

## Nonfiction Mentor Passage

Read the two passages below and answer the questions.

*Basic Archaeology: "What's a Dig?" and "What's a Midden?" from socialstudiesforkids.com*

By David White, copyright 2002-2011.

### Basic Archaeology: What's a Dig?

1 One of the main things archaeologists do in their line of work is the **dig**. This is a project designed to find out more about a specific area and what it was like many, many years ago. Archaeologists might be looking for animal skeletons or plant remains. They might be looking for weather patterns or fire damage.

2 Whatever they're looking for, it usually involves digging. Why? Well, first of all, the wind is constantly blowing fresh dirt and trash all over the world. This airborne debris lands on the ground in tiny layers. After years of these tiny layers building up, what was once on the surface is buried underground. It's not that the ground has really sunk; it's more that more layers have been added on top.

3 So, archaeologists use their pickaxes and their drills and their brushes to find and piece together clues to what happened in an area's past. And the more they find, the more they understand.

4 For instance, by discovering seeds, archaeologists can also discover what kinds of crops the people who lived there grew or, if people didn't live there at all, what kind of wild plants or fruits or vegetables grew there.

5 Also, a dig might turn up fragments of clothing or shoes, giving archaeologists clues to what kind of clothing the people who lived there wore.

6 The basic idea behind the dig is to discover the past.

## Basic Archaeology: What's a Midden?

- 1 It might sound a little silly, but archaeologists can find out a lot about people by looking through their trash.
- 2 People throw away things because those things aren't important or because the people have too much of those things already. By sifting through the garbage pile of a civilization, archaeologists can find out what was important to those people (or what they had too much of).
- 3 Why is this important? Sometimes, garbage is all that's left of a people. Especially if that people has been conquered by others, the buildings, tools, and food was probably consumed or destroyed long ago. A people's trash, especially if it was also trash to the invaders, might be left alone, enabling archaeologists to discover more about a people who left few clues to what they liked and didn't like.
- 4 Did they wear certain clothes? What kinds of food did they eat? What kind of tools did they use or throw away? Answers to all these questions can be found by sifting through a midden.
- 5 It could also be possible to find out more about a conquered people by searching the midden of their conquerers. Some invaders, not really knowing what's valuable to the people they're conquering, might very well throw away things that are extremely valuable. It is left to archaeologists to find these things and piece together the life stories of people long since conquered.
- 6 One person's trash could be another person's treasure.

### QUESTIONS:

1. In paragraph 2 of Article 1, "What's a Dig?" which two words help the reader understand what the word "debris" means?
  - A. Wind
  - B. Dirt
  - C. Trash
  - D. Ground
  - E. Layers
  - F. Surface

2. What does the information in paragraph 3 in Article 1 help the reader understand about archaeologists?

- A. What types of tools they use
- B. How long it takes to complete a dig
- C. How many clues are found at each dig
- D. What they learn about people from the past

3. In paragraph 6 of Article 1, the author states, "The basic idea behind the dig is to discover the past." Draw a ring around the two paragraphs in Article 1 that support the ideas that digs can tell us specific information about people who lived in the past.

4. The following question has two parts. Answer A and then answer part B.

PART A: According to Article 1, what do archaeologists study in addition to people who lived long ago?

- A. The reasons an area became full of debris long ago
- B. The general conditions in an area long ago
- C. The governments of the people long ago
- D. The ways people worked together long ago

PART B: Which details from Article 1 best supports the answer to Part A?

- A. "It's not that the ground has really sunk; it's more that more layers have been added on top."
- B. "And the more they find, the more they understand."
- C. "For instance, by discovering seeds, archaeologists can also discover what kinds of crops the people who lived there grew or, if people didn't live there at all, what kind of wild plants or fruits or vegetables grew there."
- D. "Also, a dig might turn up fragments of clothing or shoes, giving archaeologists clues to what kind of clothing the people who lived there wore."

5. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A: Which sentence best states the main idea of Article 2, "What's a Midden?"

- A. Conquering other people destroys details about the past.
- B. Learning about the past is more important than ever.
- C. Being an archaeologist is a very difficult job.
- D. Looking at old trash gives archaeologists useful information.

Part B: Which detail from the article best support the answer to Part A?

- A. "By sifting through the garbage pile of a civilization, archaeologists can find out what was important to those people (or what they had too much of)."
- B. "Sometimes, garbage is all that's left of a people."
- C. "Especially if that people has been conquered by others, the buildings, tools, and food were probably consumed or destroyed long ago."
- D. "Some invaders, not really knowing what's valuable to the people they're conquering, might very well throw away things that are extremely valuable."

6. Read the following sentence from Article 2.

*A people's trash, especially if it was also trash to the invaders, might be left alone, enabling archaeologists to discover more about a people who left few clues to what they liked and didn't like.*

Which point is the author supporting by including this sentence in the article?

- A. how difficult is it to learn about people based on the objects they have left behind
- B. that objects that were considered worthless in the past are also worthless in the present
- C. that throughout history people have fought over valuable objects
- D. why some objects people used in the past may have survived to the present

