

# Roman Excavation

## Aims:

1. To demonstrate some basic archaeological principles:
  - the most recent things are nearest to the surface, and things are progressively older as you dig down
  - archaeologists are concerned with layers; things buried in the same layer of soil are likely to be of the same age
2. To show how archaeological evidence can be used to help our understanding of the Romans
3. To reinforce some of the principles of using evidence:
  - evidence is fragmentary; we can study only what survives
  - we can't be certain that our interpretations are right; different people may come to different conclusions.

## Preparation:

It doesn't matter where this activity comes within your Roman topic. It could be a starter, or a conclusion, or part of a main course. No particular preparation seems to be necessary, though it would be helpful for us to know beforehand what the class has done.

## The activity:

- The activity requires approximately 1 hour.
- There needs to be enough space for the class to sit in a circle with the 'excavation' on the floor in the middle, visible to all.
- Access beforehand will be needed, as it takes 10 minutes to set up the 'site'. This needs to be done while the class is elsewhere, in order to make sure that the excavation process reveals a succession of surprises.
- It also takes about 10 minutes to pack away the artefacts at the end of the session.
- The activity will involve 'excavating' a mock archaeological site, by removing blankets representing soil one by one, and by recovering and identifying the artefacts between each soil layer. The removal of the final blanket will reveal a collection of Roman material - kitchen waste, broken pottery, building materials etc, which can be sorted, identified and interpreted.
- If there is time the Roman artefacts can be handled by the class.

## Follow-up ideas:

Photos of the objects used in the session are available on the Museum Education Service section of the Carisbrooke Castle Museum website ([www.carisbrookecastlemuseum.org.uk](http://www.carisbrookecastlemuseum.org.uk)) If there is time, individual or group work based on the objects could be done:

1. A chart showing the layers and what was found in each layer could be developed into a vertical time-line. If the Romans are being studied as part of a whole 'invaders and settlers' topic, it could also be used to show how the Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Viking invasions/settlement relate to each other in a time context.

2. List the materials found in the Roman layer of the 'excavation'. What other materials might the Romans have used? Which of these would probably have rotted away? You could also think about origins of materials - animal, vegetable and mineral.
3. An archaeological record card for each object found, with sketch, description and identification.
4. The idea of archaeological layers can be illustrated by using the analogy of a family dust-bin over a week - the first rubbish to be thrown away is at the bottom, the most recent at the top. Or pupils could classify the contents of the class waste-paper bin at the end of the day. Which items might survive after 2,000 years burial? What would they tell a future archaeologist about a 21st- century classroom? What information would the archaeologist fail to recover because so much of the material hadn't survived?
5. Artefacts could be borrowed (online catalogue available on the website). These could be used to create a mock burial. A child or outline could be used as the body. What do the artifacts tell us about the age /wealth of the person?



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