Appendix A: Activity #4: Understanding Projectile Points

Age Group: 3rd Grade – 4th Grade

Number of Participants: 2-3 at a time; unlimited repetitions

Time Required: 5-10 minutes per group

Materials’ Location: Bag 13; Box A

Additional Materials/Costs Required: None

Vocabulary (See “Glossary” for Activity 4 in the Trunk): Hafting, fluting, base, point, reuse, flaking, atlatl, typology.

**Directions:**

1. Students should be organized into small groups of 2-3, so each child is able to work on at least 2 cards at a time.
2. Read the Overview (below) and encourage students to keep the Guiding Questions in mind as they do the activity. You will return to these questions, and others, after the activity.
3. Lay out the six cards and the six projectile points in the center of the table and encourage students to work together to match the bases. The cards feature various bases, but are not duplicates of the points and fragments provided.
4. Once students have completed the activity, revisit the Guiding Questions. Has the activity sparked any ideas about past peoples?
5. Once you have discussed the Guiding Questions, lead students through the Wrap-Up Questions. Use the space provided to list any additional questions students have for future use, or any you wish to add.

Note: Remember to consult the Glossary prior to each lesson to brush up on vocabulary and concepts.

**Overview:** Archaeologists work with the remnants of past peoples; this means that they identify, investigate, and explore the things that people lost or left behind, many years ago. Sometimes objects were left behind on purpose: perhaps they were discarded because they were broken or worn out, or perhaps they were left behind in a grave or ritual location. Projectile points, which you probably know as “arrowheads” are one of the objects that archaeologists can find in both contexts.

The term “arrowhead” can be deceiving, because it was not until fairly recently, roughly 1,500—2,000 years ago depending on where you are in North America, that the bow and arrow came into use. This presents a problem, since we know people were here at least 13,000 years ago, and perhaps even longer ago than that! So what were these past peoples using instead of bows and arrows? Well, they would sometimes use spears and sometimes use a throwing tool called an atlatl, which was paired with darts, often made of cane or other flexible materials. These darts were several feet long, rather than the small darts we think of today.

So how can we tell if the projectile point we are looking at came from an arrow, a dart, or a spear? How do we tell age? There are some tricks that archaeologists use to help them figure this out. The biggest hints come from the base of the projectile point, because while resharpening can change the length and shape of the tip of the point, the base generally stays the same.

Look at the bases of the points provided for you. You will notice that some are straight and some have notches in the sides or bottoms. One also has a shallow depression that comes up from the bottom; this is called a flute. Archaeologists know that flutes are something we see in older points, roughly 8,500 years and older, so those can’t be arrowheads! Likewise, we see notching later so we can estimate that those points are not as old. Some archaeologists believe that size and weight play a big role, too, but we also know that some very small points have come out of mammoth bones, so where does that leave us? Well, we just have to start with typology! Let’s take a look at the points on the table and see if we can match them to their cards. Then let’s talk about what we think about these different artifacts.

**Guiding Questions:**

1. Why do archaeologists care whether a projectile point is an arrowhead or a spear point, or something else entirely?
2. What can we learn about past peoples by exploring their technologies, such as these weapons?

**Wrap-Up Questions:**

1. Why do you think the bases of these points are all different? Do they have a purpose, or is it just decorative?
2. What tools do you use in your everyday life that an archaeologist might study someday, like these projectile points? Remember, archaeologists use points to describe technologies used by *groups* of people. What is unique to you or your culture?
3. Do you think the different types, colors, or qualities of stone used for these points were important to past peoples? Why or why not?
4. The artifacts you’re touching are 700 years old or older. Do you think they are in good shape for their age? What possessions do you have that you think might survive long enough to be called “artifacts”?
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