

## ABOUT WHO DISCOVERED AMERICA?

*Who Discovered America?* takes kids back through time and into the mists of prehistory, first explaining that Christopher Columbus wasn't really the first person in America, and then trying to solve the mystery of who was. Some of the possible candidates discussed in the book include Chinese seafarers, who sailed to the Americas in 1421; Vikings from Greenland, who arrived in Newfoundland around the year 1000; and Aboriginal mammoth hunters, who settled in North America about 11 500 years ago.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Valerie Wyatt is an award-winning editor and writer and the author of 12 nonfiction children's books, many of them about science.



## DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

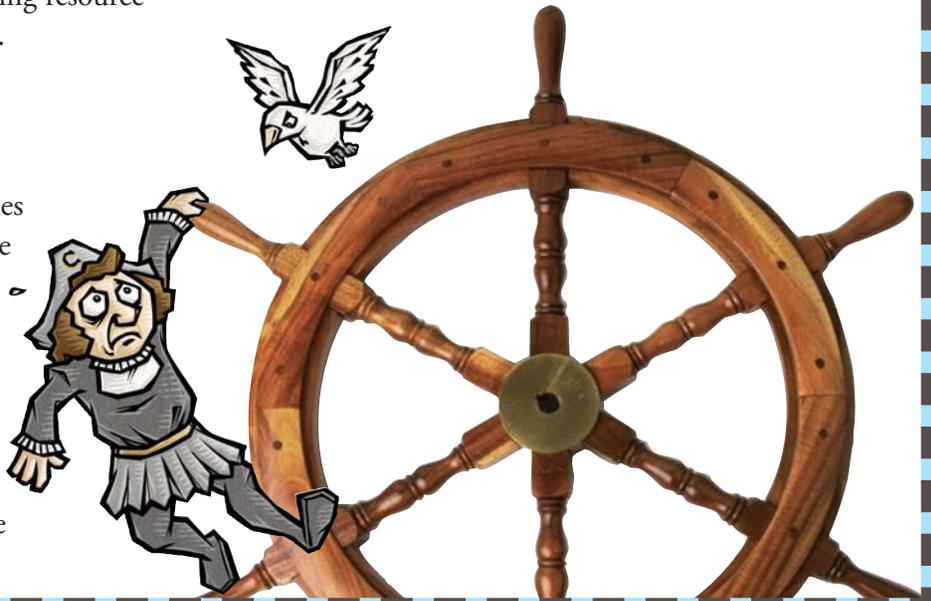
The following discussion topics and activities are suitable for language arts, science and social studies classes for students in grades four to six. This learning resource has been designed as originals that can be reproduced for home or classroom use only. For more learning resource materials please visit [www.kidscanpress.com](http://www.kidscanpress.com).

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. WHO ARE THOSE GUYS?

Artifacts left by long-ago people are the clues that let archaeologists put together a picture of the people who owned them.

Archaeologists make inferences about the people based on what they find. For instance, finding lots of spear points in an area might lead archaeologists to infer that the people who lived there were hunters. This activity asks students to make their own inferences based on "artifacts."



## You will need:

- 1 index card for each student

## What to do:

- Distribute one card to each student and ask them to take the cards home and write down five of their belongings that might last for 1000 years. This is an opportunity to talk about things that won't last (organic materials, such as cloth and wood) and things that will (inorganic materials, such as metal, stone and plastic).
- The next day, collect all the cards and redistribute them randomly. No one should have his or her own card.
- Ask students to look at the list they've been given and try to infer what their owner would be like. Is the owner a boy or a girl? What hobbies or interests does she or he have? What is the person's family like? Can they identify the actual person?
- Discuss the limits of inferences. Because only hard objects survive, archaeologists were misled into thinking that the Clovis people were big game hunters who contributed to the extinction of the mammoths and other big animals. Students' lists of five objects might similarly lead to incorrect inferences. To avoid errors, archaeologists use a variety of techniques, such as comparing cultures with similar objects and checking local environmental conditions to shed light on artifact survival, before making inferences.

## 2. GARBAGE-PAIL ARCHAEOLOGY

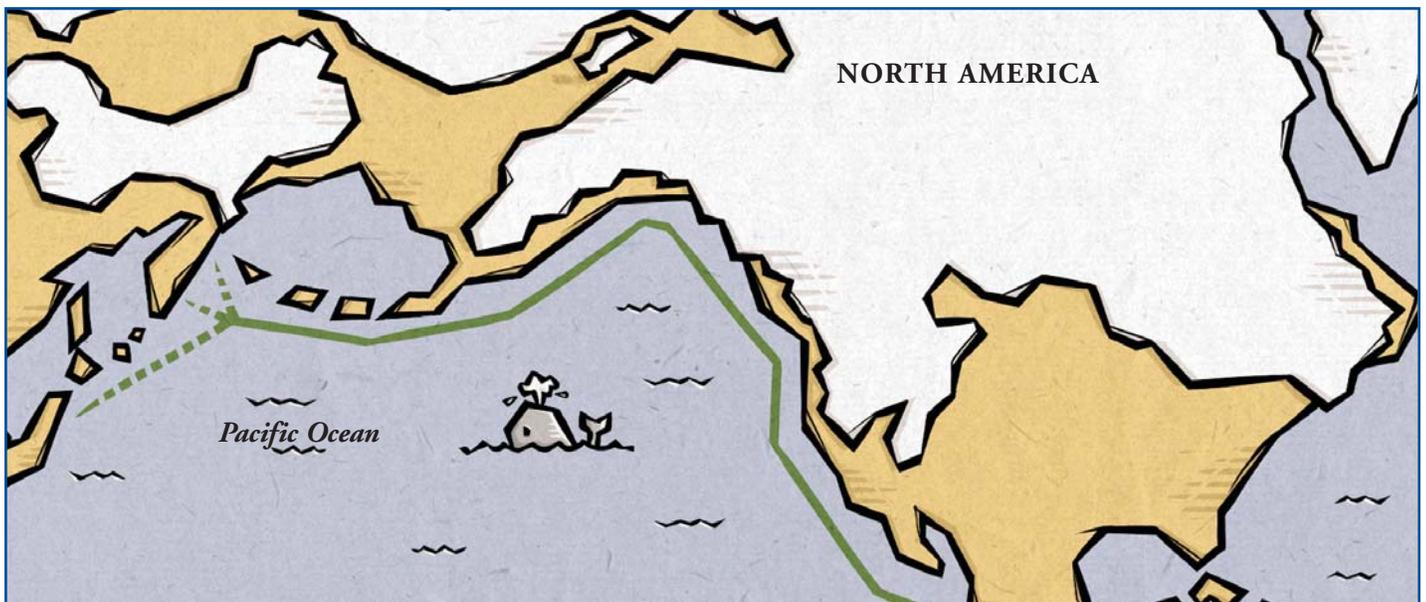
This activity lets students see that the deeper down an artifact is found, the older it is. It also shows how the presence of several objects in a strata (layer) allows archaeologists to make more accurate inferences about the original owners of the artifacts.

### You will need:

- ↳ 1 wastebasket for each group
- ↳ paper and a pencil for each group

### What to do:

- Enlist other teachers' help in preparing the wastebaskets. Ask them to put into the basket crumpled up paper or other objects from one day. So, for example, if they start with math class followed by social studies, they should put several math "artifacts" (a broken ruler, a crumpled sheet or math homework, a math quiz) into the bottom of the can. Next they would put in some artifacts from social studies and so on with each class of the day. At the end of the day, the wastebasket will be full of layers of artifacts from each subject.
  - Give one garbage can to each group of four or five students, and explain to them that they are at an archaeological dig and that this wastebasket is their site. Explain to them about stratification. There are strata (layers) in their site that have been deposited at different times. Ask them which would be older, the layer at the bottom of the basket or near the top? This is relative dating.
- Ask them to excavate their site. They should carefully remove the objects one by one and put them into groups of similar objects. They should label the groups: 1 is the top layer, 2 is the next layer and so on down to the bottom of the basket.
  - Have them look at the layers and try to deduce what was happening in each: this was math class; that was social studies and so on. Next they should put together a timeline of the day for their wastebasket.
  - Explain that archaeologists do the same thing at real archaeological sites. They painstakingly excavate the site, recording the exact position and depth of each object. The relationship between objects in one layer (say, a bone, a knife and a fish hook made of bone) tells them more than just a single object would. And the depth of the layer tells them when something was deposited relative to the other layers.



# RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

## 1. OUR TOWN

Divide your class into groups of three to four students, and ask one group to research what is known about the founding of your community. For this group, some questions they might try to answer include the following:

Who gets credit for having discovered your community? Do you acknowledge a town founder, or is there a group of people that is considered the first group to settle the land that your community was built on? Are there any clues about who these early settlers were or where they came from (for example, can you learn anything from the names of streets, natural features or other landmarks)? What can you find out about who was living in your community before it had the name you know it by today?

The other groups should choose historical buildings in your community — or even buildings like their school or their family homes. They should see how much they can discover about when these buildings were constructed and what existed on the land before the buildings were built. How far back can they go without running into your community's own version of "prehistory"?

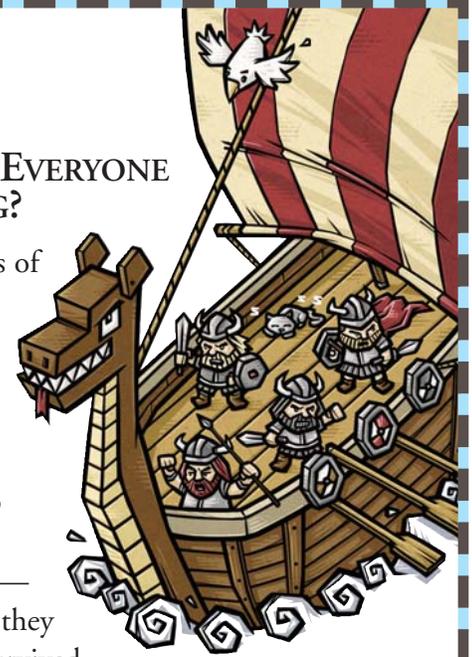
For this assignment, you might want to ask your students to contact local historical societies and/or municipal or county offices and archives in addition to using the Internet or the local library.



## 2. WHAT WAS EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

We know the names of some of the people who captained expeditions across the seas to the Americas, but we pay less attention to the people who accompanied them — and without whom they would never have survived.

Try this two-part assignment as a way to encourage your students to remember that the great explorers of history didn't sail their ships alone!



### Part 1

As an individual or group assignment, ask your students to research the voyages of Columbus, Zheng He or Leif Erikson. These are some things they might want to think about: how many people accompanied this explorer on his voyage? What were their living conditions? What jobs did they do? How many days did their voyage take and what perils did they encounter on the way? What did they have to eat?

### Part 2

When your students have completed their research, ask them to write a series of journal entries in which they imagine themselves to be one of the crew members on the boat. How did they feel when setting out on the voyage? How did they feel partway through? And when they finally reached land, were they exhilarated, disappointed or just wondering if they would ever make it home again?