

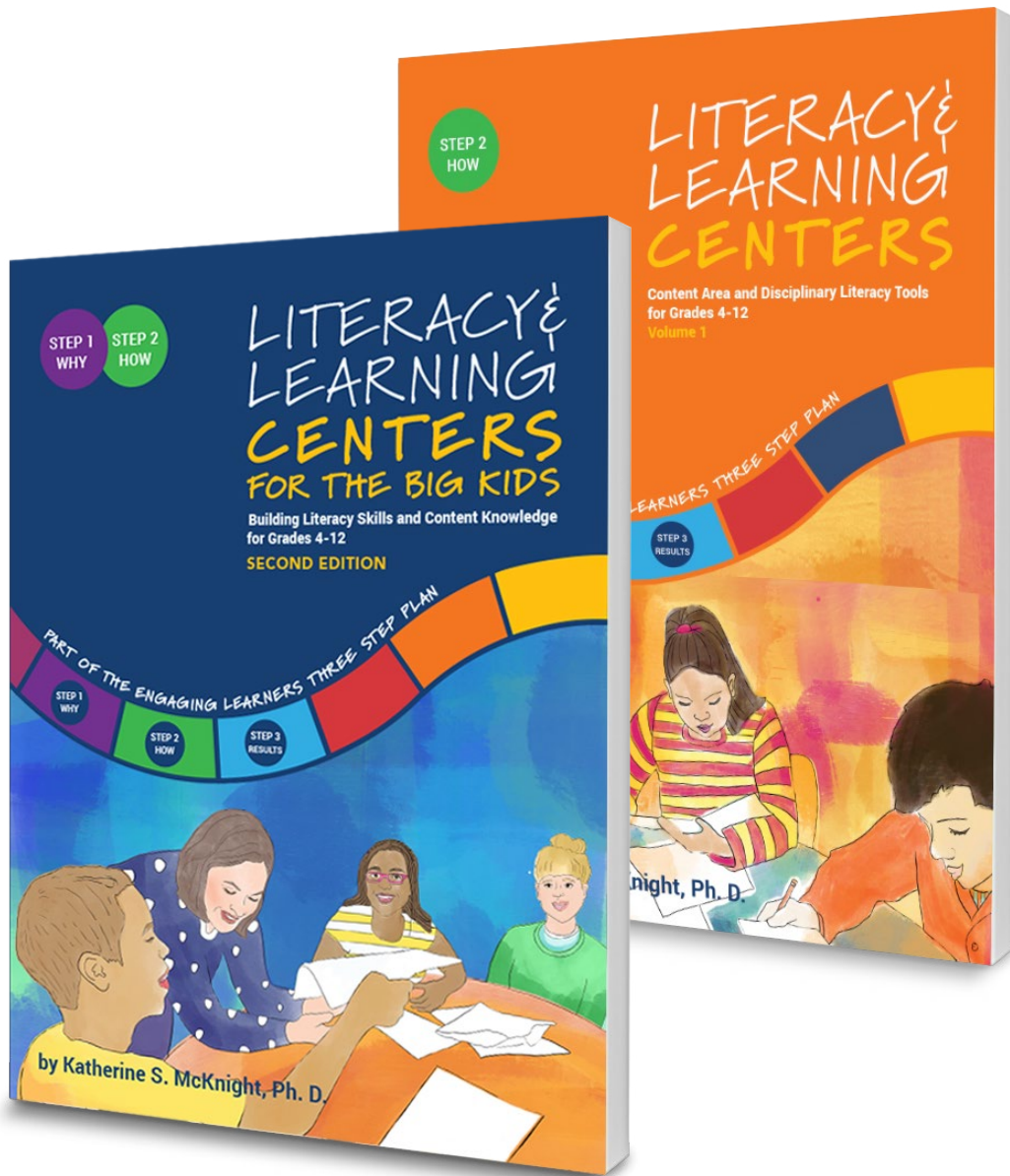
LITERACY & LEARNING CENTERS™

The Archaeologist

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Katie McKnight's books are loaded with useful information and practical classroom activities!

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The Archaeologist

Center(s)

Writer's Craft, Speaking and Listening

Skills

Students practice observation so that they can include precise and descriptive language in their writing. They work at producing clean and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style is appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience. And when you ask students to critically analyze the papers in their group in order to select one to represent them all, you help develop their editorial and revision skills.

Mini-Lesson

The activity begins in a dramatic, almost shocking, manner. Without saying a word, the instructor walks into a classroom, moves directly to the wastepaper basket, and turning the basket upside down, empties its contents in the center of the room. Once the giggling stops, the instructor sets the stage. The first question to ask is this: "What is an archaeologist? What exactly do they do?" Your goal is to get to the idea that archaeologists study trash, that much of their work actually takes place where people have discarded everyday items. Then ask students to activate their imaginations and pretend that they no longer live in the 21st century, but rather in the 24th. Then ask them to imagine that they are archaeologists engaged in a dig during which they have uncovered

the very classroom they are sitting in. The only objects that remain intact are those in the wastepaper basket.

Description

Helping students develop observation skills leads to significant improvement in their ability to add description to their writing of narrative and informational text. It is not enough to tell students to include detail, we have to show them how to do it. This exercise provides a strategy for observation that is engaging, fun, and increases their understanding content.

The Archaeologist has many benefits:

- It increases observation of minute details.
- It enhances note-taking skills.
- It develops analytical skills.
- It develops interpretive skills.
- It improves critical selection skills.

Asking students to observe minute details, take notes on what they observe, and discuss and analyze their findings are powerful ways to engage them in authentic writing practices.

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Overview and Tips for Classroom Implementation

This activity will take several center rotations to complete. Unlike the typical center activity, it's usually most effective to have all groups do the steps simultaneously since it's impossible for students to discuss and analyze before they've observed and taken notes.

Step 1: Observation and Note Taking

Give each group between five and seven minutes to examine the trash on the center of the floor. Instruct the groups to bring paper and pencil so they can take notes on their observations. While one group is closely examining the trash, tell the other three groups to observe the trash from afar if they have not yet done a close examination, or if they have, to begin to discuss and interpret what they have seen up close.

Step 2: Discussion

When all groups have had an opportunity to closely examine the trash (we make the last group responsible for returning the trash to the wastepaper basket), give them ten minutes to discuss their findings.

During this time, instruct the students to think about a specific question.

For example, you may prompt the students to consider the people who inhabited the space they are studying. Ask them to write about what they can learn about those people from the information found in the trash, and only from the information found in the trash.

Step 3: Writing and Analysis

At the end of the ten-minute discussion, ask students to write individual reports, imagining that they will be presented to a prestigious group of archaeologists meeting to discuss the new findings. Give them another ten minutes to write, and then have the students reassemble in groups, share their papers, and select the one paper that will represent their group at the meeting. The first time we do this exercise we ask the students to suggest things to look out for that will help them select the best paper, the one that will represent their group. Students then share the selected papers (one per group) with the whole group.

Center Prep

- Writing materials (paper, pencils, etc.)
- Wastepaper basket with selected "trash"
- Written center instructions

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Prompts for the Content Areas

The Archaeologist activity can easily be adapted to specific classes to add a level of content review. Consider the following examples and then create your own adaptation to suit your purposes.

7th Grade Life Science Class

Wastepaper basket contents include:

- Linnaeus' Classification System
- Gardening catalog
- Birding guidebook
- Print out of the USDA Pollinator of the Month web page (see <https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/pollinator-of-the-month/index.shtml>)

Prompt: What might a 24th century archaeologist think about our ability, desire, and need to identify and classify living organisms?

10th Grade Current Events Class

Wastepaper basket contents include:

- Assorted editorial cartoons, hard news, and fact-checking headlines
- Print out of the RTDNA Code of Ethics (see <http://www.rtdna.org/uploads/files/New%20Version%20RTDNA%20COE%202015.pdf>)

Prompt: What might a 24th century archaeologist think about media bias in 21st century America?

6th Grade Math Class

Wastepaper basket contents include:

- Completed worksheet asking students to find various positive and negative numbers on a number line
- Printed copy of a glove sizing guide (see for example <http://www.glove.org/Modern/glovemeasure.php>)
- Tape measure

Prompt: What might a 24th century archaeologist think about our use of number lines?

Middle School PE Class

Wastepaper basket contents include:

- Badminton racket
- Deflated basketball
- Catcher's mitt
- Newspaper article about soccer

Prompt: What might an archaeologist think about 21st century sports? What might they think these objects are?

High School Health Class

Wastepaper basket contents include:

- USDA MyPlate recommendations
- Orange peel or grape stem
- Granola bar, chip and candy wrappers
- Assorted headlines about diets: vegan, paleo, gluten-free, etc.

Prompt: What might a 24th century archaeologist infer about nutrition in early 21st century America?