

Activities

Activity 3

An Exercise in Archeology: Uncovering Israel's Ancient Past

Preparation:

Estimated time: 1-2 class periods • **Materials:** Internet access, *Israel 101*

Background: Since the late 19th century, archeologists have excavated in what is today Israel and the Territories. Often inspired by a desire to verify the Old and New Testaments, they led the way for modern archeology of the region. Today, Israel's Antiquities Authority and archeologists from around the world continue to excavate and discover remarkable evidence of Canaanite civilization, the ancient Jewish state, the Jews' continuing presence in the land (such as synagogues dating throughout the region's history), and other civilizations and groups that ruled and populated the land. In this exercise, students will examine some of the archeological record about the Jewish past.

Activity:

This exercise will also introduce students to archeology and to some of the issues involved in interpreting archeological evidence.

Divide the class into groups. Give each group a choice between two sites to investigate. Explain that each group will present their findings to the class, according to the following outline (a student worksheet is on the next page):

- a. *Name of the archeological site*
- b. *Date/era of Jewish settlement*
- c. *Name of the area's location today*
- d. *Name of archeologist(s) and excavation date(s)*
- e. *What was actually excavated?*
- f. *What does this evidence show? Are there competing interpretations of the evidence?*
- g. *Interesting facts*
- h. *Web links (Who produced the sites?)*

- List of some archeological sites to investigate:

Masada
Gamla
Western Wall (Wailing Wall)
City of David
Hebron
Tiberias
Nablus (Shechem)
Zippori

- Have each group make a presentation of its findings in class.
- Conduct a general class discussion about the findings. How does the evidence they've investigated relate to the Zionist movement, which began in the 19th Century? What does the evidence suggest about the Jewish presence in the land?

Example: Gamla existed during the Roman period. The city, also called “The Masada of the North,” was destroyed by the Romans in 67 CE during the Great Revolt (just before the destruction of the Second Temple). Gamla is located in what is today the northern Golan Heights. Excavations were started by Itzhak Gal and Shemaryahu Gutmann in 1967; they have continued to the present. The remains of the wall from the time of the Great Revolt as well as those of a synagogue located near the city entrance, a mikva, and some magnificent buildings have been uncovered. Ballista stones and arrowheads were found in the synagogue, showing that the battle was also fought here. These interpretations are straightforward and well accepted. Controversies do exist about the role played by the Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, who was the commander of Galilee and Gamla at the time. It’s interesting that Josephus records the final battle in his classic, *Antiquities of the Jews*, and that his description of Gamla helped the archeologists find the actual site; their excavations are completely consistent with what Josephus wrote. Web links include: www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Early%20History%20-%20Archaeology/Archaeological%20Sites%20in%20Israel%20-%20Gamala-%20Jewish%20Ci (produced by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Wrap-up: Archeological research confirms that Jews have been present in Israel since 1000 BCE, and continuing research will shed more light on the early history of the region.

Israel's Ancient Past

Activity Sheet

Uncovering the Evidence

Instructions: As a team, explore your chosen archeological site. Record your findings (as outlined below) and be prepared to present them to the class.

a. Name of the archeological site _____

b. Date/era of Jewish settlement _____

c. Name of the area where it is located today _____

d. Name of archeologist(s) and excavation date(s) _____

e. What was actually excavated? _____

f. What does this evidence demonstrate? Are there competing interpretations of the evidence?

g. Interesting Facts _____

h. Web links (Include who produced the sites.) _____
