

Activity: Sketch an Artifact

People have lived in the area that is now Denali National Park & Preserve for over 13,000 years. Descendants of these first peoples still live here today. One of the oldest cultural traditions in Alaska is called the Denali Complex. It is largely defined by artifacts, including microblade cores, found at the Teklanika West Site in Denali.

Archaeologists, scientists who study the objects left by people who lived long ago, continue to research the Denali Complex to learn more about these ancient peoples.

Main Ideas

- 1) Museum collections can tell us about the history of humans in an area.
- 2) Archaeologists often make drawings of artifacts to help them examine the object closely and notice details.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Describe how archaeological artifacts can teach us about the history of humans.
- Practice observation skills by looking closely at and sketching archaeological artifacts.

Learning Standards

Alaska History Content Standards: C.2. Use historical data from a variety of primary resources, including...archaeological sites and artifacts.

Alaska Geography Content Standards: E. A student should understand and be able to evaluate how humans and physical environments interact.

Additional Resources

Archaeology-Denali National Park & Preserve: www.nps.gov/dena/learn/historyculture/arceology.htm

UAMN Archaeology Kit: uaf.edu/museum/education/educators/kits-hands-on-objects/history/

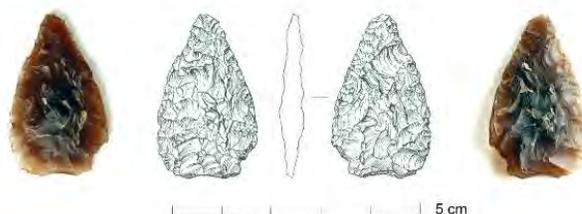
Time Needed: 30 minutes - 1 hour

Materials

- Archaeological objects, replicas, or photos (see sources under Additional Resources)
- *Observe and Sketch* worksheet
- *Drawing Tips* handout
- Rulers, measuring tapes, and/or calipers
- Pencils
- Magnifying glasses (optional)



Sketching an artifact.
NPS photo / Charlotte Bodak



Flint arrowheads. www.archeox.net

Activity: Sketch an Artifact

Directions

- Show students an everyday object, such as a pen, tool, or article of clothing. Ask students to look closely at the object, and then brainstorm what they can infer about the person who made or used it.
 - Show students an archaeological artifact (if not available, use replicas or photos). Ask them to brainstorm what they can learn about the person who made or used this object. Explain this is what archaeologists do: study the objects left by people who lived long ago in order to learn more about their cultures and how they lived.
- Ask students how they think archaeologists record the size, shape, and appearance of artifacts. Explain that while photographs and written descriptions are important, archaeologists often make drawings as well.
 - Discuss some reasons why archaeologists sketch artifacts. Answers include that drawing helps the person observe the artifact closely and notice details that may not be apparent at first glance, and that drawings can be more accurate than photos (as some details don't show up well in photos and cameras can distort sizes).
- Explain that students will practice their observation skills by drawing an artifact. Pass out the *Observe and Sketch* worksheets.
 - You can either assign artifacts to students or let each student or group choose one.
 - Ask students to spend a few minutes looking at the artifact and observing details.
 - Have students measure the dimensions of the artifact.
 - Give students time to make a detailed sketch. Use the *Drawing Tips* handout to guide them. Emphasize that they do not have to be great artists; the goal is to observe details, not produce a perfect drawing.
- Have students exchange their sketch with a classmate. What can they learn about the artifact from looking at the drawing? Are there any details they hadn't noticed before?
- *Wrap Up*: Discuss the following questions with your students:
 - Which parts were the easiest to draw? Which parts were the hardest?
 - What details did you notice about the artifact after observing it for a long time? What surprised you the most?
 - From your drawing, what could someone learn about the artifact and the person who made or used it?
 - Why do archaeologists make sketches? What are the advantages and disadvantages of sketches and photographs?



Sketching artifacts.
UAMN photos.



Observe and Sketch

- **Look closely** at your artifact. What do you see? Write down your observations:

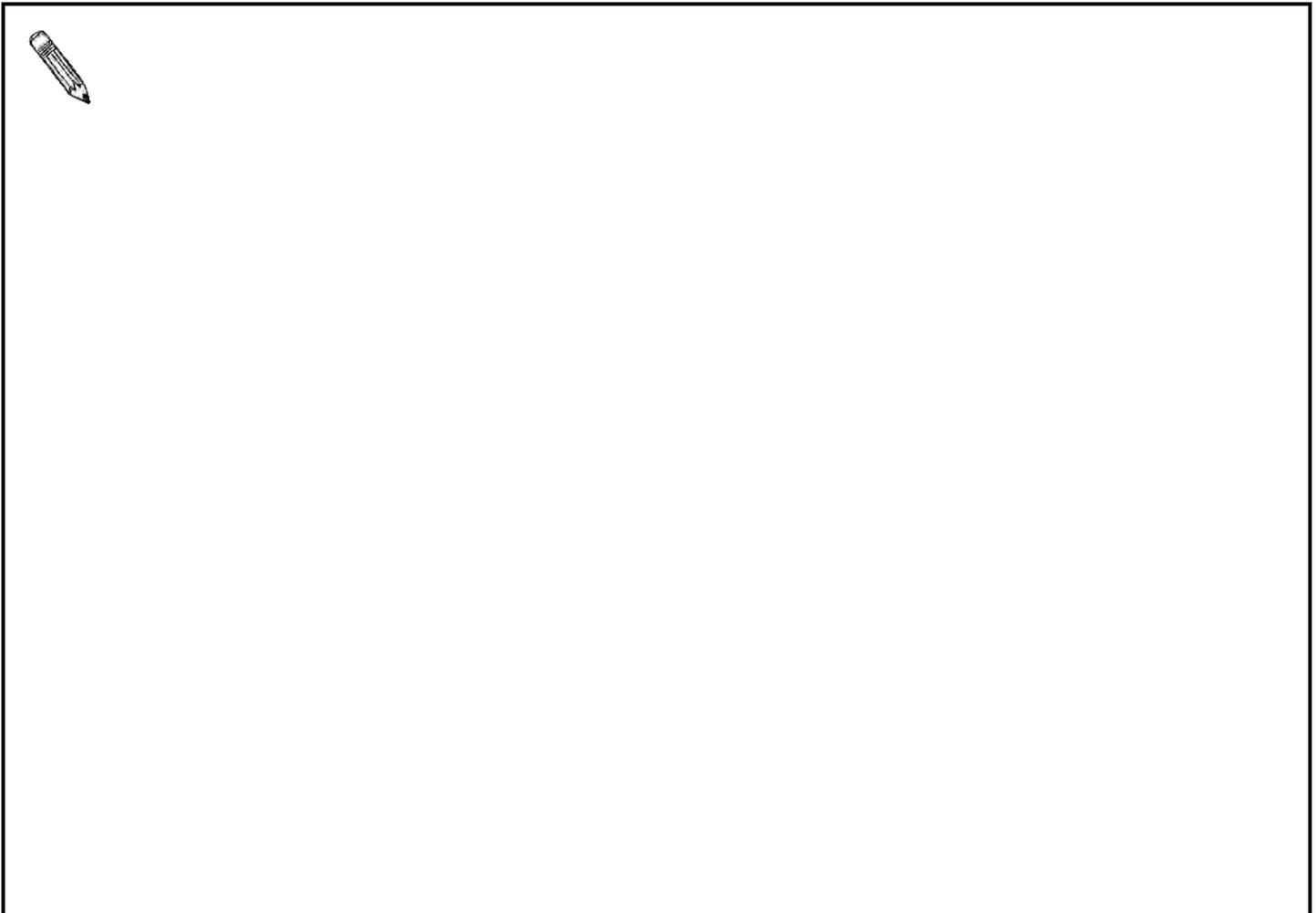
- **Measure** the artifact.

Length:

Height:

Width:

- **Sketch** the artifact. Draw as many details as you can.
 - Try looking at and drawing the artifact from different angles.
 - Don't worry about making mistakes!





Drawing Tips



UAMN photo.

Look carefully at your artifact.

- What are the lightest parts and the darkest parts?
- How big is one part compared to the other parts?

Start drawing.

- Use different kinds of lines: long, short, thin, thick, wavy, zigzag, etc.
- Press lightly with your pencil. Sometimes you need to make several lines before you get the right one.
- Close one eye and squint. This helps you see a 3-dimensional object more like a 2-dimensional shape.
- Don't worry about making mistakes. You can always erase them later.
- Practice, practice, practice! The more you draw, the more you will learn.