



Create before the lesson – recreating the evidence!

Activity 4

Poos from the past

BBC

**HANDS ON
HISTORY
DIG!**

Teacher's information

Archaeologists use a number of methods to help **DISCOVER, EXAMINE and RECORD** the secrets of the past. A great way to understand more about humans from history is to learn what they ate. One fun (and mucky!) way to do this is to dissect a fake human poo.

This activity will give participants a chance to gain hands on excavation experience and uncover evidence about the eating and living habits of humans through the ages.

Before you run this activity, you will need to make your fake poo to act as evidence. Using the following recipe will give you a material with the ideal consistency. However, if you are unable to create this yourself, soft modelling dough would also be suitable.

Teachers instructions

- In the measuring jug, mix 1 cup / 8 fl oz of hot water with either 10 stock cubes or enough paint or food colouring to make a good poo colour.
- Place the flour, salt, bicarbonate of soda and vegetable oil in a large mixing bowl.
- Add your coloured liquid slowly to the ingredients, mixing until you have a firm but flexible dough. To make it darker add more colouring directly, but be careful not to end up with runny poo!
- Using the recipes below, create poos from each of the three eras by placing the evidence inside your poo.
- If you have a group who likes to get mucky, add cooked spaghetti to the poos to give the look of internal parasites such as tapeworms.

You will need: (This recipe will make approximately 20 fake poos)

- 2 cups / 300g plain flour
- 1 cup / 300g of salt
- 2 tablespoons of bicarbonate of soda
- 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil
- 1 cup / 8 fl oz of hot water
- 10 stock cubes OR brown poster paint OR brown food colouring
- Mixing bowl
- Measuring jug
- Evidence (if making all three types of poo) – fish bones, bread grains, lentils, apple pips, peas, melon seeds, olive stones, orange/lemon pips, cherry stones, small stones

ROMAN

Evidence	Quantity
Melon seeds	Lots
Olive stone	2 or 3
Bread grains	Lots
Small stones	About 5
Orange/ lemon pips	2

VIKING

Evidence	Quantity
Fish bones*	2
Bread grains	Lots
Peas	5
Apple pips	3
Small stones	About 10
Cherry stones	1

TUDOR

Evidence	Quantity
Fish bones*	2
Bread grains	Lots
Lentils	Lots
Apple pips	3
Peas	5

* Boil and clean fish bones carefully to ensure you remove all flesh and the spinal cord.

You will need (one per pair/group)

- Your pre-prepared poos from different periods
- Photocopies for each group of worksheets 1 and 2 included in this pack

Organic remains tools:

- Wooden scrapers e.g. wooden coffee stirrers or cocktail sticks with the points cut off
- Paper plates
- Plastic sheeting to cover the table/floor
- Rulers and pencils
- Vinyl gloves (Optional. Note, participants with wheat allergy should wear gloves)

The lesson itself – examining the evidence!



Teachers instructions

- Divide the group into pairs or small groups.
- Hand each group a poo on a paper plate (you may need to give them some time to have a giggle!) and a copy of worksheets 1 and 2.
- Set the scene – *Our history time traveller, Eric, has travelled back in time and shared his meals with the Tudors, Romans and the Vikings. You have found a poo from one of these eras. You will need to carefully dissect the poo to find evidence of which historic period Eric has visited. Use the Clue Cards to help you identify what you find and the Organic Remains Recording sheet to record your discoveries.*
- Ask the groups to come and pick up their organic remains tools.
- Give the group around 30mins to carefully dissect their poo, putting everything they find onto their Finds Tray plate.
- At the end of the time, ask each group to present their findings to the rest of the room and to explain which era their poo is from and how they have found this out.



Worksheet 1 – Poos from the past

CLUE CARDS

Did your poo come from the Roman, Viking or Tudor period?



Clue Card 1 – Eric the Roman (In Britain 43 – 446 AD)

- In this period Eric had the luxury of exciting new food brought to Britain by the Romans. These included garlic, leeks, cabbages, peas, thyme, rosemary and pheasants.
- He would also have tried foods traded from other countries such as olive oil and exotic fruits, as well as spices such as pepper, cinnamon and ginger.
- Some of the food Eric ate as a Roman would turn the stomach of many people today – stuffed dormice, snails fattened in milk and even peacocks were all served at rich feasts.
- A favourite sauce, called liquamen or garum, was made from rotted fish guts.
- For a Roman poo look out for – bread grains, melon seeds, olive stones, orange or lemon pips, and small stones from bread made by grinding grains with stones (called quern stones). The stones would have been eaten unknowingly.

Clue Card 2 – Eric the Viking (In Britain 787 – 1066 AD)

- Poor Viking people would add pine-tree bark to their meals to add bulk and provide a source of vitamin C (not that they knew this!)
- Viking Eric didn't have a fork to use in this period – only knives and spoons or he would have used his fingers – yurgh!
- Fish and meat were often salted, dried in the wind or smoked over the fire to help preserve food stocks over the winter.
- As a Viking, Eric ate a variety of different fruits like cherries and apples.
- Food was often cooked in a cauldron over the fire, either hung from a chain or supported on a tripod. A 'cauldron snake' was the Viking name for a spiced sausage cooked in this way.
- As a Viking, Eric saw bread being made using a quern stone to grind the wheat, and he would sometimes eat small bits of stone without knowing.
- For a Viking poo look out for – fish bones, bread grains, apple pips, peas, cherry stones and small stones.

Clue Card 3 – Eric the Tudor (1485 – 1603 AD)

- As a Tudor, Eric enjoyed newly discovered food like lentils, tomatoes, peppers, maize and turkey that all came from voyages to the new world. Only the rich folk around him could afford to enjoy potatoes which were also introduced at this time.
- Fruit and vegetables grown in England (such as apples and peas) were also eaten.
- Eric the Tudor ate a lot of bread. It was eaten with every meal and even used as a plate in a thick slice called a trencher with food served on top.
- Poor people ate little meat, although would have eaten some fish. Their staple food was 'pottage' a thick form of soup containing anything they could get their hands on!
- Ale and wine were drunk instead of water which was often unsafe to drink.
- For a Tudor poo look out for – fish bones, bread grains, apple pips, peas and lentils.



Worksheet 2 – Poos from the past

Organic Remains Recording Sheet

Archaeologist's name: _____

Description of organic remains (poo!)

Length of poo in cm:

Width of poo in cm:

Height of poo in cm:

Contents of the poo

What type of evidence
have you found?

How many of these things
have you found?

So who did the poo?!

Roman

Viking

Tudor

