

## Pottery Design Transfer

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**Age:** 7 and up

**Objectives:** Provides an introduction to vocabulary—"artifact", "sherd", "context"; introduces ideas regarding what an artifact can "tell" archaeologists; introduces a technique that archaeologists use to record pottery decorations.



**Materials:** A variety of large (unprovenanced) pottery sherds with bold incised or stamped designs; printed information about the sherd (age, illustration of similar complete vessel); thin paper towels; a 4-inch hard rubber roller (brayer); black or white tri-fold picture frame cards (one manufacturer is Strathmore); 1 6-inch non-toxic ink pad; washable colored markers; soft foam placemat; computer labels

**Preparation:** Cut rectangular pieces of paper towels that will slide easily into card frames. (Institutional paper towels work well, as do other thin, absorbent papers.)

Print a label for each card that tells about the piece of pottery and the event. For example, "I made this rubbing of a piece of 2000-year-old Louisiana pottery at SAA ArchaeologyLand, April 2, 2005."

A second label can be made that reflects a preservation message. This label can be pre-pasted onto the back of the cards.

I made this rubbing of a piece of 2000-year-old Louisiana pottery at SAA ArchaeologyLand, April 2, 2005

Even a single sherd is important. Context provides the information about how this one sherd relates to everything around it. Keep artifact pictures and information, not the artifacts.

Prepare two sample cards for display.

**Number of volunteers:** 1 archaeologist; 1 volunteer to every 4–6 children to assist with the card decorating and assembling



**Procedure:** Set up three areas on the table. In the first area, display a finished card and general information about the pottery and its context geographically and temporally.

In the second area, put the sherd on a soft foam placemat, pieces of paper towels (to be used for rubbings), the brayer, and the ink pad.

Put the markers, cardboard frames, information labels, and the second sample card in the third area.

The participants begin by examining the sample card and background

information about the sherd. Explain the age and region of the pottery type and note that decorated pottery can tell a lot about the people who lived at the site, if the artifacts are recovered in context. Also explain that the sherds that are being used in this activity have lost valuable information because they were incorrectly taken from a site.

In area two, the visitor places a piece of paper towel on top of the sherd and rolls the brayer on the ink pad. With help from the archaeologist, if needed, the participant rolls the inked brayer over the paper until the design is transferred to the paper. No ink goes on the sherd, only the paper.

Upon completing the rubbing, the participant then moves to area three where he or she decorates the cardboard frame with markers, slips the paper inside the frame, and signs the card inside. The participant may write information about the sherd inside the card, or place an informational sticker inside the card.



**What they take away:** Each participant takes home a framed picture of a pottery design with information about the sherd.

**Preservation message:** Even a single sherd is important; with context, this one could have given archaeologists a great deal of information about a site. Individuals may keep artifact pictures and information, rather than the artifacts themselves.

***Special Note:*** *This activity is appropriate for an archaeologist to lead at a public event or as part of a larger discussion of prehistoric pottery.*