

# CAN YOU DIG IT?

## MARITIME ARCHEOLOGY AND SHIPWRECKS

### AGES

Children 7+ years

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

As time capsules, shipwrecks like the Titanic provoke our imagination. Underwater archaeologists interpret sunken artifacts, such as clothes, dining menus, and mariners' compasses, to tell us how ships were built, why they sank, and the stories of people from the past. In this program, mock digs and artifacts provide children

the chance to piece together stories just like archaeologists. Don't forget to reach out to local museums or colleges to reach archeologists who might be able to give a presentation about local artifacts. Activities inspired by Luz Mejia-Ramos at the Pasadena Central Library and the San Diego Archaeological Center. Suggested runtime: 90 min.



Image source: Shutterstock

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

#### Activity #1: Artifact Bottles

Materials: Water bottles with labels removed (the smoother the sides the better), small objects to find (e.g., tiny charms, seashells, small toys, shaped beads, birthday candles, coins, keys, buttons), filler (e.g., colored rice, small peas, or sand), scoops or cups to get the filler in the bottle, super glue or hot glue to seal the bottles.

Optional: funnels; ribbon, stickers, etc. to decorate the top of the bottle when done



Image source: Joelle Wake of Whiting Public Library, Whiting, IN

### ADAPTATION:

A scaled-down version of this program could be used as part of an ocean-themed escape room. Children excavate a small plastic bin's worth of sand and dirt to find 3–4 parts of an object to tape together, or letters from a word to unscramble.

### TIP:

Shipwrecks aren't just for oceans! According to the Great Lakes Shipwrecks Museum in Michigan, roughly 6,000 shipwrecks are currently at the bottom of these freshwater lakes, with 550 in Lake Superior alone. Reach out to local museums or historical societies to discuss wrecks in waterways near you.

### ADAPTATIONS:

- Instead of making sensory bottles, set up a sensory station.
- Use tupperware or bags instead of bottles.
- This craft also makes a fun take-and-make kit.

Instructions:

- Let participants select 15–20 items to go in their bottle.
- Take a reference photo of their items, and print it out (optional).
- Fill the bottle around  $\frac{1}{4}$  full with filler.
- Add the objects and more filler if necessary until the bottle is  $\frac{3}{4}$  full.
- Place the cap on the bottle, using a little glue to make sure it stays secure. Decorate the top as desired.

### Activity #2: Titanic Artifacts

Materials: 5–8 artifacts similar to those that have been recovered from the Titanic (such as a menu, pair of gloves, leather shoe, receipts, violin, coins, and more) or photographs of those artifacts, handouts of the Titanic's blueprints.

Optional: Projector, screen, and laptop to create a slideshow presentation of the artifact photographs—if using this method, include the blueprints of the Titanic here instead of as a handout.

Instructions:

- If using, prepare the slideshow presentation in advance.
- Reveal artifacts one at a time and lead a discussion around each one. Who do the children think owned it? How do they think it was used? Where in the wreck do they think it was found? Do they think similar artifacts will be recovered?

### Activity #3: Buried Treasure Archaeological Dig

Materials: Artifacts or pictures of them; sand; water; cornstarch; plastic cup; broken pieces of recycled/paper/styrofoam dishes; large basin; excavation tools such as popsicle sticks, spoons, rocks, and brushes; tablecloths; masking tape; tacky glue; pencils; paper

Instructions:

- Prep archaeological digs 2–3 days before the program. Break styrofoam or paper cups and/or plates into chunks.
- In cups, combine 3 parts sand, 2 parts cornstarch, and 1 part water. The mixture should have the consistency of soft serve ice cream. Add small amounts of any ingredient if you need to make adjustments to the consistency.



Image source: Shutterstock

### TIP:

Because it includes small objects and strong glue, children under 5 will need supervision. You could also size up the artifacts for younger children.

- Pour the mixture into the basin. Press down broken pieces. Let the mixture dry for 2-3 days.
- Cover two tables with tablecloths. Place the prepared basin and the excavation tools on one, and on the other set up a restoration station where they can try to reconstruct cups or plates.
- Children use a variety of excavation tools to dig up the pottery pieces.

### Activity #4: Large Mock Dig

**Materials:** A large kiddie pool (may need more than one depending on the size of the group—4–5 children can work on one kiddie pool); potting soil, sand, water, stones and other natural materials to create the landscape of an archaeological dig; rubber gloves; string or yarn; scissors; tape; yardstick; pencil; paper; a variety of artifacts such as coins, cooking utensils, dishes, jewelry, or keys; excavation tools such brushes and trowels; tarps or drop cloths for messes.

**Instructions:**

- Place drop sheets or tarps down to catch any mess.
- In advance, fill the kiddie pool with potting soil, sand, stones, and a small amount of water to create the landscape of a dig site. Bury artifacts throughout the pool.
- Divide children into groups of four or five per kiddie pool. Have children wear gloves.
- Archeologists dig in a grid system to stay neat and organized. Use the yarn, scissors, and yardstick to divide each pool into sections; secure yarn with tape. Have each child pick a plotted piece to excavate.
- Children bring excavated items to the restoration station to sketch and categorize them. Who or what left them behind?

### UNIQUE SPACE AND/OR PERSONNEL NEEDS

The mock digs can get messy and work well outdoors. Add 1–2 extra volunteers or staff members as needed to help with multiple activities.

## RESOURCES

### Web

Dig program from the San Diego Archaeological Center:

<https://bit.ly/2SAb8sd>

“Dig for Ancient Treasures” from the Pasadena Public Library:

<https://bit.ly/3fvWRWV>

“Titanic Deck Plans” from *Encyclopedia Titanica*: <https://bit.ly/3uoia0x>

Preserving Titanic artifacts from CNN: <https://bit.ly/3up5eaD>

“New Artifacts from the Titanic” from *Today in Nashville*:

<https://bit.ly/2Toxwp6>

“What is Marine Archeology?” from the Smithsonian:

<https://s.si.edu/3vmAwjT>

“Marine Archeology” from the NOAA: <https://bit.ly/34njMwZ>

### Books

#### Non-fiction

*The Sinking of Titanic* (2018) by Valerie Bodden (adult)

*Discovering the Titanic’s Remains* (2017) by Meish Goldish and Melinda E. Ratchford (children’s)

*Digging Deep: How Science Unearths Puzzles from the Past* (2019) by Laura Scandiffio (children’s)

*Shackles from the Deep* (2017) by Michael H. Cottman (children’s)

*Accidental Archaeologists* (2020) by Sarah Albee and Nathaniel Hackett (children’s)