

# Digging Up History

One way in which we are able to learn about the past is through archaeology, the process of carefully excavating, or digging up the earth and recording all the evidence that we find. Evidence can be large such as walls, small such as pottery sherds or miniscule such as seeds or bone fragments. Sometimes evidence comes in the form of slight changes in the type of earth that an archaeologist is excavating.

In the Synagogue there are a couple of areas archeologists have helped us to better understand through excavation and careful study, including the mikvah, a ritual bathing area, and the exterior paint color. Follow the instructions below to get a taste of what is involved in being an archaeologist. We recommend that an adult sets up the dig to create the most accurate experience for amateur archaeologists.



## What you will need:

- Foil pan, at least 10" x 12"
- Soil or sand, if you have both even better
- Small objects you are willing to bury such a coins or small toys
- String
- Paint brush or small excavating tools, we found spoons worked well

## What To Do - Creating Your Dig

- Start by putting a layer of sand or earth on the bottom of your pan, if you have both we would recommend starting with the sand.
- Now place in a few objects in your dish, try spreading them across the whole area. Also add a few small stones.
- Fill in the rest of the dish with soil or sand.
- Tape equally place popsicle sticks along the sides of your dish, we would recommend one on the short edges and two on the long edges. As you get more practiced you could include more for more accurate recording.

To start your dig print a copy of the site recording sheet and follow the directions.

**Bonus Challenge:** You can introduce the idea of different strata or layers within your dig. This idea is important to archaeologists as it helps them to think about the age of the things they find, often each layer can represent a different era. Try building another dig with a mix of layers using sand and soil to make them easily distinguishable. Now create different drawings for each layer of your dig, by looking at the finds in each layer you can start to understand the history of your site.

# Site Recording Sheet

One of the most important parts of being an archaeologist is carefully recording everything the you find. An archaeologist records all of their finds, the location in which they found them and the way in which items are connected. They also record other things they come across such as rocks and the type of soil in which they are digging, all these clues can help to create a better understanding of the site.

- Start by orientating your recording sheet put an arrow that indicates the direction of north.
- Now start to slowly remove the earth, be careful not to remove any objects or rocks. Archaeologists put the removed material in the spoil heap, sometimes they will go back through this material with a sieve to be certain they haven't missed anything.
- Once you have removed your first layer of soil use your string and popsicle sticks to create a grid so your site looks the same as your recording sheet. Using the grid to guide you start inputting your finds in the corresponding squares, the more detail the better. Also take a minute to record all of the larger stones on your site.
- Once you have everything recorded you can carefully remove your finds and look for more clues to help you date your site or learn about the people who once lived there.
- If you have more than one layer, or strata, to your site continue to remove the next layer of earth and do another recording sheet for your next layer. Keep digging until you get to the bottom of your pan or what archaeologists would call the natural, earth that is undisturbed by humans.
