Catalog Clues

Analyze how a museum organizes artifacts by hierarchy and category.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.11-12.5 "Analyze how the text structures information or ideas into categories or hierarchies, demonstrating understanding of the information or ideas."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the words that name levels in the location hierarchy, number those levels from broadest to narrowest, and circle the descriptive categories that cut across that hierarchy.

Inside an Archaeological Catalog

1 An archaeological museum does not treat every recovered item as an isolated treasure. Its catalog begins with the collection, a broad group of materials from one project or institution. Within a collection, records are separated by site, such as a river settlement or hillside cemetery. Each site is divided into excavation units, such as square grids. Each unit can contain smaller contexts, which are distinct deposits or features. A context might be a hearth, a trash pit, or a single soil layer. This descending arrangement preserves an artifact's location and its relationship to nearby evidence, even after the objects leave the ground.

2 At the lowest catalog level, individual artifacts receive unique numbers. The number links an object to its context, excavation unit, site, and collection. Curators then add a second set of categories that describes what the object is, rather than where it was found. They may classify it by material, including ceramic, stone, metal, or bone, and then by object type. A ceramic fragment, for example, might be placed in the ceramic category and identified more narrowly as part of a storage jar. These descriptive categories cross the location hierarchy instead of replacing it.

3 This two-part structure lets researchers ask different questions without losing evidence. A scholar studying trade can gather metal objects from several sites through the material category. Another researcher can start with one hearth and examine every object linked to that context through the location hierarchy. Because each artifact belongs to both systems, a search for ceramic does not erase the fact that a piece came from a particular layer. The catalog therefore moves from broad groups to increasingly specific locations, while its descriptive categories sort objects by shared physical features.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. List the location hierarchy from the broadest grouping to the individual artifact record.

2. What second organizing system do curators add, and how is it different from the location hierarchy?

3. Why does the passage say that descriptive categories "cross" the location hierarchy instead of replacing it?

4. Compare the two researchers in paragraph 3. Which structure helps each researcher, and why?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a catalog for photographs from a school event. Write a five-level source hierarchy from broadest to narrowest, then add two descriptive categories that could cross the hierarchy. In two or three sentences, explain how the two systems would help someone search the photographs.

ANSWER KEY

Catalog Clues

HIGH SCHOOL · RST.11-12.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the words that name levels in the location hierarchy, number those levels from broadest to narrowest, and circle the descriptive categories that cut across that hierarchy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	List the location hierarchy from the broadest grouping to the individual artifact record.	**Collection, site, excavation unit, context, individual artifact.**
2	What second organizing system do curators add, and how is it different from the location hierarchy?	**They add descriptive categories, such as material and object type. These describe what an object is, while the location hierarchy records where it was found.**
3	Why does the passage say that descriptive categories "cross" the location hierarchy instead of replacing it?	**An artifact remains connected to its collection, site, unit, and context while also being grouped with objects that share a material or type.**
4	Compare the two researchers in paragraph 3. Which structure helps each researcher, and why?	**The trade scholar uses the material category to gather metal objects from several sites. The researcher studying one hearth uses the location hierarchy to find every object connected to that context.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Source hierarchy: District media archive > Northview High School > 2026 Science Fair > Robotics Demonstration > Photo 07. Descriptive categories: image type, close-up; subject, robot arm. The source hierarchy shows where Photo 07 belongs among increasingly specific groups. The descriptive categories let users find close-up robot images from different events without removing each image from its source path.

Accept equivalent descriptions of the hierarchy and accurate explanations that distinguish location from object-description categories. For Part 3, accept any logical broad-to-specific hierarchy and categories that can sort items across more than one branch.