Digging for Clues

How careful recovery helps archaeologists study ancient settlements.

USI.2.a "describing how archaeologists have recovered artifacts from ancient settlements including, but not limited to Cactus Hill in Virginia; and"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions archaeologists take to recover and record evidence, and circle names of artifacts or remains they might find, so you can connect each method to the clues it protects.

Recovering Evidence at Cactus Hill

1. Archaeologists study ancient settlements by recovering objects people left behind. At Cactus Hill, a site in southeastern Virginia near the Nottoway River, researchers carefully excavated layers of soil. They did not simply collect objects from the surface. They removed soil in small amounts, watched for changes in color or texture, and recorded the depth and location of each find.

2. The layers at a settlement can hold clues from different times. Archaeologists call careful layer study stratigraphy. A find lower in undisturbed soil may be older than a find above it. To protect this evidence, workers use small tools such as trowels and brushes. They screen excavated soil through mesh so that tiny stone flakes, bone pieces, or other artifacts are not missed.

3. At Cactus Hill, recovered artifacts include stone tools and flakes made while tools were shaped. Archaeologists place each artifact in a labeled bag and make notes about its layer, position, and nearby materials. Back in a laboratory, they compare finds and study the records. The objects matter, but their context, where and how they were found, helps archaeologists explain how people lived at the settlement.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two details did researchers record for each find at Cactus Hill?

2. Why do archaeologists screen excavated soil through mesh?

3. How can undisturbed soil layers help archaeologists decide which find may be older?

4. Why do archaeologists study an artifact's location and nearby materials, not only the object itself?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are excavating a newly found ancient settlement. Write exactly three sentences that tell how you will dig, how you will avoid missing small finds, and what context you will record for each artifact.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 5 · USI.2.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions archaeologists take to recover and record evidence, and circle names of artifacts or remains they might find, so you can connect each method to the clues it protects. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two details did researchers record for each find at Cactus Hill?	**They recorded each find's depth and location.**
2	Why do archaeologists screen excavated soil through mesh?	**They screen soil so tiny artifacts, such as stone flakes or bone pieces, are not missed.**
3	How can undisturbed soil layers help archaeologists decide which find may be older?	**A find lower in undisturbed soil may be older than a find above it.**
4	Why do archaeologists study an artifact's location and nearby materials, not only the object itself?	**Its context, including where and how it was found, helps archaeologists explain how people lived at the settlement.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I will remove soil slowly from a small square with a trowel and keep each layer separate. I will pass the soil through mesh to catch small flakes or bone pieces. I will label each find and record its depth, position, and nearby materials.

Accept equivalent descriptions of careful excavation, screening, labeling, and recording context. For the open response, accept any exactly three-sentence plan that includes all three requested parts.