

Discovering Dated Artifacts

A Mercer Museum Scavenger Hunt

How old is it? That's a question that archaeologists often ask about a site that they are excavating or exploring. Archaeologists use different methods to determine the age of a site, or of the layers within a site. One thing that helps is to find "artifacts of known age." Certain artifacts actually have dates on or in them (a coin, for instance). Or, archaeologists might know that a certain type of tool or object was only in existence at a particular time or within a certain range of dates.

In this archaeological "above ground" scavenger hunt, see if you can find each of these artifacts around the Mercer Museum! Which is the oldest artifact? Which is the newest artifact? Record the dates of the objects you find.

2nd Floor in Central Court

1. Find a fireplace and you will find this object of iron, shaped sort of like a tombstone (it's a fire back, to protect the back of a fireplace and reflect heat)

Date of Object: _____

3rd Floor

2. This sign, for a hotel and inn in Bucks County, features a large mammal on the front that is not native to the United States.

Date of Object: _____

4th Floor

3. Prior to the invention of zippers, clothes and other objects were tied shut or held together with "tapes" or cord. This portable loom was used to make these tapes.

Date of Object: _____

5th Floor

4. Look for this heavy stone used for grinding corn or grain (it is called a “quern”).

Date of Object: _____

5. Find this iron weathervane, a product of the **blacksmith’s** trade, with name and date.

Date of Object: _____

6th Floor

6. On this heavy iron plate, a couple dances to a fiddler’s tune (it is on a stoveplate).

Date of Object: _____

When you’ve found all of the dated objects, answer the following questions:

Which artifact is the oldest? _____

Which artifact is the newest? _____

Which would decay (rots away) quickly? Why do you think so?

If all of these objects ended up in the ground for future archaeologists to try to find, which ones are the most likely to survive a hundred years from now?

Discovering Dated Objects Scavenger Hunt

Answer Key

1. 1728
2. 1848
3. 1819
4. 1735
5. 1764
6. 1746

Which artifact is the oldest? **Fireback**

Which artifact is the newest? **Elephant Hotel sign**

Which would decay (rots away) quickly? Why do you think so? **Elephant Hotel sign and Loom. Wooden objects will decay faster than metal or stone objects.**

If all of these objects ended up in the ground for future archaeologists to try to find, which ones are the most likely to survive a hundred years from now? **Stoveplate, fireback, weathervane, or stone quern**