

# Why Is the Past So Important?

**Code: EL1 and MID: CR, LA, LS, SS**

**Strategies:** brainstorming, small group discussion

**Time:** 30-45 minute sessions

## **Objective:**

In this introduction to their study of archaeological heritage connected to the Nez Perce Trail, students will use a personally owned object to:

1. Share the importance of their past.
2. Connect this importance with reasons why Nez Perce history is important.

## **Materials:**

Students bring to class an object, photograph, or drawing that represents their past.

## **Vocabulary:**

Nez Perce - A term given the Nimiipuu (people) by French trappers. It means pierced nose, although not all Nez Perce people pierced their noses.

Nimiipuu - what the Nez Perce call themselves. It means "Real People" or "the people."

Archaeological site - a place where human activity occurred and their material remains were left.

Archaeology - a method for studying past human cultures and analyzing material evidence (artifacts and sites).

artifact - any object made or used by humans.

## **Background:**

Sites and artifacts can be messengers from the past. If we know how to read their messages, material remains can tell us about the people who made and used them and then left them behind. Although the owner of the artifacts and the inhabitants of the sites may have lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago, they undoubtedly had many of the same needs and concerns, hopes, and fears, joys, and sorrows that we have today.

The messengers from the past belong to everyone. Everyone has a right to know how the world came to be and to know his or her place in the world. Material remains and their context play a universal role" ...in providing cultural continuity and perspective and hence in linking past, present, and future within the experience of any given human generation" (Lipe, 1984, pg.2).

The Nez Perce Trail provides a tangible link to the heritage of the Nimiipuu and the history of America and is valued for that reason. By examining the trail, trail sites, the

heritage of the Nimiipuu are valued accordingly. These sites are also capable of providing scientific information about the prehistory of the region.

**Setting the stage:**

Assign the students to bring an object (artifact) or photograph from home that tells about their family's past. If the object cannot be brought to class, a drawing will work.

**Procedure:**

1. Share background information and vocabulary.
2. Working in groups of 3 to 4, students tell each other what the object conveys about their past.
3. In a class discussion, ask the following questions:

Is it important for you to know about your past? Why or why not?

Is it important to know about the Nez Perce peoples' past? Why or why not?

Nez Perce had lived in North America for 12,000 years. Is it important to know about their lives? Why or why not?

What can we learn about the Nez Perce peoples' past? The students brainstorm ideas.

**Some examples:**

How humans have lived in the past and how and why human cultures changed over time.

If your past is important to you, what statement can you make about the importance of the past in general?

**Variations:**

Borrow an artifact(s) from your local museum, Forest Service, Park Service, Bureau of Land Management Office, University or Tribal Office. First have students observe what the object is made from. Then observe marks caused by wear that might indicate its use. Finally, have the students do some library research or listen to a Nez Perce elder or archaeologist talk about the artifact(s).

Bring a series of your own baby and childhood pictures. Recall events you can remember that correspond with each picture. Label the pictures. Through modeling, students will grasp the personal and emotional importance of their own past and how it shapes their lives.

Make a classroom school museum. Arrange the artifacts in a display with interpretive labels. Have the students write a descriptive label and a label that explains how the object was used. Suggest that they relate themes of subsistence, social/governmental organization, religion, art, leisure, tools and weapons.

Each student makes a book about their family artifact(s). They need to interview a family member who can tell a family story about the artifact. After they have recorded the story,

they draw pictures for the story and combine the two. Laminate the page and bind with a comb binder. Have the students read their stories over a period of time to the entire class.

**More questions:**

Why do you think museums are dark?

How do you properly treat artifacts?

Why should you use acid free paper?

**Reference:** Lipe, William D., 1984, "Value and Meaning in Cultural Resources." In *Approaches to the Archaeological Heritage: A Comparative Study of World Cultural Resource Management Systems*, edited by Henry Cleere. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K.

**Lesson excerpted from:**

*Intrigue of the Past*

Shelley Smith, Jeanne Moe, Kelly Letts, and Danielle Paterson

Anasazi Heritage Center

27501 Highway 184

Dolores, CO 81323