

## Garbage Concepts

### Question:

*When students propose an inference about the people who generated the garbage, ask them:*

What would the activity you are proposing (hypothesis) look like archaeologically? What artifacts would you expect to find if your hypothesis is correct?

Does your study of your garbage tell you everything about American society? Why or why not?

Do the contents in your garbage can change throughout the year? . . . as a result of special occasions like birthdays or company for dinner? What mistakes might an archaeologist make about your family if he/she studied only the garbage from those special events?

How would the results of your study be different if we had mixed your individual garbage bags all together into one heap?

### Concept:

When archaeologists suspect a certain behavior was occurring, they make an hypothesis about what the archaeological evidence would look like. For example, archaeologists could hypothesize that people butchered large game where it was killed and only took the most desirable parts back to their village. In excavating the village, archaeologists would prove or disapprove their hypothesis based upon the animal bones present.

One sample is only a glimpse into a complex society. Just as you only see a small piece of our culture from one sample, archaeologists see only a sliver of the past from one site.

Just as someone who wants to completely understand your family would study your garbage over a long period of time, an archaeologist studies many sites because one site cannot reflect the range of activities people engaged in.

Context would have been lost, and only very general statements about the culture that generated the garbage could then be made. This is what happens when vandals dig up sites and mistakenly say the artifacts are preserved and no information has been lost.