

# Project-Based Learning Semester Plan: The Museum of Lost Civilizations

**Subject Focus:** History, Geography, Archaeology, Art, Engineering, and Creative Writing

**Grade Level:** 6th Grade (11-year-old)

**Timeline:** 16 Weeks (3 homeschool days per week)

**Core Project Goal:** The student will act as a museum curator, researching famous lost cities to ultimately design, build, and present their own "lost city" civilization as a final museum exhibit.

## Overall Materials Needed:

- A large sketchbook or binder to serve as an "Archaeologist's Field Journal"
- Access to the internet for research, videos, and virtual tours (Google Arts & Culture, museum websites)
- Access to a library for books on ancient civilizations, archaeology, and specific lost cities
- Art supplies: modeling clay (air-dry or polymer), paint, brushes, drawing pencils, markers, construction paper
- Building supplies: cardboard boxes of various sizes, craft sticks, glue, scissors, fabric scraps, natural materials (twigs, small stones, sand)
- A large tri-fold presentation board or a designated table/shelf space for the final museum exhibit
- Optional: A camera or tablet for documenting the process and creating digital components for the exhibit

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## Part 1: The Archaeologist's Toolkit (Weeks 1-3)

**Learning Objectives:** By the end of this unit, the student will be able to define "archaeology" and "lost city," explain how new sites are discovered, and create a simulated dig site to understand the principles of excavation.

### Week 1: What is a Lost City?

- **Day 1 (Research):** Begin the Archaeologist's Field Journal. On the first page, brainstorm: What is a "lost city"? Why do cities become lost? Watch introductory videos on archaeology and famous lost cities like Troy or Babylon. Research and write down definitions for key terms: *civilization, ruin, artifact, excavation, theory*.
- **Day 2 (Skills):** Practice observation skills. Go on a "backyard archaeology" walk. Collect interesting natural and man-made objects (leaves, unique rocks, old bottle caps). In the journal, sketch each item and write a detailed description, hypothesizing its origin and purpose.
- **Day 3 (Creation):** Create a "Wonders of the Lost World" map. On a large piece of paper, mark the locations of 5-7 famous lost cities you learned about (e.g., Pompeii, Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat, Tikal). Draw a small icon for each and write one fascinating fact.

### Week 2: How We Find Them

- **Day 1 (Research):** How do archaeologists find sites? Research modern techniques like satellite imagery (LIDAR), ground-penetrating radar, and old-fashioned survey work. Watch a short documentary on a recent discovery.
- **Day 2 (Skills):** Introduction to Grids. Learn why archaeologists use a grid system. On a piece

of graph paper, draw a simple map of a room in your house. Create a grid over it and label the squares (A1, A2, B1, etc.). "Bury" five small objects (like coins) in the room and mark their location on your grid map.

- **Day 3 (Creation):** Build a "Dig Site." In a shoebox or plastic tub, create layers of dirt, sand, and small gravel. Gently bury several "artifacts" (e.g., a Lego figure, a bead, a small toy car, a seashell) at different levels. This will be excavated next week.

### Week 3: The Story of Artifacts

- **Day 1 (Research):** What can artifacts tell us? Choose three different types of artifacts (e.g., pottery, tools, jewelry) and research what they reveal about a civilization's daily life, technology, and culture. Add sketches and notes to the Field Journal.
- **Day 2 (Skills):** The Dig! Using your grid map from last week, carefully excavate your shoebox dig site using old paintbrushes and spoons. As you find each artifact, record its location (grid square and depth) in your journal before removing it.
- **Day 3 (Creation):** Catalog your finds. Clean your excavated artifacts. For each one, create an "Artifact Card" that includes a drawing, its measurements, where it was found, and a hypothesis about what it was and who used it.

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## Part 2: Case Studies of the Lost (Weeks 4-12)

**Learning Objectives:** The student will analyze the geography, culture, achievements, and theories of decline for three distinct lost cities, creating a project for each that will inspire their final exhibit.

### Weeks 4-6: Pompeii - Frozen in Time

- **Focus:** Daily Life, Natural Disasters, Preservation.
- **Day 1 (Weekly):** Research and read about Roman life in Pompeii, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, and how the city was rediscovered. Use Google Street View to take a virtual tour of the ruins.
- **Day 2 (Weekly):** Skill-building activities.
  - **Week 4:** Science - Build and erupt a model volcano using baking soda and vinegar.
  - **Week 5:** Creative Writing - Write a diary entry from the perspective of a child living in Pompeii on the day of the eruption.
  - **Week 6:** Art - Recreate a Roman mosaic using small squares of colored paper or tiles.
- **Day 3 (Weekly):** Work on the "Pompeii Exhibit Piece." Design and create a cut-away model of a Roman villa in a shoebox, showing different rooms like the atrium and courtyard. Label the rooms and furnish them based on research.

### Weeks 7-9: Machu Picchu - City in the Clouds

- **Focus:** Engineering, Adaptation to Environment, Mystery.
- **Day 1 (Weekly):** Research the Inca Empire, the geography of the Andes Mountains, and the incredible stonework and terracing at Machu Picchu. Explore theories about its purpose and abandonment.
- **Day 2 (Weekly):** Skill-building activities.
  - **Week 7:** Geography - Create a 3D salt dough relief map of the Andes mountains, painting to show Machu Picchu's location.
  - **Week 8:** Engineering - Try to build a small, stable "Inca" wall using only sugar cubes or stones, without any "mortar" (glue). Experiment with fitting them perfectly.
  - **Week 9:** Math/Culture - Research and create your own *quipu* (Incan knotted string record) to represent your family's birthdays or other numerical data.
- **Day 3 (Weekly):** Work on the "Machu Picchu Exhibit Piece." Design and build a model of the

agricultural terraces using stacked cardboard, clay, and fake moss/greenery. Explain in a short paragraph how this system allowed the Inca to farm on steep mountainsides.

## Weeks 10-12: Angkor Wat - Temple Mountain

- **Focus:** Art & Architecture, Religion, Water Management.
- **Day 1 (Weekly):** Research the Khmer Empire in Cambodia. Focus on the symbolism within Angkor Wat's architecture, its transition from a Hindu to a Buddhist temple, and the massive reservoirs (barays) surrounding it.
- **Day 2 (Weekly):** Skill-building activities.
  - **Week 10:** Art History - Study the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat. Choose a small section of a story and recreate it as a detailed pencil drawing in your Field Journal.
  - **Week 11:** Architecture - Draw a blueprint for your own temple, incorporating elements of symmetry and symbolism like the Khmer architects did.
  - **Week 12:** Science/Engineering - Design a simple water management system for your backyard or a container garden, inspired by the Khmer barays. Draw the plan and explain how it would work.
- **Day 3 (Weekly):** Work on the "Angkor Wat Exhibit Piece." Sculpt a detailed "temple ruin" out of air-dry clay. Focus on creating an iconic feature, like the lotus-bud towers or a section of a decorated wall. Let it dry and paint it to look like ancient stone.

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## Part 3: The Curator's Creation (Weeks 13-16)

**Learning Objectives:** The student will synthesize knowledge from the case studies to invent, design, and build a multi-faceted museum exhibit about their own original lost city.

### Week 13: Worldbuilding

- **Day 1:** Brainstorm your civilization. In your journal, answer the big questions: What is your civilization's name? Where in the world did they live (jungle, desert, mountain, coast)? What were they known for (art, war, astronomy, trade)?
- **Day 2:** Design the city. Draw a detailed map of your lost city. Include key features like temples, markets, housing, and defenses. What is its name? Why was it built in that specific location?
- **Day 3:** Write the history. Write a one-page "museum plaque" that tells the story of your city. Include its rise, its golden age, and your theory for why it became "lost."

### Week 14: Creating the Artifacts

- **Day 1:** Design 3-5 key artifacts that a future archaeologist might find in your city. Sketch them in your journal and describe their purpose (e.g., a ceremonial mask, a special tool, a piece of currency).
- **Day 2:** Create Artifact #1 and #2. Use clay, cardboard, beads, and other supplies to bring your designs to life.
- **Day 3:** Create Artifact #3 and beyond. Finish making your artifacts and "age" them with paint washes or by rubbing a little soil on them to make them look excavated.

### Week 15: Building the Exhibit

- **Day 1:** The centerpiece. Create a central model or diorama of the most important building in your lost city. Use all the building techniques you've learned this semester.
- **Day 2:** Assemble the display. Arrange your map, your city history plaque, your model, and your artifacts on the tri-fold board or display table. Think about flow and what you want visitors to see first.

- **Day 3:** Write the labels. Create small, clear labels for each artifact and for your model, just like in a real museum.

## **Week 16: Museum Opening!**

- **Day 1:** Final touches and rehearsal. Put the finishing touches on your exhibit. Practice your "curator's tour," where you will explain each part of the exhibit to your audience (family/friends).
- **Day 2:** Presentation Day! Set up your museum and give a formal tour. Explain the story of your lost city, answer questions, and proudly display your work from the entire semester.
- **Day 3:** Reflection. In your Field Journal, write a final entry reflecting on the project. What was your favorite part? What was the most challenging? What is the most interesting thing you learned about the ancient world?