Minoan walls above Bodolaki beach, with the hill of Kastri behind. © British School at Athens, Lasithi Ephorate of Antiquities, and Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities

Archaeology

with Professor Carl Knappett

Talking *points*

Knowledge & Comprehension

1. When was Palaikastro occupied?
2. What techniques do archaeologists use to analyse ancient sites?
3. What was life like for the Minoan inhabitants of Palaikastro? For example, what did they eat and create, and how did they use pottery?

Analysis

4. How was Palaikastro different to other Minoan towns? What might this represent about the society and how people lived?
5. To what extent do you agree with Carl's hypothesis that similar pottery indicates everyone had the same resources? What other factors could account for this? And how could archaeologists test different hypotheses?

Evaluation

6. What do you think you would most enjoy if you helped with an excavation at Palaikastro, and what would you find most challenging? Why?
7. Carl mentions the idea of containers versus contents, and how we think differently about each. List ten containers in your life (e.g., backpack, car, pillowcase, classroom) and their contents. In each case, which is more important to you – the container or the contents? Why? Which containers/contents do you think about most often, and which had you never considered as containers/contents until this exercise? Why do you think this is?

Creativity

8. "When we buy a coffee, we think only of the contents (coffee), not the container (paper cup and plastic lid) that we also buy and then almost immediately discard," says Carl. "How is it we allow ourselves to ignore some of our material culture in this way, even when we know the environmental impacts?" How could we encourage more people to consider the impact of material culture such as disposable containers?

Activities

1. "Think of all the things that surround you – your phone, street signs, desks in your classroom," says Carl. "These things all vary from one place to another. When archaeologists approach past societies, we pay attention to the little differences in stuff from one place to another, because they can speak volumes about how people lived and how they thought of themselves."

   Create a quiz for your classmates or family that compares photos of day-to-day items from different places around the world. Can your audience guess which part of the world each item is from? Afterwards, reflect on the differences you noticed between the items. Why are these items different depending on the place/culture they come from?

2. Choose any three items from your home, such as your favourite book, some cutlery, a painting or a vase. Imagine that these three items were discovered buried five hundred years from now. What do you think future archaeologists would assume about your life based on these objects?

   Then, if possible, bring these items into class. Can your classmates guess the history of each item, such as when and where it was made? Are some objects easier to place and date than others? If so, why?

3. If you have access to a piece of unwanted pottery (e.g., an old plate or mug from a thrift store, or a small terracotta plant pot) and strong glue, you could create your own archaeology-inspired 3D jigsaw by smashing it up and trying to piece it back together again! ASK FOR PERMISSION before smashing any objects and ENSURE YOU SMASH SAFELY by wearing eye protection and sealing the object in a bag then dropping it or hitting it with a hammer. Swap your pottery sherds with a friend. Can you reassemble their pottery vessel?

More *resources*

- The British School at Athens, where Rachel works, conducts archaeological excavations around Greece: **bsa.ac.uk**
- This National Geographic article highlights the tensions between archaeological excavations and economic development on Crete: **nationalgeographic.com/history/article/greek-antiquities-boom-crete-discovery**
- This video gives you a taste of a day in the life of an archaeologist as well as tips for getting into the field: **youtube.com/watch?v=ao4vVcfvyuE**