

EVERYDAY ARCHAEOLOGY

June 29, 2012 Grace Krause Day of Archaeology 2012, Education Academia,
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My Day of Archaeology is not in the field, or in the lab, or even at a conference. By “everyday” I don’t mean mundane, quite far from it. Everyday Archaeology is the way I choose to describe my experiences dabbling in the public aspect of museums. Currently, I’m a PhD student at Michigan State University studying for exams and trying to get my dissertation proposal together, but I also work in our tiny museum shop, where my most common customers are children. This job has been a completely new and enlightening experience, one which I feel has helped me grow as a future educator. I’ve been thinking a lot about this question lately: When I’m not in the field and not in the lab or in a place where there are artifacts readily available, how do I talk about archaeology in a way that gets people excited?

One answer is using toys. We have several archaeology toys in our shop—things like pyramid dig kits, replica projectile points, and storybooks. When I get asked about these items, either how they work or if they’re real artifacts, it’s an opportunity to engage young minds and create a spark of interest in the field. Most recently, I was asked if I knew what was inside the pyramid in one of the dig kits. I replied that it was a surprise, because you never know exactly what you’re going to find during an excavation, and he promptly told his mother he wanted to buy it. Sometimes parents (or grandparents) stop in to buy a souvenir for their kids, and ask about archaeology in Michigan so they can relay the information with the present later. Projectile points and their abundance are a popular topic of conversation, because they are easily relatable artifacts for kids, who are often interested handmade things.

Getting away from the books and artifacts during the day to talk to visitors, particularly children, grounds me and helps me put what I do in perspective. I’ve been interested in the community aspect of doing archaeology since college, when I did lab analysis on a project where kids from a local school assisted in the excavation of their own neighborhood. Archaeology should be meaningful for everyone, and I try to use my job in the Museum as a venue to excite curiosity for ways of knowing about the past. Right now, that usually means talking to kids about toys, and at the end of the day I’m happy with my accomplishments.