

TEACHING ARCHAEOLOGY IN A MUSEUM SETTING

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When people think of archaeology, they usually think of working in the field; trowels and clothes covered in dirt; artifacts bagged and tagged. And for many archaeologists, that's exactly how they spend much of their year. But for me, field work no longer consists of the dirty work of a shovel bum. I work at the Milwaukee Public Museum, a large natural and cultural history museum, and my job revolves on taking our spectacular collections, archaeological and otherwise, and bringing them to life for our visitors.

I received my MA in European Historical Archaeology in 2011 from the University of Sheffield, but I knew that I didn't want to pursue a career in archaeology. Don't get me wrong, I loved my experiences and all the great archaeologists I worked with. But I found a passion in teaching others about parts of their own history they thought lost. Not to mention the joy I got when I was able to correct someone's faulty idea of what an archaeologist actually does. (No, I don't dig dinosaur bones. Yes, I have seen Indiana Jones. No, I haven't been to Egypt.) I realized the perfect place for me was in a museum or other heritage institution. Organisations like those encourage community involvement in a shared history, often through artifacts and oral histories.

I started working in the education department at MPM in 2013, two years after I finished my masters. Our museum offers educational programming for all ages. Many of our programs are directed towards school groups that come in to enhance their classroom curricula, but we have started moving more and more in the direction of engaging the general public, whether 3 or 93. True, because our collections are so extensive, a number of the programs my fellow educators and I teach are not related to archaeology. But we offer a unique opportunity for outsiders to come into the museum and get a hands on experience with archaeology.

Recently, with the summer holidays upon us, my department has begun our Summer Urban Academy. This is a grant funded program that provides visits and education programs for children in Milwaukee area summer programs. Each group attends 4 different topic sessions: Astronomy (including a trip to our planetarium), Environmental Science, Paleontology, and of course, Archaeology. We designed these programs to help these kids (mostly ages 8-14) discover the topics in a different way. And in developing and teaching these programs, I get to put both my degree and my passion for teaching archaeology to good use. A lot of the kids come in not knowing anything about archaeology, but they leave knowing what an artifact is, how different projectile points can help us learn about Wisconsin prehistory and the people who lived there, and how archaeology helps us understand the world around us. Will any of those kids grow up to become an archaeologist? Probably not. But have I helped one more visitor put everything they see in a historical and global context? Absolutely. And that's everything I could hope it would be.