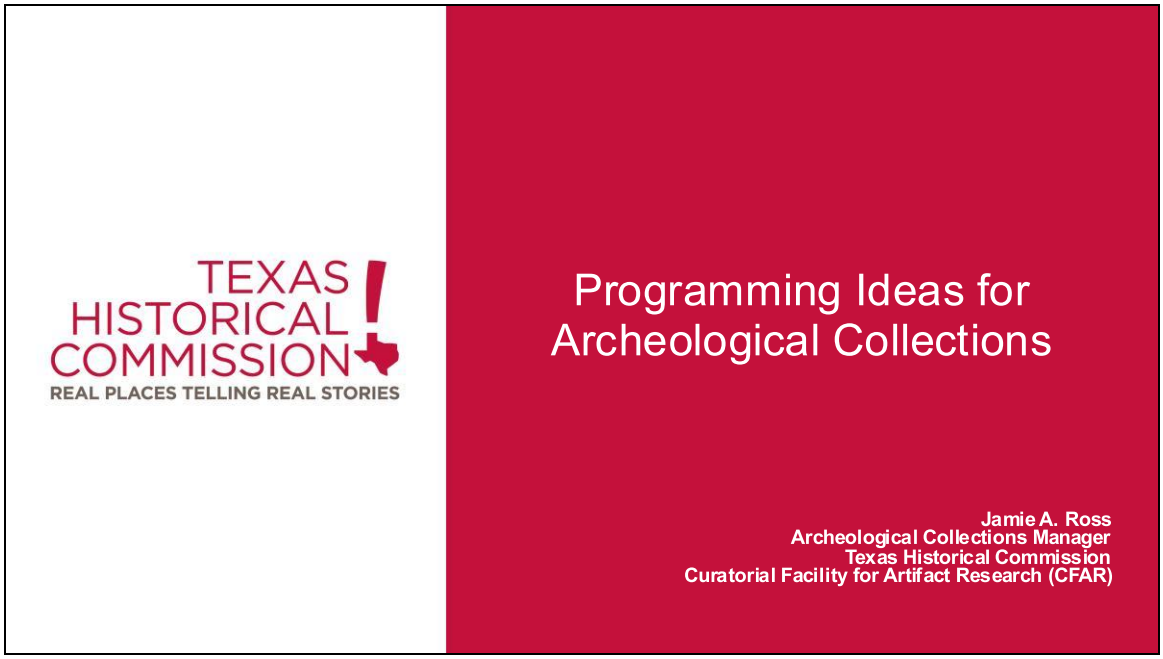

Good afternoon. My name is Jamie Ross and I'm an archeological collections manager for the Texas Historical Commission. I have been in my current position for a little over eight years and worked in collections for over a decade before that. I am really excited to be here with you today giving this webinar because one of my favorite, and I feel most important, parts of my job is developing programming and using archeological collections to teach the public about our shared past.

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Agenda

- Overview of archeology and why it is such a great foundation for programs
- Different approaches to archeological-based programs
- Things to consider when developing these programs
- Case studies from Texas Historical Commission programs and events
- Examples of each approach and framework

This is a brief overview of what I am going to be discussing today, but first I would like to give a little background on the development of this webinar. In the past few years, I have been facilitating workshops on conducting archeological outreach programs and just hosted one this past August. These workshops have been held at the Witte Museum and the Bullock Museum here in Austin and sessions included talks and demonstrations with our amazing outreach partners at Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Historical Commission, the education and outreach staff at the Bullock and Witte Museums, Texas State University, University of Texas in Austin and San Antonio, multiple archeological societies, and more. I say all of this to highlight that this is a very collaborative process and that many of the ideas featured here are developed from programs created by my extremely creative colleagues, including Jenny Townsend, Allison Harrell, Sue Gross, Eleanor Stoddard, Kristen Mt. Joy, and more. Programming is a team sport.

So today I am going to give a very brief summary of archeology and what the discipline encompasses, and how the variety of methodologies used in archeology makes it an incredible foundation to develop programs around.

Next, I am going to talk about three different ways to approach programming in

archeology and things that you should consider when planning programming, archeological or not.

Finally, I am going to give examples of how we have used each of these program frameworks here at the THC, as well as examples of ways these frameworks have been used in other programs.

To start, What is Archeology? Archeology is the scientific study of past cultures and the way people lived long ago based on the things they left behind. The practice of archeology is multifaceted, and archeologists can use a number of methodologies to gain a better understanding of our collective history and how people lived, including excavation, but also remote sensing, and analysis. There are a number of subdisciplines, as well, such as geoarcheology, marine archeology, and Archeobotany that examine the past in a variety of contexts.

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How Archeologists Learn About the Past

- Research
- Site Location
- Excavation
- Non-Invasive Archeology (GPR, LiDAR, etc.)
- Recording and Documentation
- Lab Processing
- New Research
- Conservation
- Illustration
- Reexamination
- Communicating

Archeologists also learn about the past in a number of different ways. While popular depictions of archeology begin and end with excavation, digging up material is only a fraction of what archeologists do. And because archeology is a destructive science and you can only dig up a site once, responsible and ethical archeology goes beyond excavation.

Archeology can involve archival research into site locations and the history of a site. It can involve excavation of a site, but may also involve non-invasive or remote sensing techniques, such as Ground Penetrating Radar or LiDAR. At every step from planning through the conservation and display of objects, there is the opportunity to record and document information about findings. Lab work in archeology can encompass almost anything – archeology seems to be the magpie of the sciences – from chemical and compositional analyses to predictive modeling to genetic studies. And archeology is iterative; we continue to go back to sites and materials previously excavated with new questions and new approaches.

Finally, it is imperative that archeologists enter into a dialog with their audience and communicate their ideas.

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Developing Programs Using Archeology

- Makes history feel real through physical objects
- Teaches careful observation and data collection
- Shows that history changes when new finds appear
- Connects science, math, and social studies together

- Museums & Galleries of NSW

All of that gives archeology a unique capacity in programming. Archeology is positioned to teach us about the past because it examines the history left behind by everyone, rather than only the histories that were considered important enough to record or preserve. Archeology can examine how people truly lived their lives by looking at what they left behind, what they discarded, what they used up and loved, and where they lived. It is the tangible record of history for those whose history did not make it onto paper.

Archeology
- Makes history feel real through physical objects
- Teaches careful observation and data collection
- Shows that history changes when new finds appear (and that we're always learning about the past and that it is okay to change when our evidence and understanding change)
- Connects science, math, and social studies together (but also art and engineering and even more)

So, we're finally into how to develop an archeology program. I have found it easiest when developing archeological programs to look at activities within one of three frameworks.

1. The methodological framework uses archeological techniques and processes to teach about the past or look at how archeologists have done their jobs.
2. The material framework, which looks at the physical objects left behind and develops a program around those.
3. The experimental framework, which employs technologies of the past and how we understand the way people made tools, created art, built their homes, feed their families, and more.

For any program, archeological or not, there are a couple of things that you need to consider that I do want to bring attention to. First, know that your audience can vary widely and that they may not all be looking for the same thing out of their visit. A group of school kids is not going to engage in the same way that a researcher is or a retired community member. A successful program will tailor itself to the intended audience or will offer multiple ways to access activities that can meet people at different levels. For example, if you have a community booth where you have a wide range of participants who will be interacting with you from anywhere from five seconds to five minutes – you can have printed activity sheets for those that need to grab and go, a QR code for more in-depth information about your subject, an activity that can appeal to kids, but also piques the interest of their adults.

And not everyone is looking for the same thing – you can go into a program thinking everyone will want to hear about the newest application of technology, but not everyone wants that. There are people who want to not use their phones or have a more analog engagement.

The more you know about your audience, the better, but prepare as best you can

to be surprised and be flexible enough to pivot.

The other major consideration is resources, and not just budget, but all resources.

1. How capable is your staff of handling 400 school kids? Do you need to ask for volunteers? Do they have the skills they need to facilitate an activity?

The amazing Allison Harrell, the site manager for one of our historic sites, brilliantly broke down her archeology fair into "manned" and "unmanned" activities, so that she could maximize engagement on activities that really needed support. It also allowed staff to rotate on and off activities to allow for things like bathroom breaks, lunches, and quick breathers.

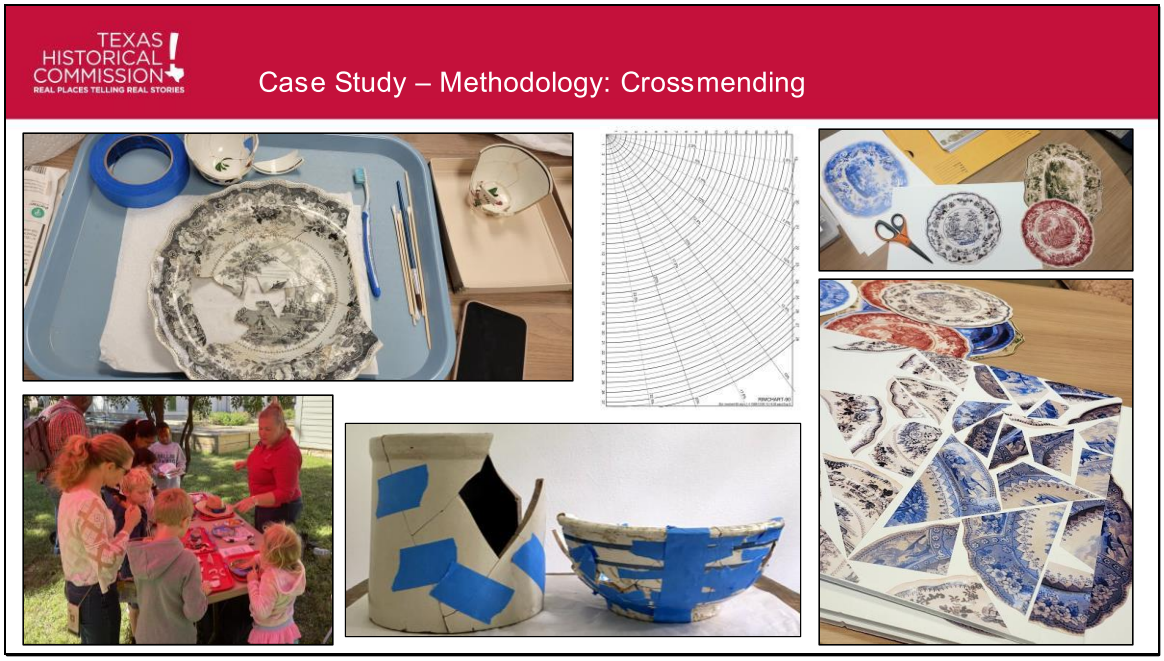
2. What is the capacity in your location? Is it indoor/outdoor? What do you do in the event of rain? Where do people park? Do you have enough bathrooms? Do you have space for people to safely engage in your activity? (which is a big question if you're practicing fire starting or using a spear thrower)

3. What is your budget? You may need to consider not just activity consumables, but also feeding your volunteers, publicity, clean up, and honorariums.

4. What material do you have access to? Can you get original artifacts in cases, and can they be displayed at an event? What equipment you need? Do you need permissions to use any of this?

5. How does your institution feel about your program, and will they provide

support and publicity? Is your community interested and is this meeting what they have communicated that they want?

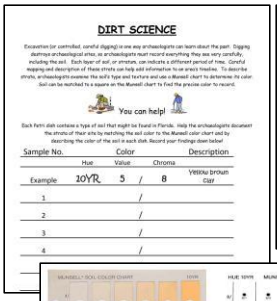


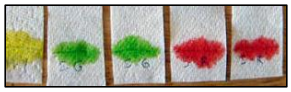
Now that all the high-level stuff is out of the way, let's talk about how we have made this work here at the THC and elsewhere. First, I want to talk about how we have created programs using a methodological framework. So, I work primarily in a lab and a lot of what we work with is tiny pieces of broken ceramics. When I needed to develop an outreach program that looked at what I was working on, I leaned into the lab activity of crossmending. Crossmending is used by archeologists to understand artifact distribution and artifact use across a site by matching up individual pieces to determine the size and frequency of complete objects. The larger the assembled piece of ceramic, the easier it is to determine the diameter, using a diameter chart like this one. But it also highlights whether or not you are looking at one plate or six. Or one style or ten.

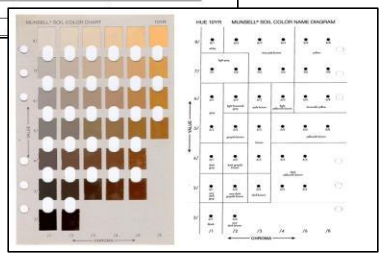
In the lab, we crossmend for exhibit by using conservation adhesive and slowly building the piece up. But temporary joins for measurement or quantification are made using painter's tape. This became a great program where we could use thrift store earthenware plates and have visitors try and match them back together. I would suggest try trying them out first before your event, because some cross-mending matches are harder than expected. Sue Gross from the Brazosport Museum of Natural Science recently introduced me to another way to

engage with this activity. She took high-resolution photographs of complete historic ceramic pieces, cut those pieces up and adhered them to foam core, which she then cut apart. This allowed an even safer way to have participants complete this activity.

Program Examples – Methodology







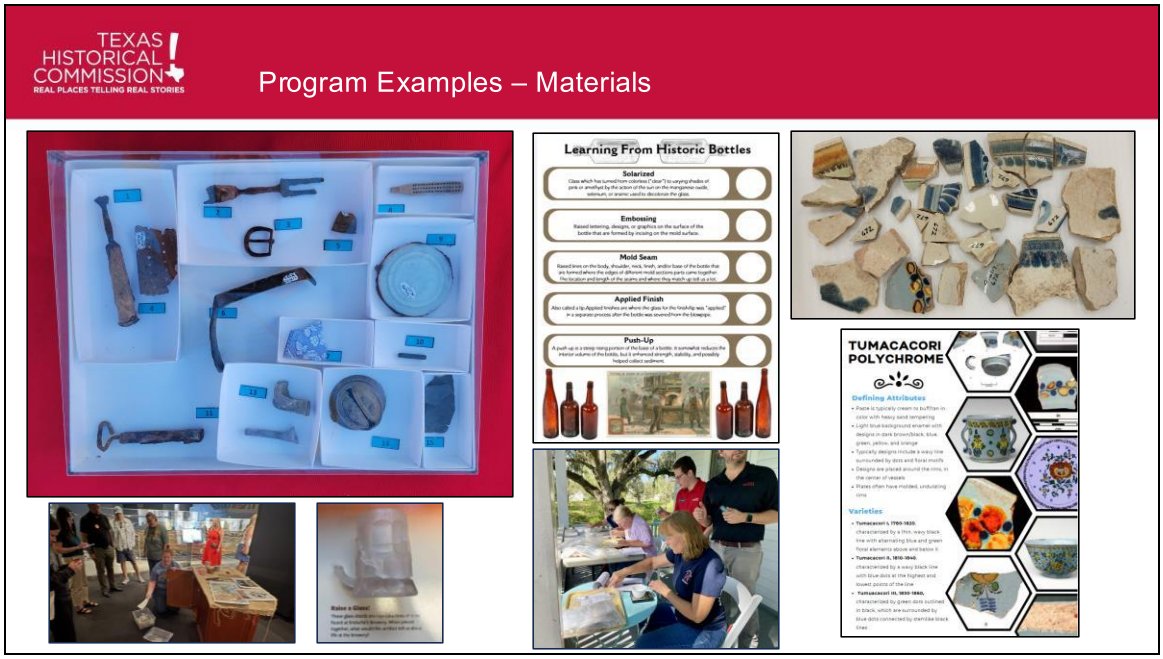
Some other activities that I have either conducted or seen conducted looking at the science and methods of archeology are here. These include models of what an excavation would look like, like this one from UT's Texas Archeological Research Lab, exhibits of the lifecycle of an artifact, like this one from Levi Jordan State Historic Site, which is based on an exhibit developed by Danielle Brissette for San Felipe de Austin, materials analysis like chromatography and soil descriptions and even mapping and stratigraphy exercises.

The next framework I want to talk about focuses on the materials that are excavated themselves. A lot of time and work goes into the long-term care and maintence of collections and making sure that they are preserved into perpetuity is important, but if the preservation means that the materials become inaccessible OR if they are not being used to teach and learn, then that is a loss, too.

One example that I have used as a program that pulled from an artifact on display at one of the THC's historic sites, Kreische Brewery, focused on the branding iron in the collection. Kreische Brewery was an 18th-century brewery founded by German-Immigrant Henrich Kreische, who served the community of La Grange, Texas. I wanted a program that spoke to the brewery's heritage for their Bluff Schutzenfest community event, but I knew that I couldn't just set out broken bottles and barrel staves for people to look at. So, when we sent the branding iron off for conservation at Texas A&M's conservation lab, we had them mold the branding iron to cast as a stamp.

The branding iron had been used to brand beer barrel heads with Kreische's name before they were distributed, which is a practice still used today (although

now it is more commonly laser engraving). With the stamp, we had kids and adults alike create their own barrel heads with dates, letters, and symbols using stamps and markers to commemorate the event, all with the Kreische brand stamp in the center.



Materials is probably the most difficult framework to develop programming around because the materials can be so fragile and not easily leveraged into a program that a lot of people can engage with. We have used display trays and cases to transport and display artifacts to engage with, like the one in the top right. That is a “What is it?” activity created for Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park by the incomparable Marni Francell of TPWD who has since retired. I have had this at booths at the park where people can come by and try to guess what the object is from the fragment ;eft behind, which is something we have to do all the time at the lab. I did something similar with bottles at Kreische Brewery, where we had people guess different parts of historic bottles like mold seams and pontil marks. We create molds of artifacts that can’t be handled by the public so they can see the size and detail. And, recently, we have started a program that allows community members to help us catalog collections by bringing the collections to sites and breaking down cataloging work into manageable, simplified steps. And right now I am working on a memory game involving Spanish Colonial ceramics from our site Presidio La Bahia.

Experimental programming I think may be the most fun. One of my weirdest and most popular activities adapted the art of mocha ceramic glazing into an activity that could be demonstrated in a matter of seconds. And for something that took seconds to demonstrate, it took a lot of time to figure out. Mochaware is a type of slip-decorated ceramic that relies on the reaction between an acidic solution carrying a pigment with a wet alkaline slip. The reaction is a good way to show both fluid dynamics and acid-base reactions, but also cool branching patterns.

A lot of people I encountered during my outreach had no idea how the glaze worked, so it help communicate a technology from the not-so-distant past that isn't that well understood.

There are so many ways to approach this. Shumla, a rock art research and preservation non-profit, has done a ton of demonstrations on ancient paints and pigments, I have seen demonstrations on net making and textile weaving. Another activity I worked on for Presidio La Bahia looked at the plaster found archeologically that used to be on the building, we showed those samples and then created a fresco activity allowing visitors to create their own fresco designs in wet plaster and explained how the material allowed preservation across years.

But you do not have to limit your even planning to just one framework. At the French Legation Historic site, we took one artifact Texian Campaigneware, a ceramic pattern found on transferprint sherds across the state and created a whole program out of it. Texian Campaigneware depicts scences from the Texas Revolution but was created from engravings originally designed with the Napoleonic wars as source material.

This started as the brainchild of site manager, Mary Margaret Kennedy, who found the history of the design really compelling and felt that the French and Texas history connection could really help tell part of the site's story. In addition to an exhibit, the site hosted lectures on ceramics to those interested in the history (and lectures), we did a transferprint manicure activity and had a crossmending activity for kids with foam puzzles using Texian Campaigne photos as the prints.

Resources and Where to Start

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Questions and Contact Information

Discussion Group: Programming Ideas for Archeological Collections

Tuesday, October 6, 2:30–3:30 p.m. Central

Jamie A. Ross, Archeological Collections Manager
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