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Final Writing Assignment

Methods

The location I selected for this assignment was an elementary school classroom in Warrenton, South Carolina. The primary reason I chose this site was because my older sister works at the school where the classroom was, so I was able to get permission to survey the room without much trouble and have someone I knew nearby to give me access to the room after school hours were over. I chose to survey the site after school had ended so I could see the room immediately after it had been used, meaning it would show clear signs of recent human behavior, but also so I could guarantee no one involved in that behavior would still be in the room at the time of me surveying the site. And although I don't have serious interest in being an educator myself, I figured that a classroom would be an interesting place to study in-depth after growing up around teachers such as my parents and older sister along with being in the public school system for several years.

I surveyed the area using a standard walking survey where I walked the length of the room in straight lines and recorded the artifacts and features present. I used the square-shaped tiles on the floor to record the size and position of objects, as it created a visible grid to map out the site with. Each of the tiles are 1 foot wide by 1 foot long, making it easy to measure artifacts and features relative to the tiles and record their exact positioning. For the sake of time and to ensure nothing on the site was disturbed from the state I found it in, I only recorded information

on artifacts that were visible to me without disturbing anything on the site, meaning I did not record the contents of any closed closets, cabinets, or boxes. I tested the accuracy of my interpretations by comparing what I deduced the site was used for to images of other places with that purpose and recording any similarities or differences.

Description

Figure 1 shows the sketch of the site I created while I was present in the classroom. Since the map is in plan view, some artifacts that were under or inside storage containers like cabinets mounted on the walls of the room are not visible on the map but are visible in the photos. After I left the site, I added a key and labels to my map according to the photos I took. Figures 2 and 3 show parts of the site from two different angles.

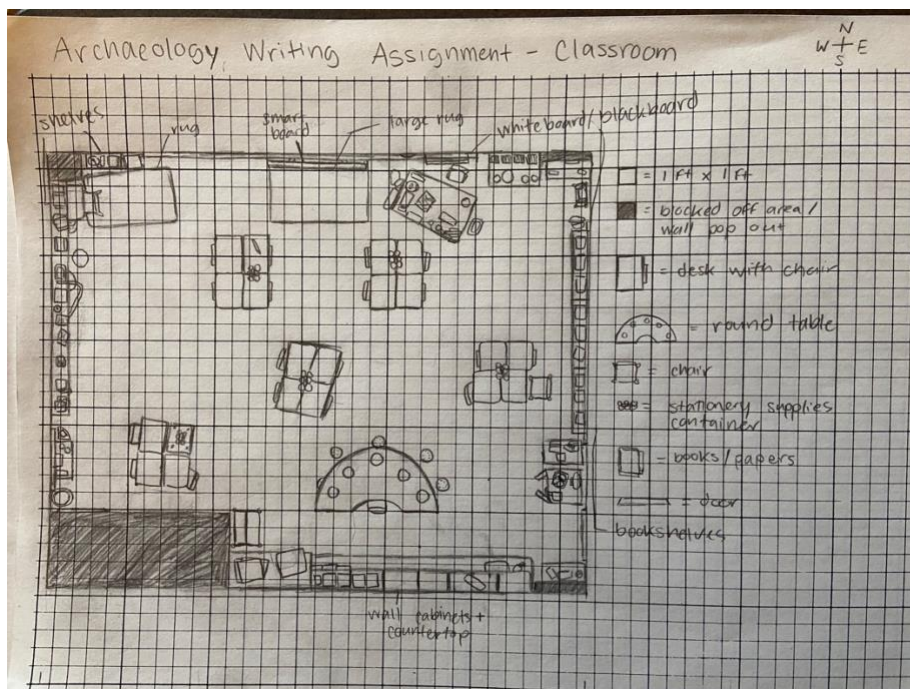


Figure 1: Sketch map of site showing the prominent features and artifacts present. Also contains a key and artifact/feature labels.



Figure 2: Photo of the classroom site from the main door/entryway.



Figure 3: Photo showing the back of the site adjacent to the entryway.

The room itself is mostly rectangular in shape and measures 31 feet long and 25 ½ feet wide, not accounting for any pop-outs in the wall or additional closets (all of which are recorded

in the sketch). This site also contains a large volume and wide variety of artifacts to be studied. Some of the most noticeable ones include a large Smart Board in the front of the room facing the desks, a combination white board and chalkboard behind it, a bulletin board on the right wall, two large, colorful rugs, five sets of four small wooden desks with chairs, a wooden semi-circle shaped table with colored stools surrounding it, and several sets of shelves, cabinets, storage containers, and closets. Most of the storage containers in the room contain books or other classroom supplies. In the front right corner of the room there is also a larger wooden desk with a desktop computer, keyboard, file organizers, and a black desk chair. Additional artifacts included a storage cart used primarily for holding stationery items, a red easel, a rolling cart used to store laptop computers seemingly used by students, a smaller bulletin board next to the room's entrance with a calendar titled "Student Center" on it, two large flags on the wall, a wall clock, multiple trash cans, a large paper pad, and many piles of papers, pencils, books, and various decorative items strewn about. On the walls, there are both educational and encouraging signs and decorations, with some describing different elements of literature and others having short messages written on them. Outside of this room was a long hallway leading to other similarly sized rooms, likely used for similar purposes with similar artifacts.

Analysis

Based on my findings, I believe the purpose of this room is for educating young children, primarily on topics like reading, the English language, literature and literary tools, and writing. The basis for this conclusion was the large volume of books at various difficulty levels, reading tools, and signs and papers on the walls covering topics like poetry, prose, narratives, literary tools used by writers, and text analysis, all topics that are covered in most English and reading

curriculums in South Carolina. I also concluded that the room is used for teaching younger children, likely between the ages of 9 and 11, based on the colorful space-themed decorations, many of which had encouraging messages written on them, wooden desks and chairs seen in many other American elementary school classrooms, a daily Wordle game written on a large paper pad in the front of the classroom that could be used to help students practice English vocabulary, and the wide variety of craft supplies, including colored pencils, rulers, scissors, and crayons, among others. Additionally, the topics shown throughout the room and the level of understanding needed to read the books stored there indicate that the children being taught are not incredibly young, as there seems to be an expected semi-complex understanding of English and basic literature concepts, but they are not very old either, as very few of the books and topics were on a high school difficulty level.

It seems that the students attend the school and alter the site frequently, likely daily or almost every day, based on the daily schedules and calendars tracking daily learning progress on the walls. Regarding these progress trackers, there appear to be several gamified methods of tracking individual student progress used in this classroom, including one called Edmentum where they can earn “trophies” as they progress through a series of lessons, indicated by writing on the whiteboard and on a large piece of paper on the right side of the room with “Edmentum Challenge” written at the top. The latter may be used both to physically keep track of each student’s progress and possibly to motivate students to continue their learning so they can earn more trophies and other rewards, which are represented visually by star-shaped stickers. There was also writing on the whiteboard that read “Review MAP Testing” as part of a daily agenda, indicating the students would be doing a type of important testing soon and had likely been studying for it in the days leading up to it.

In terms of specific behaviors that occurred directly before my arrival, I deduced that the students had just left school by the time I arrived and had taken most of their personal items with them as they left. Despite this, it looked as if they hadn't completely cleaned the room before exiting. All of the smaller desks were clear of most items that students would likely be using, besides small supply containers and textbooks inside the desks' storage compartments. However, there were still chairs pushed out from under the desks in various directions and randomly placed artifacts such as papers, pens, books, and laptops throughout the room, indicating that not every item had been put back in its intended place before the students left school for the day. The only personal items still at the site when I was surveying it were ones that most likely belonged to the teacher, including a personal computer connected to the Smart Board, a large tote bag, and small stacks of graded papers, indicating they had not organized or left with their own belongings.

Discussion

One of the most significant takeaways I got from completing this study is how difficult it can be to take a step back and look at the evidence objectively rather than just assuming the purposes of things based on your personal experiences. Since I grew up in the public school system and am familiar with what a typical American elementary school classroom looks like from my own life, I could've easily assumed what behaviors occurred and what the artifacts were used for based on my own life. However, if another person were to replicate this study and had no knowledge on what a classroom like this might look like, they could interpret it in a completely different way. Knowing this, I attempted to the best of my ability to not let any bias influence my interpretations and instead look at other examples of elementary school classrooms to test my data. It was also difficult to decide what information was important to my study and

what wasn't, since there were many small artifacts to record information on and the amount of time I had onsite was limited. While I made sure to record the locations of the larger artifacts like tables and cabinets as accurately as possible, there was such a large volume of smaller items such as books and decorative objects that I couldn't spend as much time analyzing everything as I would've wanted to. If I had more time on the site, I may have been able to take a much closer look at the possible usages of each item, but for the purpose of this assignment and because of my time constraints, I had to be slightly more selective.

Additionally, there may be some inaccuracies in my interpretations of exactly what behaviors occurred since I do not have access to any materials the students may have brought with them to the school from home, used during the day, and then left with before I arrived. I only had access to objects that stay in the room after the students leave or that could have been accidentally left behind, making it difficult to accurately determine what behaviors occurred and get the full scope of what artifacts are and aren't used regularly. Before completing this study, I hadn't thought about how much information I could be missing simply because of how many small alterations to the site can occur each day and how many individual items don't stay exclusively within the classroom. After surveying the site, however, it made me realize just how significant this lack of information could be on another archaeological site from a much older period that isn't regularly altered by human behavior or can't be compared easily to similar sites like the one I studied.