



Paleobotanist: The Decline of the Byzantine Empire

Adventure Description:

In this adventure, you will think like a paleobotanist and analyze artifacts from the Byzantine Empire to draw a conclusion about why the Byzantine Empire declined.

Activity

Step 1: Background Information on Perspectives about Decline of Byzantine Empire (5-10 minutes)

- Show [Video: Decline of Byzantine Empire](#).
- Discuss how professionals often disagree on why a society declined. Ask students why they think a paleobotanist might have a different theory about why the Byzantine empire declined compared to an art historian or an archaeologist.
- Provide students with [Handout: Different Perspectives From Different Professionals](#). Discuss how professionals study different parts of a civilization. Each professional has an understanding of a civilization that is tied to their area of study. For example, an archaeologist might have found an artifact that suggests that there was a civil war that caused the civilization to decline. However, an environmentalist might have proof that a drought caused that same civilization to fall apart.
- Explain to students that one way professionals learn about ancient civilizations is by analyzing remains, including trash and artifacts.
- Provide students with [Handout: Trash Pits](#) and read through it as a class.
- Ask students to think about the items they have thrown away today. What could someone learn about each student by analyzing his or her trash? (e.g. food wrappers show what we eat, clothing tags show where we buy clothes, receipts can show what we choose to spend money on)

Step 2: Activity Set Up (5 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will be creating an artifact that could be found in a trash pile from the Byzantine empire. Then, they will switch artifacts with another student. The other student will analyze the artifact and draw a conclusion about why the Byzantine empire declined.
- Provide students with [Handout: Creating an Artifact](#). Review the steps as a class.
- Explain to students that they can use both [Handout: Trash Pits](#) and [Handout: Causes of the Collapse of the Byzantine Empire](#) as resources when creating their artifacts.
- Provide students with the following materials:
 - Building Supplies (glue, tape, scissors, etc.)
 - Clean recyclable materials (cardboard, plastic containers, etc.)
 - Art supplies (markers, crayons, etc.)
 - [Handout: Causes of the Collapse of the Byzantine Empire](#)

Please contact Allison Bischoff, Director of Customer Service, at allison@rozzylearningcompany.com or 314-272-2560 with questions.

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Step 3: Create an Artifact (15-25 minutes)

- Have students complete steps 1 - 3 on the handout.
- As students are working, ask the following:
 - How can the analyzing artifacts from different perspectives encourage people to discuss different reasons related to the decline of the Byzantine Empire?
 - How can a trash mound be used to analyze historical events?
 - The Byzantine empire interacted with many other cultures. How might studying trash piles help to understand these cultural interactions?
 - How can trash piles help understand what people used to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter or clothing?

Step 4: Analyzing Others' Artifacts (15+ minutes)

- Explain to students that they will now analyze an artifact found in a trash pile. Provide students with [Handout: Analyzing an Artifact](#).
- Have students switch desks with each other so that they analyze an artifact that belongs to another student.
- Have students complete the steps on the handout. Remind students that they should fill in their responses based on the career they chose.
- As students are working, ask the following:
 - What types of trash can help provide clues to the collapse of the Byzantine Empire?
 - How can the location of a trash pit help professionals to understand how space was used in a city?
 - Why is it important for different professionals to analyze the same artifact?

Step 5: Discussion (5-10 minutes)

- Ask students to share the claim they have developed from studying an artifact with the class. Students can also share which career they think is most closely associated with the artifacts found.
- Have a concluding discussion about the different perspectives different professionals bring when analyzing artifacts. Discuss the following:
 - Why is it important for different professionals to work together when analyzing ancient artifacts? (different professionals bring different perspectives, which can help create a clearer picture of the events that occurred)
 - Why is analyzing trash helpful to people that want to learn more about an ancient civilization, like the Byzantine Civilization? (Trash gives a window into what products people use and how they spent their money.

Materials List

Provided online:

- Video: Decline of Byzantine Empire
- Handout: Different Perspectives From Different Professionals
- Handout: Trash Pits
- Handout: Creating an Artifact
- Handout: Causes of the Collapse of the Byzantine Empire
- Handout: Analyzing an Artifact

Not Provided Online:

- Building Supplies (glue, tape, scissors, etc.)
- Clean recyclable materials (cardboard, plastic containers, etc.)
- Art supplies (markers, crayons, etc.)

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