

# The Tell Ubivis Project

## Bringing Archaeology into the Classroom

TFAHR's Tell Ubivis Project is a set of activities designed to bring archaeology into the classroom. Working with school teachers, we have prepared a series of presentations with artifacts (both modern and ancient), and a number of videos on various aspects of antiquity and archaeology. The highlight of the program, however, is the "mock dig" we create for students to dig up, document and analyze.

Our target age group for the Tell Ubivis Project is fifth through eighth grades. TFAHR first launched the Tell Ubivis Project in Houston, at Annunciation Greek Orthodox School in 1996 and 1997, in cooperation with teachers who had worked on TFAHR excavations abroad. A similar project was started in 2005 at Mountain Valley School in Sattler, Texas.



**Figure 70. Teachers on a TFAHR excavation at Lake Prespa, Macedonia.**

And in 2007 a Tell Ubivis Project will begin at Startzville Elementary School, Startzville, Texas. In each instance, the teachers responsible for the project have had actual excavation experience on TFAHR digs. This experience is critical, so TFAHR volunteers do not have to teach the teachers and the students simultaneously about how an excavation operates.

The first step is to create a set of ruins. TFAHR vol-

unteers and the teachers design a set of ruined buildings to be excavated by the students; precise planning ensures that all students in all squares will discover something – and not dig dry holes, as can happen on a real excavation! We build walls of stones or bricks which are mortared together, to make it easier for the students to excavate.



**Figure 71. Teacher and student volunteers building the "ruins."**

Artifacts are then planted amidst the ruins. Many artifacts are donated by students' families: broken pottery, bits of metal, bones, shells, burnt wood and ashes (for destruction levels), etc. Some artifacts are designed and created by TFAHR volunteers: tools, clay tablets, figurines, etc.



**Figure 72. Creating artifacts from bones.**

We attempt to keep all artifacts culturally and religiously neutral, that is, nothing should point to a specific time, place or faith; for example, we would avoid pottery with “Hecho in Mexico” stamped on it or immediately recognizable modern tools.

The ruins are then covered with soil. Depending on time allotted for the project and financial resources available, one or two strata of ruins can be built. The latter is preferable, as it allows us to teach about chronological and spatial relationships between archaeological strata.

In the classroom, in the meantime, teachers train students in the various skills required for the excavation: knowledge of the metric system, the art of measurement and survey, and the skills needed for restoring and drawing pottery and artifacts.



**Figure 73. TFAHR video on pottery making and restoration.**

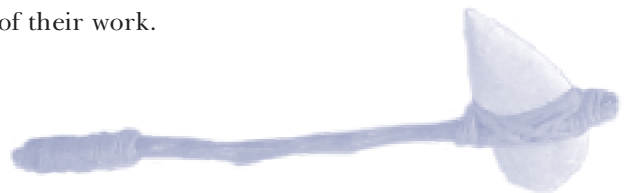


**Figure 74. TFAHR video on glass making.**

Thus, the classroom teacher is teaching more than archaeology: she uses the opportunities presented by the excavation to teach math skills, writing skills, scientific concepts, and analysis tools appropriate to her grade level.

To enrich the teacher’s classroom activities, TFAHR has prepared videos depicting various aspects of antiquity and archaeology, using the resources of our Archives. The first program investigates how buildings are destroyed and get covered up by earth; from experience, we have learned that one of the most difficult concepts for students to comprehend is how ruins come to be underground. The next video discusses the actual archaeological process, from figuring out where to dig, to how to dig, to how to restore and analyze artifacts. Additional videos introduce students to ancient arts and means of construction: pottery making, glassblowing, lime and cement manufacturing, and how stones are quarried and shaped.

Thus prepared, students begin the actual excavation. They are responsible for the digging, the mapping of the site, photography and drawing, the cleaning and restoration of pottery and artifacts, and a final analysis of their work.



**Figure 75. Students excavating the site.**

In past Tell Ubivis Projects students have prepared their own publications of their work, or written short stories about the people they imagine may have lived in such buildings and the fate of those people. Another group has planned for the students to design and create their own “museum exhibit” of their finds, to display at school. In one project, veteran students of one year's dig helped recreate the ruins and artifacts for the students of the upcoming year's dig.

In all of the Tell Ubivis Projects TFAHR has benefited from very generous donations of time, labor, and artifacts from students' parents and volunteers. Their

participation has always been greatly appreciated. Friends in the construction industry have also generously donated stones, bricks, cement and dirt - all of which are essential to creating the “ruins”. It still is necessary, of course, to purchase the tools for digging and documenting the site.

The name “Tell Ubivis” is a hybrid term TFAHR invented for the project. “Tell” is an Arabic word that archaeologists use to refer to a mound of ruins. “Ubivis” is a Latin word meaning “wherever you want [it];” signifying, essentially, that TFAHR can build the ruins wherever you want them.



**Figure 76. Videotaping excavation techniques during an overseas dig.**



**Figure 78. Cementing the ruins into place.**



**Figure 77. Planning the location of the ruins.**



**Figure 79. Artifacts placed into the ruins.**



Figure 80. Covering the ruins with soil.



Figure 81. Teaching students about stratigraphy.

TFAHR would like to thank the following  
for their contributions to the

**Tell Ubivis Project** Mountain Valley School at Sattler, 2005 - 2006

Contributors of Materials	Volunteers	
Curt Braden Contracting David Anthony Homes Brooks Stone Ranch Robert Fleming Comal Public School Foundation Grant to Mountain Valley School	Jennifer Curtis Kristi Fleming Joyce George Annie Jacobs Megan Jacobs William Lakey William Martin Carolyne Martin Conor Martin	Isabel Martin Eulah Matthews Dorothy Neidinger Robert Neidinger William Neidinger Elizabeth Smith Richard Smith Zak Smith

