Gathering Supplies:

Archaeologist's Journal Printable
Scissors
If you don't have a printer just read on and see if you can match the sherd to the vessel.

What is a sherd?

A sherd is a broken piece of pottery and one of the most common artifacts found at an archaeological site.

All over the world and throughout much of human history, we have made pieces of pottery, from simple water jugs to large ornate vases, and... those pieces of pottery have broken. Even though a sherd is just a piece of the whole pot we can still learn from it! Archaeologists will look for what material makes up the clay. Was the pottery decorated? Is the decoration on the inside of the curve, meaning it is probably from a bowl that was decorated on the inside. Does it have decorations on the outside of the curve, making it likely that the sherd came from a pot. If the sherd is a large enough size and came from the rim of a vessel there are even ways of figuring out how wide the opening was using math!

Pottery is also unique to different areas of the world. The pottery from Ancient Egypt is different from the pottery found at an Ancestral Pueblo site in the Southwestern part of the US. Pottery designs and colors also have changed over time, making potsherds a very useful artifact for telling what time period a site dates to. This is why sherds can be called a diagnostic artifact meaning that it can help archaeologists know what culture and time frame the vessel was made in!
Try This! Find The Missing Pottery Sherds.

You can print this activity out as part of the Archaeologist’s Journal Printable or just see if you can match the missing sherd to the correct vessel.

Archaeologists usually find pottery in broken pieces, called sherds. Sometimes the sherds from different pots are all mixed together.

Can you find the missing sherds for these Mesa Verde Black-on-White mugs? Mugs like these were made by the Ancestral Puebloan people living in the Four Corners region of the US in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah about AD 1180-1300.