



# 1 Lesson One

## *Ethics of Studying Human Remains*

### **Enduring Understanding**

Studying ancient human remains has ethical implications.

### **Essential Questions**

What are the ethical constraints on excavating, studying, and displaying human remains? How should human remains be treated and displayed?

### **What Students Will Learn**

- Archaeological discoveries have ethical implications for people living today.

### **What Students Will Do**

- Evaluate differing viewpoints on studying ancient human remains.
- Watch a video on ancient human remains found at Pompeii and Oplontis.
- Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

### **Assessment**

Students respond to an ethical question with a persuasive essay.

### **Materials**

#### *For the Teacher*

- Discovery Channel video, *Pompeii: Back from the Dead* (2011). Run time of 48 minutes
- Images of Pompeii casts of people and animals, and skeletal remains from Herculaneum and Oplontis

**SUBJECTS:** science, social studies, language arts

**CCSS:** W.1, W.4, W.5, W.7, W. 8, W.9 W.10

**SKILLS:**

- **Bloom’s Taxonomy:** evaluation analysis
- **Facets of Understanding:** explanation, perspective, empathy

**DURATION:** 90 minutes

**CLASS SIZE:** Any

#### *For Each Student*

- A pocket folder or portfolio in which to gather and store unit materials
- Word Bank (page 27), 2-3 copies for each student for the entire unit
- “Investigating a Roman Villa: Understandings” (pages 28-29), one copy for each student
- Copies of the “Persuasive Writing Instructions” and “Persuasive Map” for each student (pages 25-26)

### **Background Information**

In 1864, Giuseppe Fiorelli, the director of excavations at Pompeii, invented a technique to preserve the shapes of bodies buried in the ash. The bodies left a hollow cavity in the ash. Archaeologists poured plaster into the hollow pocket creating a detailed plaster cast of the people and animals at the moment of death. However, this process destroys the skeleton and other remains. In 1984, at Oplontis, an expensive technique was employed of pouring resin into a cavity to preserve the body shape and skeletal remain as a wax cast. “The most important find, and one that—properly studied—can shed light on pressing questions, is the discovery of the

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skeletons of 54 individuals in room 10 of Villa B at Oplontis, one of the large ground-floor storage rooms. These were people who had gathered in this room to escape the eruption, and presumably awaiting rescue from the sea, were overcome by hot gas and poisonous fumes of the first pyroclastic flow that hit Villa B. They are a gruesome reminder of the human toll taken by Mount Vesuvius. Because they were found in two distinct groups, some scholars attempt to distinguish the skeletons in terms of social status. Those at the rear space, bearing no money or jewelry, would be servants and slaves, whereas the group near the entrance to the



Skeletons discovered at Oplontis Villa B,  
[www.oplontisproject.org](http://www.oplontisproject.org)

space would be elites—this because some were found with considerable wealth in the form of coins and jewelry” ([www.oplontisproject.org](http://www.oplontisproject.org)).

Herculaneum, a seaside resort nine miles northwest of Pompeii, did not experience the rain of pumice from the Vesuvius eruption and people did not flee the city immediately. Six pyroclastic surges rushed over the city later in the day. Similar to Oplontis, the people of Herculaneum were killed instantly by hot clouds of ash and gas. Then slow moving pyroclastic flows sealed the victims beneath 75 feet of rock. Human remains were discovered along the coast which show people fleeing their homes carrying their most valued possessions, before they were struck down and buried in volcanic ash and rock.

### Preparing to Teach

1. Watch the Discovery Channel video, *Pompeii: Back from the Dead*. It features the two villas at Oplontis! Determine scenes that should be omitted based on the age-level of your students and time (**warning, the video contains sexual references and information about prostitution in Pompeii**).
2. Post the Word Bank words.
3. Write the essential questions on the board: What are the ethical constraints on excavating, studying, and displaying human remains? How should human remains be treated and displayed?

### Word Bank

**ethics:** the study of standards of right and wrong; that part of philosophy dealing with moral conduct, duty, and judgment

**persuasive:** arguments to support claims in an analysis of texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence



## Uncover Prior Knowledge

1. Remind students that the story of Pompeii is a human tragedy. Display images of the casts of people and a dog, as well as the skeletal remains from Herculaneum and Oplontis. Inform students that these images are of body casts of people discovered at Pompeii, skeletons at the docks of Herculaneum, and the 54 bodies huddled in a storage room at Oplontis.
2. Ask students: How do these images make you feel? What questions do you have? Have students write their feelings and questions down. Record examples on the board to refer to throughout the unit.
3. Tell students: While examining the human remains of a natural disaster provides amazing information about the people and how they lived and died, the study of human remains is controversial especially the treatment of the skeletal remains after they are found. Some people were uncovered from the ash that buried them and then were left exposed to the elements and in view of tourists. Others are destroyed in the creation of making casts which are then displayed in museums across the world. Finally, some of the possessions/artifacts are removed from their owner's body to be studied and their bodies once analyzed are put into crates near where their bodies were found. The study and treatment of human remains raises ethical questions.
4. Introduce students to the Word Bank if they are not already familiar with the concept (see Introduction page 12) and distribute 2-3 copies of the Word Bank to each student. Assist students with defining the word **ethics** on their Word Bank.
5. Distribute folders or portfolios for students to store their Word Banks and all other materials for the unit.

## Discover New Knowledge

**What are the ethical constraints on excavating, studying, and displaying human remains? How should human remains be treated and displayed?** Inform students that this question will guide their learning.

1. Introduce the Discovery Channel video, Pompeii: Back From the Dead.
2. Watch the video (be aware that there are references to sex in ancient Rome).
3. Ask students: What are some ethical questions that could arise from the discovery and study of ancient human remains at Oplontis? These questions will serve as writing prompts for persuasive essays.
4. Ask students:
  - What are the ethical constraints on excavating, studying, and displaying human remains?
  - How should human remains be treated and displayed?
  - Are there duties to the dead to respect bodies and burial sites?
  - Are there duties to their descendants?
  - Imagine... Would it be ethical to excavate human remains from the site of the World Trade Center, study, and display them?
5. Tell students: These are some of the factors to consider:
  - Age of remains/existence of relatives
  - Cultural/religious significance (burials, treatment of the dead)
  - Value of information, scientific benefits, and distribution of benefits
  - Treating bodies with dignity and respect
6. Write down some of the more compelling, debatable questions that arise and assign a question to small groups of students to explore in a small group discussion. As a group, try to come up with a consensus.



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7. Have groups share some of their points and whether they were able to come to consensus.
8. Ask each group to choose two or three words (e.g., science, history, progress, religion) that describe the value with which their group is most concerned. Point out that each of these values or concerns has validity—there are no right or wrong answers. Remind students that being responsible citizens means understanding all perspectives about an issue before making a decision.

### Assessment

1. Ask students: What makes an effective persuasive text? Have students conduct a brainstorm through quick writing to see what students know about the elements of argumentation. Write down the essential elements of an argumentative speech to prepare them for when they write their own persuasive text. Give students a time limit for their brainstorm. Put the ideas under three elements: ideas, organization, and language. Inform students that they will write a persuasive essay on the ethical treatment of human remains found at Pompeii, Herculaneum, or Oplontis.
2. Students complete the “Persuasive Writing Map.” Check the map before the student proceeds with writing the essay.
3. Students will write a short essay with an introduction, body, and conclusion. Using their map and Persuasive Writing Instructions students will address one ethical question in a persuasive essay.
  - Introduction: State one of the ethical questions raised in the class discussion following the viewing of the video, for example: “Should the remains of ancient Romans be

studied?”. Write a summary of the archaeological discovery of human remains at Pompeii, Herculaneum, or Oplontis. What did you learn from the video and other research? Then state your position by answering one of the ethical questions in one sentence.

- Body: State three reasons to support your claim and explain reasons with facts and information.
- Conclusion: What is the significance of finding human remains at Pompeii, Herculaneum, or Oplontis? How should the remains of ancient Romans be treated?

### Reflect on New Knowledge

1. Distribute “Investigating a Roman Villa: Understandings.” Give students a few minutes to write “Ethics of Studying Human Remains” means to them. You may want to collect the sheets to check for understanding. Students should keep this document in their folders.
2. Have students present their persuasive essays.

## Persuasive Writing Map Instructions

**Ethical Question:** State the question you are going to answer.

**Thesis Statement:** State your position by answering the question and your three main points:

**Reason 1:** Counter Argument, address opponent's claim and your reasoning against it.

**Reasoning:** Explain the flaws in the opposition's argument

**Evidence:** Support your claim with facts (cite evidence from a source)

**Reason 2:** Expand your main point

**Evidence:** Support your reason with facts (cite evidence from a source)

**Reason 3:** Expand your main point

**Evidence:** Support your reason with facts (cite evidence from a source)

**Conclusion:** Remind readers of the importance of your topic.

## Persuasive Essay Instructions

### Introduction:

- State one of the ethical questions.
- Write a summary of the archaeological discovery of human remains at Pompeii, Herculaneum, or Oplontis.
- Thesis Statement: State your position by answering one of the ethical questions and your three main reasons

### Body:

- State three reasons to support your claim and explain reasons with facts and information from sources.
- Evaluate different people's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in an article, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

### Conclusion:


What is the significance of finding human remains at Oplontis? How should the remains of ancient Romans be treated? Provide a call to action of what you want people to do.

## Persuasive Writing Map


By: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethical Question: \_\_\_\_\_


**Thesis Statement**




**Reason 1**



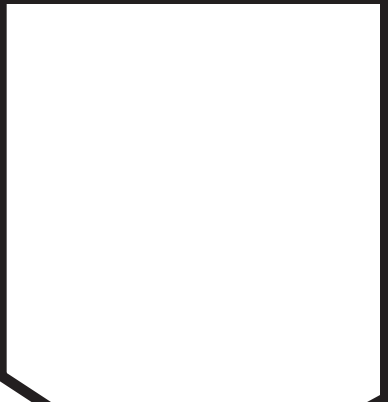
**Reason 2**



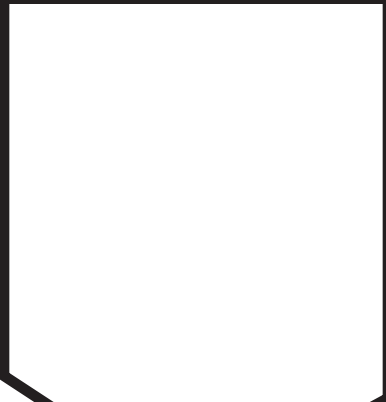
**Reason 3**



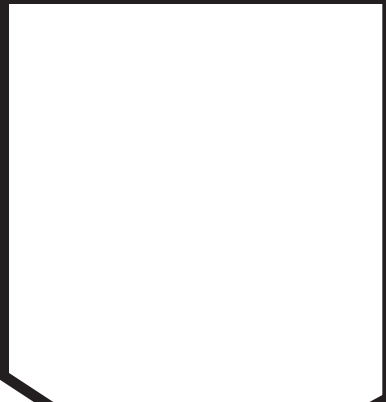
**Evidence/Facts/Examples**




**Evidence/Facts/Examples**



**Evidence/Facts/Examples**



**Conclusion**



## ***Project Archaeology: Investigating a Roman Villa***

### **Word Bank**

| New Words and Ideas | Definitions |
|---------------------|-------------|
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## Investigating a Roman Villa Understandings

### **Lesson One:** Ethics of Studying Human Remains

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### **Lesson Two:** Knowing the Land – Knowing People

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### **Lesson Three:** Vesuvius Erupts

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### **Lesson Four:** Romans Recline to Dine

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**Lesson Five:** Mosaic Math

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**Lesson Six:** Coins and Culture

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**Lesson Seven:** Mystery at the Roman Villa

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**Lesson Eight:** Stewardship is Everyone's Responsibility

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