



Laurel School seventh-grader Veda Paloma, 13, of Pepper Pike holds a bone she found digging earlier this month at the school's annual seventh-grade mock archaeological dig. In the last two weeks of school, the seventh-grade class was at the Laurel Butler Campus in Russell, where they excavated a replication of the Whittlesey tribe site.

Digging for history

Laurel School students participate in annual archaeological dig

By KRISTA S. KANO

On a sunny, 84 degree day earlier in May, Laurel seventh-grader Veda Paloma, 13, of Pepper Pike and her partner Sophia Casa, 13, of Beachwood were hunched over a 2-by-2 meter sand pit. Clad in shorts and rain boots and armed with brushes and trowels, the girls carefully excavated their site to uncover the history of the Whittlesey people, a late prehistoric tribe that lived in the Cuyahoga Valley between 1000 and 1600 AD.

Earlier in the week, Veda found a long bone yet to be identified, and in another area, Olivia MacPhail, 13 of Shaker Heights and Becky Walker, 13, of Bay Village uncovered a deer



skull. Further down, Jasmine Pockins, 13, of Shaker Heights discovered a full, in-tact piece of pottery. Kayla Richer, 12, of Chagrin Falls and Chester found an antler and two pieces of slate, and other girls excitedly yelled out when

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Laurel seventh-graders throw arrows using their recently constructed atlatis earlier this month at the school's Butler Campus in Russell. The activity was part of the annual mock archaeological dig.



Photos by Michael Johnson

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they found a potsherd or a piece of charcoal.

In their last two weeks of school, the girls have been participating in the annual seventh-grade archaeological dig, a replication of the Whittlesey tribe site in Independence excavated by Laurel teacher and archaeologist Karen Redmond.

Hope Murphy, director of curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grades, explained that Ms. Redmond brought the dig to Laurel about 15 years ago when the school in Shaker Heights purchased the Butler campus in Russell Township to promote outdoor activities.

"They lay out the site in grid lines and use the tools that archaeologists use. They collect artifacts and chart the data to put together a map of the dig site, which then gives them the ability to analyze how the artifacts fell in a meaningful way," Ms. Murphy said.

"Over time, depending on the interests of the grade level team, things have come up and there are subthemes that emerge," she continued. "One of them was the ethics of digging, and when that was one of the important themes, there was a 'town council' debate about should we disturb the past and how do we move forward."

According to Ms. Murphy, the seventh-grade teachers collaborated with specialists from the Cleveland Museum of History to prepare the mock site and the artifacts, which

display cut marks to indicate that stone tools were used to process them.

This year's group of students heard from Barbara Brown, a paleontologist and Laurel alumnus who helped discover Lucy, a female pre-hominin of the species *Australopithecus afarensis* that dates to 3.2 million years old.

Although the girls are focused on the dig, they still have classes in humanities, math and science, all of which revolve around the dig for a holistic approach to education. In math and science for example, the girls are learning to measure and plot the locations of some of the larger finds, and in the humanities classes, they're discussing the discovery of North America and Native American stereotypes.

"Today we were talking about appropriation versus appreciation, and how you can appreciate without being offensive," said Meadow Gerome Williams, 13, of Chagrin Falls.

True Pyle, 13, of Bainbridge continued that they also referenced Chief Wahoo and Halloween costumes in their discussions on cultural appropriations.

"It's really fun because I get to know Becky better," Olivia explained. "And we laugh a lot and have fun while doing it. We finished our tests and we don't have homework, so you're more focused on the dig rather than your mind going to other school stuff."

"They've been doing this for 15 years, so this is really cool," Veda said. "When you think of seventh grade at Laurel, you think of the dig."