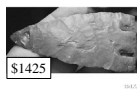
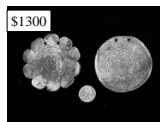
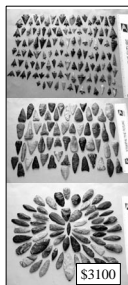
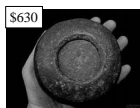
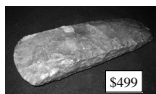


Featured Items

all items...

what are you looking for?



Introduction

The impact of the antiquities market on archaeological resources has always been a significant legal and ethical issue, and with the advent of online auction sites, the buying and selling of archaeological items is now just a keystroke away. We have developed an exercise for our introductory archaeology classes with the goal of helping students understand the scope of the antiquities market and its impact on the archaeological record. This exercise meets curricular goals recently specified by the SAA Task Force on Curriculum Reform, including ethics and values, stewardship, and real world problem solving.



Methodology of the Exercise

Students complete the following tasks:

- Read and summarize a few short articles featuring different perspectives on the antiquities market.
- Search eBay and other online auction web sites for archaeological materials.
- Evaluate the sellers' knowledge about antiquities laws and determine why they are interested in artifacts based on information that they provide either in their ads or in response to e-mails from students.
- Discuss the impact that artifact sales have on the archaeological record and provide potential solutions.



Print



Security



Shop



Stop

e Cannon (Hamilton College), Kris Bovy (U Washington)

## What Students Learned

### Sellers' interest in the artifacts and knowledge of the laws

Most online ads contain no associated contextual information.

The students recognized that sellers were interested in the artifacts only as [collectible objects](#) rather than as a source of information about the past.

Few sellers advertise that artifacts were obtained legally.

Most knowledgeable sellers were businesses rather than private individuals. They mention that their artifacts were collected on [private land](#), suggesting that they are aware that collecting from public land is illegal. Students realized, however, that the claims about artifact origin could not be substantiated.

### Impact on the record

Students argued that the online market negatively impacts the record.

Emphasizing artifacts as collectible objects rather than as part of a larger picture, the online market encourages people to collect artifacts without contextual information. Given the scale of the market, the impact is likely to be significant.



### Students' solutions to the problem

Boycott online auction sites that sell archaeological material

Although the online auction companies restrict the sale of certain items, they should be more responsible for policing what they promote. In a few instances, students located artifacts that were clearly from burials, and were appalled that the auction sites would allow these items to be sold in obvious violation both of antiquities laws and of the sites' own [policies](#). A boycott might encourage the sites to police themselves better.

Encourage fakes

Since sites such as Ebay cater to the average consumer, some students thought that increasing the number of [fakes](#) on the market would make these customers more wary about purchasing artifacts.

More laws, better enforcement

Stricter federal laws could be created, such as banning the sale of *any* artifacts. However, the inability to enforce these laws would remain a problem. Stricter laws may only encourage a [black market](#), similar to the illegal drug situation.

Public education

The most popular solution was [education](#) of the general public. Most said they had been unaware of the problems with the artifact market. Because this exercise raised their awareness about the issues involved, they would never buy artifacts.

003 19

## What The Instructors Learned

We also learned about students' perceptions and understanding regarding archaeology and the market.

### Confused fossils with artifacts

Even though the definition of 'artifact' was discussed several times in our classes, some students still considered items, such as bugs in amber, dinosaur eggs, shark's teeth, or mammoth bones, as archaeological material. They equated ['prehistoric'](#) with 'archaeological'.

### Confused ethnographic and archaeological material

Others chose items such as Navajo rugs or Pima Indian baskets. Again, the problem is similar to the one above: students associated 'archaeological' with anything ['native'](#).

### Fixated on fakes

Students were frequently as or more concerned that the items for sale might be fakes as they are with the legal or ethical issues. Even though sellers offered [certificates of authenticity](#), students remained very skeptical.

### Did not differentiate between legal versus ethical

In some instances, students ignored the larger ethical issues involved in [selling artifacts](#), and found the practice to be acceptable as long as the artifacts were legally obtained.

## Spotlights On

Quality Dinosaur Egg!

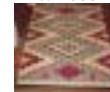


Bugs in Amber  
MUST SEE!

Spectacular  
Fossil Shark Tooth!



Premium Navajo Rug  
ca 1930



Real Nice, Old  
Pima Basket

Guaranteed  
Authentic!

## Conclusions

### Many students are not aware of the existence of the online market.

This exercise effectively introduces them to the legal and ethical issues involved in the sale of antiquities. Most will argue that the true [value of artifacts](#) lies in what they can tell us about the past, rather than in how much money they can bring.

### Students gain a better sense of competing interests in the record.

Most believe that the online antiquities market should be regulated more carefully and that potential buyers should be educated about the [effects of the antiquities market](#) on the archaeological record.

### We learned how to make this exercise more effective.

Since students often confuse paleontological and ethnographic materials with archaeological materials, we recognize that we need to do a better job in our introductory courses with these basic issues. Rather than simply giving definitions for terms like 'artifact', we can use this exercise as a hands-on way for students to think about whether certain things are ['archaeological'](#) or not.

In addition, since some students think that the sale of antiquities is ok as long as it is legal, we need to point out that current [antiquities laws](#) are inadequate in many respects, and emphasize that even the sale of ['legal' artifacts](#) can have devastating effects on the archaeological record.