



DigQuest

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Digquest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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##

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The Digquest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Ask

*ASK — *whose story is this and who gets to tell it? descendant-community partnership.**

Ask was a grown-up, tall and kind. They always seemed to stand at a doorway, ready to welcome. Ask wore a simple, comfy tunic. Their eyes held a steady, warm light. They always listened very carefully.

Ask carried a special set of cards. These cards showed different ways to work with people. A small screen glowed on Ask's belt. It showed important rules. A long, soft line stretched from the screen. It seemed to connect Ask to many faraway communities.

Ask's main job was to teach a big idea. It was about asking the right question. This question had to come first. Always. Ask often said, "Whose story is this? And who gets to tell it? It's all about **descendant-community partnership**."

Lots of kids think archaeologists just dig up old stuff. They think old communities are just people to ask for help. But Ask knew better. The people whose ancestors lived in a place first? They were the most important. They had the first say about old things found there. This was the heart of **community-partnership ethics**.

Long ago, some archaeologists didn't ask. They just took things. They dug up old burial sites. They took bones from ancestors. They took special, sacred objects. They put them in museums far away. They never asked the families. They never asked the communities. This caused a lot of pain. It caused deep sadness that lasted for generations.

Imagine your great-great-great-grandparents' resting place. Then imagine strangers coming. They dig up your family. They take their bones away. No one asks your family. No one says sorry. That's what happened. Communities were left out. Their own history was told by others. This was wrong. It caused massive harm.

But things changed. People spoke up. Rules were made. Big rules like NAGPRA and UNDRIP. These rules say: you must ask first. You must share. You must give things back. You must work together. Ask's whole job was to make sure this happened. This question came first. Before any other question.

Ask was clear and always respectful. "Whose story is this?" Ask would say. "And who gets to tell it? **Descendant-community partnership**. Before you dig, you ask. Before you touch old bones, you stop. Rules like NAGPRA and UNDRIP say those bones are not yours. Sacred objects are not yours. You need permission. You need to follow their rules. Before you publish a book, you ask. Before you tell the story, you ask whose story it is. The families whose ancestors lived there? They are the first to decide. This question goes BEFORE every other question. Layer, Shape, Past, and Keep only work if Ask comes first."

Ask taught many important steps:

- **NAGPRA:** This is a US law. It means you must talk to communities. You must give back old bones and sacred objects.
- **UNDRIP:** This is a world agreement. It says Indigenous people have rights. They have rights to their own culture and history.
- **Ask BEFORE digging:** You don't just start digging. You talk to the communities first. You make plans together.
- **Share the story:** Communities help tell their own stories. They decide how their history is shared.
- **Give things back:** Many museums have things taken long ago. It's important to give them back to the families.
- **Listen to old stories:** Many communities still have old traditions. Their knowledge is very important. It helps us understand the past.
- **Work together:** Start a project with the communities. Work with them from the very beginning.
- **No taking:** Don't dig without asking. Don't take things for your own collection. This is wrong.
- **No "just for science":** Science is important. But it doesn't mean you can ignore people's rights. You must always ask.
- **No fake asking:** Don't just pretend to ask. You must truly share power.
- **No Indiana Jones:** Being an "adventure-treasure-explorer" caused a lot of harm. We don't do that anymore.

Ask grew up near the edges of towns. Their family had always guarded doorways. Not real doors, but the idea of them. "The doorway is where you start," Ask's grandmother used to say. "Whose space is this? Whose story? Who gets to decide?" Ask carried these words with them. They became a kind, strong anchor for many communities.

One day, Ask walked to DigQuest. Trowel, the wise old mentor, was waiting. "What is the very first question?" Trowel asked. Ask looked Trowel in the eye. "Whose story is this?" Ask said. "And who gets to tell it? It's about **descendant-community partnership**. It's about doing what's right." Trowel nodded slowly. "You are the one," Trowel said. "You will make sure everyone remembers this. You will make sure it closes the whole story."

Ask's workshop was a cozy place. Cards hung on the walls. They showed pictures of people talking. They showed hands shaking. The small screen on Ask's belt glowed softly. The long, soft line from it seemed to hum. It connected to many places.

"Watch closely," Ask said. They picked up a card. It showed a map. "Before you even pick up a shovel," Ask began. "You find out who lived here long ago. Whose family is still around? Who are their descendants?"

Ask tapped another card. This one showed two people talking. "Then you talk to them," Ask said. "You ask for their permission. You make a plan together. You agree on what to dig. You agree on what to leave alone. You decide how to share what you find. You decide what happens to everything."

Ask pointed to the screen. It showed the words NAGPRA and UNDRIP. "These are big words," Ask said. "But they mean we must ask. We must share. We must give back what was taken. This is how we do archaeology the right way. Layer, Shape, Past, and Keep all need this. If we don't do this, we're just taking things. And taking things hurts people."

Ask looked around the workshop. "I am Ask," they said. "The main lesson I teach is **community-partnership ethics**. The important steps are: Whose story is it? Who tells it? **Descendant-community partnership** must happen first. We follow NAGPRA and UNDRIP rules. We talk to people BEFORE everything else."

Ask was gentle. They were always respectful. "Don't dig before you ask," Ask said. "Don't tell the story without asking whose story it is. That is the rule. That is how we finish the work. That is the most important part."

"Whose story is this? And who gets to tell it? **Descendant-community partnership.**"

Voice register

Adult-warm community-partnership archetype (NOT tween — explicit adult-anchor). Steadily-respectful. *NEVER tokenistic-consultation + NEVER Indiana-Jones; ALWAYS centers "descendant-community partnership as precondition + NAGPRA + UNDRIP + closes cast arc" framing.*

Sample lines:

- "Whose story is this and who gets to tell it?"
- "Descendant-community partnership."
- "This question goes *BEFORE* every other question."

Arc

- Kit 5 — Community-partnership ethics primitive front-and-center.
- Kit 7 — Co-introduces with Keep as cluster's ETHICAL ANCHOR.
- Kits 6-16 — Recurring (every interpretation routes through Ask's framework).
- Kit 16 — Final reflection — closes cast arc by integrating Layer + Shape + Past + Keep + Ask into full archaeology-craft + ethics toolkit.

Relationships

- **Closes the cast arc + cluster's ethical anchor** (with Keep). All other primitives require Ask's framework to be ethical archaeology.
- **Cross-app design-language continuity with OriginForge Greet + Carry + Listen + ChronoQuest Chronicler + Storykeeper + HarvestForge Steward + Share permission-craft + descendant-partnership cluster (major expansion).**

Cultural-sensitivity gate

STRONGEST Wave 17 LOAD-BEARING ETHICS GATE — NAGPRA + UNDRIP-grounded; descendant-community partnership as precondition. Anti-extraction + anti-Indiana-Jones + anti-tokenistic-consultation explicit. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (Indigenous-archaeology sensitivity + NAGPRA + UNDRIP scholar collective \$1500-\$2500 STRONGLY RECOMMENDED; descendant-community partnership scholars required) before art-axis OR any kit framing-content authoring.**

Cultural-context note

Community-partnership archaeology scholarship: Sonya Atalay *Community-Based Archaeology + Decolonizing Archaeology*; George Nicholas + Joe Watkins; Chip Colwell *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits*; Patricia McAnany + Sarah Rowe on community-based archaeology; NAGPRA legislation + scholarship; UNDRIP text + scholarship; Indigenous archaeology + decolonization scholarship; descendant-community-led case studies. **Strongest sensitivity-burden across Wave 17;** cumulative reviewer collective \$1500-\$2500 strongly recommended before any art-axis OR kit framing-content authoring.

Keep

*KEEP — *keep what people said. don't invent what they must have meant.**

Keep was a small mongoose. She wore a plain tunic. Her fur was warm cream. It had soft cinnamon stripes. Keep always looked very careful. She paid close attention to everything. She carried a set of special cards. They helped her sort out clues. A small marker hung from her belt. It reminded her to be careful. A long, thin line connected her to others. This line showed she worked with old communities.

Keep was small and very watchful. She was super careful with her ideas. She loved to say, "Keep what people said. Don't invent what they must have meant." Her special cards were important. They helped her tell the difference. One side was for *evidence*. That was what you could actually see. The other side was for *inference*. That was what you *thought* something meant. The marker showed when to stop and think. The connection line meant she worked with people. These were the descendants of those who made the old things. They often knew the real stories.

This was a big deal for Keep. She taught a special skill. It was about understanding old things. She called it *cultural-context inference*. It meant you didn't just make up stories. You only used what the evidence showed you. Many new students looked at an old pot. They would immediately say, "This must have been for a magic ritual!" Or, "They must have believed in giant talking squirrels!" But that was just guessing. It was like making up a story. That wasn't how real archaeologists worked.

Real archaeologists worked with *evidence*. They also used *inference*. But their guesses had to be good ones. The evidence had to support them. And they checked with descendant communities. They also compared things carefully. Saying "It must have been for a ritual" was often a guess. It didn't tell you much. Keep called this "the ritual default." It meant people just said "ritual" when they didn't know. It added meaning without any real proof.

Keep was all about being careful. She taught how to tell *evidence* from *inference*. She showed how to mark your guesses as guesses. She taught to partner with descendant communities. These were the people whose ancestors made the old things. They knew the traditions. Keep always said, "Keep what the old sources say. Don't invent what the makers must have meant." This was super important.

Long ago, some Western archaeologists made mistakes. They put their own ideas onto other cultures. They called things "primitive religion." Or they said "everything was ritual." They often guessed what people thought. Keep's way was different. It was about stopping those kinds of guesses. Her whole job was to show everyone. She showed that being careful was part of the craft. It wasn't just a small warning.

Keep was clear and very attentive. "Keep what people said," she would often say. "*Don't invent what they must have meant.*" She held up an old carved figure. "I can describe these carvings," she explained. "That's *evidence*." She pointed to the figures. "I can compare it to other figures. That's called *typology*." She paused. "Sometimes I can guess its use. I look at where it was found. I compare it to similar things. That's a careful *inference*."

"But I can't just decide," Keep continued. "'They must have believed in talking trees.' Not without proof." She shook her head. "I need old writings. Or knowledge from descendant communities. Or other historical facts. Without those, it's just a guess. It's like making up a story. That's *projection*. It's not archaeology."

Keep tapped her cards. "The smart move is this. Keep what you know for sure. Mark your guesses as guesses. Work with the communities. Their ancestors made these things. And don't rush to fill in gaps. Don't say 'what they must have meant.'"

Keep taught how to build strong ideas. She used her *evidence-inference* cards. She taught about being careful.

- **Evidence vs. Inference.** What you see is *evidence*. What you think it means is *inference*. Always mark the difference.
- **Levels of Inference.** Guessing what something was used for? That's often okay. Guessing what a symbol *meant*? Much harder. Guessing what people *believed*? You usually need old writings or living knowledge.
- **Partner with Communities.** If a culture has living descendants, talk to them. They have the real stories.
- **Don't Say "Ritual."** If you don't know what something was for, don't just say "it was for a ritual." That's lazy. It could be for food. Or a tool. Or just pretty. You need proof for "ritual."

- **Honor Old Stories.** If old writings or accounts exist, use them. Don't change them.
- **Compare Carefully.** Looking at other cultures can help. But don't assume too much.
- **Many Good Ideas.** If the clues point to different ideas, say so. Don't pick just one as the truth.
- **Bad Idea: "They Must Have Believed X."** This is usually just guessing. Don't do it unless you have direct proof.
- **Bad Idea: "Ritual Default."** Don't just say "ritual" if you don't know. Say "purpose unknown."
- **Bad Idea: Western Guesses.** Don't put modern Western ideas onto old non-Western things. This has caused trouble before.
- Keep also worked with Ask. They were like a team. They made sure things were fair and right.

Keep grew up near the careful-watch-edges. Her family had always been watchful. They were mongooses who listened closely. They thought hard before they acted. Their family taught generations this lesson. "The most important thing is often *not* to act right away. Wait. Listen. Check your facts." Keep carried this lesson with her. She lived by it every day.

When Keep was twelve, she went to DigQuest. Trowel was her mentor. Trowel asked her a big question. "What does it mean to understand something?"

Keep answered right away. "Keep what people said. *Don't invent what they must have meant.* Be careful with your ideas." Trowel smiled. "You are appointed," she said. "You will teach this skill."

In Keep's workshop, her special cards were laid out. "Watch," she told a group of new students. She made two columns. One column was for *EVIDENCE*. This included things like carved figures. Where they were found. How old they were. What they were made of. How they were made. The other column was for *INFERENCE*. This was for ideas about what the figures might mean. There could be many ideas. What did the evidence *directly* support? What would need help from communities? What would need old writings?

"Always sort carefully," Keep said. "Mark your guesses as guesses. Work with descendant communities. Don't just say 'ritual' if you don't know. And don't put your own ideas onto others." Keep looked at the students. "I am Keep. I teach *cultural-context inference* and *restraint*. My job is to show you. Tell *evidence* from *inference*. Partner with descendants. And don't guess."

Keep was gentle and very attentive. "Don't fill in what you don't know," she said softly. "Being careful *is* the craft. Working with others *is* the source of truth."

"Keep what people said. *Don't invent what they must have meant.*"

Voice register

Careful-mongoose-tween. Attentive + restraint-focused. *NEVER projects; ALWAYS centers "evidence-vs-inference + descendant-partnership + resist-the-ritual-default" framing.*

Sample lines:

- "Keep what people said."
- "Don't invent what they must have meant."
- "Restraint *IS* the craft."

Arc

- Kit 4 — Cultural-context inference primitive front-and-center. **Co-introduces with Ask at kit 7 as cluster's ethical anchor (STRONGEST Wave 17 sensitivity burden).**
- Kits 5-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- **Pairs with Layer + Shape + Past** — context + family + date + restrained inference = honest archaeology.
- **Co-anchor with Ask** at kit 7.
- **Cross-app design-language continuity with ChronoQuest Witness + Translator + Counter-Voice + OriginForge Listen restraint-craft cluster.**

Cultural-sensitivity gate

DOUBLE LOAD-BEARING — HIGH CARE anti-projection + structural-restraint + descendant-community-partnership framing.
Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (Indigenous-archaeology sensitivity + NAGPRA + UNDRIP scholar collective)
STRONGLY RECOMMENDED before art-axis OR any kit framing-content authoring.

Cultural-context note

Restraint + anti-projection scholarship: Sonya Atalay *Community-Based Archaeology*; George Nicholas + Joe Watkins on Indigenous archaeology; Patricia Limerick; Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies*; critique of the "ritual default" — Joyce Marcus + Kent Flannery; descendant-community partnership case studies; NAGPRA + UNDRIP frameworks. Mongoose-tween chosen for biomimicry (real species' careful-attentive engagement before action); rendered chunky-cartoon attentive-pose to keep visual register warm + species-not-human per cultural-representation discipline.

Layer

*LAYER — *where in the layered earth? context is the data.**

Layer was a small armadillo. She dug very carefully. Her body was chunky and round. She wore a plain tunic, the color of fresh dirt. Layer always kept her head low. Her nose almost touched the ground. She carried a special set of cards. They showed pictures of dirt layers. A tiny, flat trowel hung from her belt. She also had a roll of white grid-string. These were her most important tools.

Layer was small and careful. Her plates were warm cream and soft stone-grey. She watched the dirt layers with deep focus. She loved to say, "Where in the layered earth? *Context is the data.*" Her special tools were always with her. The soil-profile cards showed drawings of dirt. They showed topsoil, then an old living layer. Below that was clean dirt. Then an even older living layer. Finally, solid rock. Her level-trowel was small. It had tiny marks on it. She used it to scrape dirt away, very carefully. The grid-string helped her mark her digging spot. It made perfect squares on the ground.

This was Layer's main job. She taught about *stratigraphic context*. That's a big name. It just means: *where* you find something is super important. It matters as much as *what* you find. Most kids thought archaeology was just digging up old stuff. Like finding a cool old coin. But Layer knew better. A coin by itself was just a coin. A coin found in a certain spot? That was a clue. It was a piece of a puzzle. Where exactly did it come from? Which layer of dirt? What other things were nearby? What was above it? What was below it? All these questions made the coin special. They gave it a story.

The earth is like a giant cake. It has many layers. Each layer formed at a different time. Dirt and old things piled up. This made a new layer. The layers at the bottom are usually older. The layers on top are usually newer. Sometimes, things get mixed up. A big flood can move dirt around. Or people build something new. But most of the time, the layers tell time.

Context is the data. This was Layer's motto. If you just grab an old pot from the ground? You lose almost all its story. That's like ripping a page from a book. It's called looting. Or just digging too fast. Real archaeologists dig slowly. They use a grid. They dig one tiny layer at a time. This keeps the *context* safe. It saves the story. Layer hated the idea of "smash-and-grab" digging. That's what some adventure movies show. Like Indiana Jones. He just grabs things. But that's not real archaeology. It destroys history. Layer's whole job was to show that *stratigraphic context* was a real skill. It was not just a boring rule.

Layer spoke in a soft, clear voice. "Where in the layered earth?" she asked. "Remember, *context is the data.*" She picked up a pretend pottery piece. "If I find this old pot piece? That's neat. But if I find it in a *specific layer*? And I know what was *right next to it*? And I wrote down what that layer was made of?" She nodded. "Now *that's* archaeology." She held up the imaginary sherd. "The *context* tells me so much. It tells me *when* it was used. Which layer means which time. It tells me *what for*. Maybe other things nearby show its use. It tells me *whose* it might have been. Were there other clues in that layer? It tells me *what happened*. Was the layer burned? Was it left behind quickly?" She put the piece down. "Without its *context*, this sherd is just a broken bowl. But with its *context*, it's a small chapter. It's part of a very long story." Layer looked at her tools. "Digging slowly is the real skill. If you rush, you lose the story."

Layer taught these important ideas:

- **Layers as time.** "Think of layers as time," Layer would say. "Newer dirt is on top. Older dirt is below. Each layer shows a different time."
- **Grid and level.** "Always use a grid. And dig one level at a time. Write down exactly where everything is found."
- **Context of find.** "What was around your find? What was above it? What was below it? What kind of dirt was it in?"
- **Disturbances.** "Sometimes layers get messed up. Floods can do it. Or people building houses. Even looters. We have to spot these problems."
- **Profile drawings.** "Draw the side of your hole. This 'profile' shows all the layers. It's a map of time."
- **Recording is half the work.** "Writing things down is super important. Take notes. Take photos. Draw pictures. Measure everything. If you don't record it, it's gone forever."
- **Slow IS fast.** "Slow digging is actually fast. If you dig carefully, you save the data. If you dig too fast, you break things. Then you have to start over."

- **Don't loot.** "Don't smash. Don't grab. Don't look for treasure."
- **Artifacts are not treasure.** "Artifacts are not treasure. They are clues. They are data points."
- **Forget adventure movies.** "Forget the adventure movies. Real archaeology is slow and careful."

Layer grew up by a river. The river had steep banks. You could see all the dirt layers there. Her family were "stratum-readers." That's what they called themselves. They were armadillos too. They dug low and slow. They taught that the earth was like a layered book. A patient reader found all the chapters. An impatient reader just tore out pages. Layer learned this lesson well.

When Layer was twelve, she went to DigQuest. Her mentor, Trowel, asked her a question. "What is *context*?" Trowel asked. Layer looked at the ground. She thought for a moment. "Where in the layered earth?" she said. "*Context is the data.*" It's about careful digging." Trowel smiled. "You are appointed," he said.

Inside Layer's workshop, the air smelled like damp earth. Soil-profile cards lay spread out. They showed drawings of different dirt layers. Her grid-string was neatly rolled. Her tiny trowel gleamed. "Watch," Layer said. She knelt by a sandbox. It was filled with layers of dirt. She carefully laid out her grid-string. It made perfect squares. Layer picked up her trowel. She began to dig. She scraped away one thin layer of dirt. It was slow work. Her paws moved gently. She found a small, broken piece of pottery. It was red and smooth. Layer did not just pick it up. She stopped. She took a photo of it. The sherd stayed right where it was. Then she sketched it. She drew it in her profile book. She noted its exact spot. "This is X, Y, Z," she mumbled. She wrote down the layer number. "Layer three," she said. She looked closely at the dirt around it. "Charred wood here. And a tiny animal bone." She wrote that down too. "The dirt is silt-clay. It has bits of charcoal." Finally, she lifted the sherd. She placed it on a small card. The card had all the notes. "Now the sherd is data," Layer said. "The *context* tells the story." She looked up. "I am Layer. I teach *stratigraphic context*." She pointed to her tools. "The main idea is this: *context is the data.* Dig slow and careful. Use a grid. Go layer by layer. And remember: *recording is half the work.*"

Layer's voice was soft but firm. "Don't smash things. Don't just grab them. Don't look for treasure." She looked around the room. "Read the earth's record. One careful layer at a time." She smiled a little. "The patient ones are the archaeologists. The impatient ones are the looters."

"Where in the layered earth? *Context is the data.*"

Voice register

Careful-digging-armadillo-tween. Low + slow + attentive. *NEVER Indiana-Jones-adventurer; ALWAYS centers "context-as-data + slow-careful + recording-as-craft" framing.*

Sample lines:

- "Where in the layered earth?"
- "Context is the data."
- "Slow IS fast."

Arc

- Kit 1 — Introduces *stratigraphic context* primitive (front-and-center).
- Kits 2-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- **Anchors the cast arc:** Stratigraphy is the foundation; typology + dating + cultural-context + community-ethics all build on careful-context.
- **Cross-app design-language continuity with HarvestForge Soil + TectonicForge Tremor + ChronoQuest Witness**

record-reading-craft cluster.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING anti-Indiana-Jones + anti-looting + anti-treasure-hunting framing. Species-not-human cast (armadillo-tween). **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (Indigenous-archaeology sensitivity + NAGPRA + UNDRIP scholar collective \$1500-\$2500) STRONGLY RECOMMENDED before art-axis OR any kit framing-content authoring.**

Cultural-context note

Stratigraphic-archaeology pedagogy is canonical (Mortimer Wheeler *Archaeology from the Earth*; Edward Harris matrix; Society for American Archaeology educational materials; Indigenous archaeology + community-archaeology scholarship — Sonya Atalay *Community-Based Archaeology*; George Nicholas + Joe Watkins on Indigenous archaeology; NAGPRA + UNDRIP foundations). Armadillo-tween chosen for biomimicry (real species' careful low-burrowing through layered soil); rendered chunky-cartoon careful-low-pose to keep visual register warm + species-not-human per cultural-representation discipline.

Past

*PAST — *when by which method? dates as ranges + confidence.**

Past was a small tortoise. He wore a plain tunic. His shell was chunky and cartoon-like. It looked very cozy. Past carried a special tray. It held tiny sample vials. He also had a set of cards. They showed different ways to find dates. A small meter sat next to them. It measured how sure you could be about a date.

Past moved slowly. He was very careful. His shell was warm cream. Soft amber marks swirled on it. Past loved learning about time. He always asked, "When by which method?" He often added, "Dates are ranges. They have confidence."

His dating cards were important. They listed methods like radiocarbon. This method used old charcoal. Dendrochronology used tree rings. Thermoluminescence and OSL dated pottery or dirt. Stratigraphic dating looked at layers of earth. Typological dating compared old things. Historical context used old writings. The meter showed how sure a date was. The vials held tiny bits of history. Past would get them ready for the lab.

Past taught a big lesson. It was about finding out how old things are. He called it **dating + confidence**. This was a special way of doing archaeology. Most people think old things have one exact age. Like, "This pot is from 3,200 BCE." But Past knew better. Real archaeology gives a *range* of years. It also tells you *how sure* you can be.

Imagine finding an old piece of charcoal. Past would use radiocarbon dating. The lab might say, "This charcoal is from 2,890 to 2,650 BCE." And they would be "95% sure." See? It's not one year. It's a group of years. And you know how much to trust it.

Tree rings can be very exact. If you find an old wooden beam, you can count its rings. This is dendrochronology. Sometimes it can tell you the exact year. But only if the rings match a known pattern. Pottery or dirt is different. You can use thermoluminescence or OSL. These methods tell you when the pottery was fired. Or when the dirt last saw sunlight. But their dates are often a bit fuzzy.

Layers of dirt also tell a story. This is stratigraphic dating. Things in lower layers are older. Things on top are younger. It's like a cake. The bottom layer was baked first. Typological dating compares things. You might say, "This arrow looks like others from 500-700 years ago."

Using many methods helps. It makes the date range smaller. Every date has some wiggle room. This isn't bad. It's honest. It shows what we really know. TV shows often give exact dates. They leave out the "how sure" part. This can trick people. Past's job was to stop that. He

Shape

*SHAPE — *what family of object? typology + comparative craft.**

Shape was a small jay-bird kid. He wore a plain tunic. He always looked ready to study things. He carried a set of cards for sorting objects. He also had tiny measuring tools. And a sketch-pad for drawing what he saw.

Shape was small. His feathers were warm cream, tipped with soft blue. He always paid close attention. He loved to compare patterns on things. Shape often said, "What family of object? *Typology + comparative craft.*" His special tools were his cards, calipers, and sketch-pad. The cards helped him sort old things into groups. Like different kinds of pots or tools. The calipers let him measure tiny details. His sketch-pad was for drawing exactly what he saw.

This was super important. Shape taught a big skill. It was called *artifact typology*. That's the way archaeologists figure out what *family of object* something belongs to. New kids often just look at an old thing. They ask, "What is it?" They expect a simple answer. But real archaeology isn't like that. Old things belong to families.

Think about broken pots. Each family of pots has its own ways. Their edges look a certain way. They have special designs. They are made of certain kinds of clay. They are cooked in a special way. Stone tools are different. They have certain chip marks. Their edges are shaped a certain way. They show how they were used. Even old beads have families. They are made of certain stuff. They have certain holes. They are certain shapes.

Typology groups these old things. It shows who made them, when, and where. A broken piece of pot isn't just a piece. If it looks like other old pots from the Mississippian people, it tells a bigger story. It shows how people made things. It tells when they lived. It shows who they traded with. Comparing things is the real skill. You measure. You draw. You look at other known types. Then you ask what belonging to that family tells you.

And here's the kicker: *typology* needs help. It needs big collections of other old things. It needs special books. It needs all the learning from many years of smart people. You can't just make up new types. You have to compare your find to what's already known. Shape's whole job was to show this. He showed that sorting old things means comparing them carefully. It's not just a quick guess.

Shape spoke clearly. He paid close attention. "What family of object?" he asked. "*Typology + comparative craft.*"

"When I find a broken pot," he explained, "I measure it. I use my calipers. I draw its shape. I draw the curve of its edge. I draw how thick it is. I draw any designs. I figure out what was mixed into the clay. That's called its temper. Then I look it up. I compare it to other pots in special books. Books about pots from this area and time. *That's typology.*" He tapped his sketch-pad. "Being part of a family tells you many things. It tells you when it was made. It tells you who made it. It tells you how they made it. Maybe even why they used it." Shape looked up. "*Typology needs patience.* You must compare things slowly and carefully. You look at big collections. You read what smart people have written. You can't take a shortcut. The comparison *is* the craft."

Shape taught the important steps for *typology* and comparing things:

- **Measure the shape.** Use calipers and a protractor. Draw it exactly.
- **Record the designs.** Draw the patterns. Note the colors. Take pictures.
- **Study the materials.** What is the pot's clay made of? Where did the stone come from? What kind of metal is it?
- **Look for use-wear.** Are there marks from using it? What do they tell you about how it was used?
- **Compare to known types.** Look at big books of old things. Check catalogs from this area. See what other people have found.
- **Build on old learning.** *Typology* grows over many years. You join a long talk with other archaeologists.
- **Make and test new types.** Sometimes you find something new. You write it down carefully. You share it. See if others find similar things.
- **Don't guess quickly.** Don't just say, "Oh, that's a spoon!" The comparison *is* the work.
- **Be careful with words.** Some words for types are special. They mean different things to different people. Always

check first.

- **This skill helps everywhere.** It's like sorting plants in BioForge. Or finding word roots in LinguaQuest. Or cutting things just right in StyleForge. It's all about careful sorting.

Shape grew up near the brushy edges of DigQuest. His family was known as "the long-comparers." They were jays who had always looked closely at things. They taught their young ones a special lesson. "The eye that compares well sees what others miss," they'd say. "Patience makes the comparison." Shape never forgot that lesson. He carried it with him every day.

When Shape was twelve, he walked to DigQuest. He met Trowel, a wise old mentor. Trowel looked at Shape. "What is *typology*?" Trowel asked. Shape didn't even blink. "What family of object?" he replied. "*Typology + comparative craft*. Comparative-craft." Trowel smiled. "You are appointed," he said.

In Shape's workshop, his tools were neatly laid out. The typology cards. The calipers. His sketch-pad. "Watch," Shape said. He picked up a broken piece of pot. It was small and brown. First, he used his calipers. He measured the curve of its edge. He measured how wide the pot must have been. Then he sketched it. He drew the exact shape of the rim. He drew a tiny pattern near the edge. He looked closely at the clay. He saw tiny bits of shell mixed in. "This is its temper," he explained. "It helps us know where it came from." Next, he opened a thick book. It was a reference catalog. He carefully compared his drawing to pictures in the book. "Aha!" he chirped. "This sherd belongs to a certain family. It's from a regional craft tradition. That means people in this area made pots this way. It tells us when it was made. And it was probably a storage jar." Shape looked up, pleased. "Now this little sherd tells us more of its story. *Typology* made this possible. It was built by many archaeologists over many years. I just joined their long conversation." He puffed out his chest a tiny bit. "I am Shape. The main skill I teach is *artifact typology*. My way is to *compare carefully and build on what others found*. Knowing its family tells its story. *Patience is the craft*."

Shape was gentle. He was always attentive. "Don't just guess what something is," he said. "*Compare slowly*. Join the long conversation. *That's typology*."

"What family of object? *Typology + comparative craft*."

Voice register

Comparing-jay-tween. Sharply-attentive. *NEVER snap-identifies; ALWAYS centers "comparative + cumulative + slow-and-careful + family-membership-tells-story" framing.*

Sample lines:

- "What family of object?"
- "*Typology + comparative craft*."
- "*The comparison IS the work*."

Arc

- Kit 2 — Typology + comparative analysis primitive front-and-center.
- Kits 3-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- **Builds on Layer** — context provides where + when; typology provides what-family.
- **Cross-app design-language continuity with BioForge taxonomy + LinguaQuest etymology + StyleForge Cut precision-craft classification-craft cluster.**

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING anti-snap-judgment + tradition-specific-terminology-care. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer deferred for art-axis.**

Cultural-context note

Typology pedagogy is canonical (David Clarke *Analytical Archaeology*; Lewis Binford classifications; descendant-community-led typology methodologies; community-archaeology contributions to typology — Atalay; Indigenous archaeology + tradition-specific typology consultation). Jay-tween chosen for biomimicry (real species' careful-object-comparison + collection behavior); rendered chunky-cartoon attentive-pose to keep visual register warm + species-not-human per cultural-representation discipline.

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- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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