NHMU: Classified Information

Summary
In this activity students learn to classify objects based on their attributes.

Main Core Tie
Science - 4th Grade
Standard 5 Objective 3

Time Frame
1 class periods of 30 minutes each

Group Size
Small Groups

Materials
A "Doohickey Kit" for each group of students
(Kits should contain familiar objects such as rocks, string, paper clips, cloth, bottle caps, etc.
Each kit must be identical).

Background for Teachers
A basic element of thinking is classification. We place objects and situations into conceptual
categories in order to make sense of the world. By doing this we eliminate the need to respond to
every object and situation as a completely new experience.
We classify objects by choosing certain attributes to concentrate on while ignoring others. We cannot
take in all attributes at once so we select just a few as being relevant to the task at hand.
Classification of data is an important part of all scientific study, including archaeology.

Instructional Procedures
Divide students into groups of 4 or 5 and give each group a "Doohickey Kit". Have each group
organize the objects into categories using one or more classification schemes.
When everyone is finished ask each group to explain its scheme. Which attributes did they use
to place objects in certain categories. (shape, color, function, type of material, etc.). Compare
and contrast how groups chose to classify objects.
Explore with students that one classification system is not better than another. The utility of each
classification system depends on what the classifier wants to know. When archaeologists bring
artifacts back to the laboratory, they decide what they want to know and use classification
accordingly.
Devise some simple questions that might be answered by classifying the objects in the
"Doohickey Kit". For example: What colors are present? How many shapes are there (name
them)? How might these objects be used? The students will need to regroup the objects based
on the questions asked.

Bibliography
Intrigue of the Past Activity Guide
This lesson plan was provided by the Utah Museum of Natural History.