

## Buried Treasure, page 1

Last May a modern archaeologist, known in some circles as a “garbologist,” came across a midden in an extremely remote location. A midden is a collection of household waste. Most people these days would use the term “dump” to describe a midden. This midden is located 20 yards from an abandoned two-story house.

The location has not been publicly revealed for fear that other interested parties would loot or otherwise destroy the archeological site. Thanks to the geography of this remote location, which is quite dry and cold, the materials are mostly intact. According to newspapers found in the midden, the trash was produced and buried during a 6-month period in 1999.

Dr. Julia Johnston is the archaeologist in charge of cataloguing the discarded items and inferring information about the people who produced them. Johnston has deduced from the contents of the garbage that three or four individuals at most contributed to the midden. In all, an estimated 3400 pounds of garbage were found in the midden.

Dr. Johnston recently released a summary of the items found at the site. Here is the breakdown of the trash items she found:

- 34% paper, a mix of newspapers, glossy magazines, and office paper (more than half the paper appears to have been used for packaging materials such as boxes)
- 13% organic materials from the landscape, including dried leaves and grass clippings
- 12% food, including many items still inside plastic bags and other packaging
- 12% plastic, including food containers and containers that once held liquid cleaning substances
- 8% metal, including aluminum and tin cans
- 7% textiles, rubber, and leather, including discarded clothing, a used tire, and a small rug
- 6% wood (2 broken chairs)
- 5% glass, including beverage and food containers, as well as fragments of other glass items
- 2% personal items, including diapers, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals/medicines
- 1% electronics (a cell phone and a TV remote)



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Now Johnston and her team are trying to learn more about the people who inhabited this remote location. They are looking to the midden contents for clues. Questions they hope to answer include the following:

- Why were the items discarded?
- Did these people have ample resources to survive, or did they struggle?
- What appeared to be important to them?
- How might they have spent their time?
- Did they have a relatively high or low standard of living compared to people in other places around the world?

### Instructions

Answer the following questions to begin your own analysis of the midden and the people who created it.

1. Divide the contents into the following two categories:

Luxuries	Necessities

2. Are the contents of the midden mostly essential items, or are they mostly luxuries?

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3. Why do you think these items were discarded in the midden instead of being reused inside the house?

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4. Based on the contents of the midden, how might you characterize the lifestyle of the people who created it?

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5. What other conclusions could be drawn about these people? (For example: What was important to them, or how did they spend their time?)

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6. How does the waste from the midden compare to the waste produced by your own household?

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