**How Archaeologists Study the Past**

Archaeology and Anthropology

Historians rely mostly on written records to create their knowledge of the past. However, no written records exist for the prehistory of humankind. In fact, **prehistory** means the time before writing was developed.

**Archaeology** is the study of past societies through the analysis of what people left behind. Archaeologists dig up and examine **artifacts** – objects made by humans. Artifacts may be tools, weapons, art, and even buildings made by early humans.

**Anthropology** is the study of human life and culture. Culture includes what people wear, how they organize their society, and what they value. Anthropologists use artifacts and human fossils to create a picture of people’s everyday lives. **Fossils** are rocklike remains of biological organisms – a leaf imprint or a skeleton.

Dating Artifacts and Fossils

**Radiocarbon Dating:** All living things absorb a small amount of radiocarbon, or C-14. By measuring the amount left in an object, a scientist can figure out its age. This method is accurate for objects no more than about 50,000 years old.

**Thermoluminescence:** For objects dating back 200,000 years ago, scientists can make relatively precise measurements with this method. This measures the light given off by electrons trapped in the soil surrounding the fossils and artifacts.

