La Brea Tar Pits Project Kit

Congratulations! You're going to the La Brea Tar Pits! Use these project ideas to enrich your educational experience. Read through them before you go to make sure you understand the terms and concepts, and to help you determine if you want to expand upon any of them. You'll find fun facts and printable worksheets at the end of this packet.

a- elementary level activity b- middle school level activity c- high school level activity

Language Arts

The La Brea Tar Pits inspire the imagination. So much happened in this area throughout time. Imagine you are an animal or a person encountering the pits for the first time. Do they look as dangerous as they are? Do you see animals stuck in the pits? Maybe you've heard about these notorious pits from a friend, or lost a friend or family member in them before. Use your imagination and your surroundings to do some creative writing.

a. Draw a storybook or write a short story with illustrations inspired by the pits.
b. Write a short story inspired by your visit, including a main character and the main elements of a story (setting, plot, conflict, and resolution).
c. Choose between writing a fictional first-person narrative or a screenplay inspired by your visit.

Materials required: Notebook, pen/pencil
Submission: A copy of your writings/drawing, and any pictures/videos

Teaching or learning notes:

Applied Math

Paleontologists use math every day. Measuring and cataloging specimen needs to be done with precision. Explore the museum for clues to what kind of math is needed to study the area and its fossils.

a. Go on a shape hunt. Draw and label the shapes you find. Also, draw a representation of at least two patterns you find.
b. Identify at least one fossil which is described using math. Record the measurements listed and any other numbers in the description. Explain how the scientists came up with those numbers and why they are important.
c. Math is everywhere. Imagine you are one of the people working in the lab. Describe your project and what you would need to know and do to complete it. Choose at least one application of math that you see, estimate measurements, and use calculations to show how the scientist does her job.

Materials required: Notebook, pen/pencil, calculator or smartphone (optional)
Submission: Your calculations, estimations, and conclusions, and any pictures/videos

Teaching or learning notes:

Science

Paleontology is the study of ancient life. Learning about life which has come before is important to the way our modern world works. From better understanding modern animals to helping find crude oil, paleontologists have a lot to do. Explore the world of paleontology on your trip.

a. Draw and/or write about one aspect of paleontology which interests you.
b. Explore deeper into one of the many jobs a paleontologist can perform. What do they need to know? What are they trying to learn? How can their work help us today?
c. Imagine you are curator of the La Brea Tar Pits Museum. You oversee all of the work done in the museum. What things would you need to know to do your job? What tasks would you need to complete in a day, and what tasks would you delegate and to whom? Would it be important for the curator to also be a paleontologist? Why or why not?

Materials required: Notebook, pen/pencil
Submission: A copy of your drawings, diagrams, or designs, and any pictures/videos

Teaching or learning notes:

Social Studies

La Brea has a rich history. Visit www.tarpits.org/la-brea-tar-pits/timeline and learn more about the area's history. What did it look like during the Ice Age? What kinds of animals were there? What is a tar pit? How did they form? What is their importance to the study of the ancient life in the area?

a. Write or draw about the area at one distinct time in the past. Make sure to include the date you chose and why.
b. Choose one period of time which was particularly important to the history of the area. Describe its nuances and why it is so important. Be sure to include dates and any major events.
c. Create a timeline for the area based on what you've learned. Include descriptions for major time periods and events. Include a short essay on the significance of the pits to our modern day.

Materials required: Notebook, pen/pencil, smartphone (optional)
Submission: A copy of your writings/drawings, and any pictures/videos

Teaching or learning notes:

Fun Facts

- Remains of the Dire Wolf are the oldest fossils found to date and have been tested and are expected to be nearly 44,000 years old.

- The most common fossils found in the La Brea Tar Pits are the remains of the Dire Wolf, Saber Tooth Cat and Coyotes.

- Nearly 2,000 fossils and remains of saber tooth cats have been excavated since 1913.

- The digging and excavating still continues in the La Brea Tar Pits. In 2006, a construction crew found new fossil deposits while constructing a new underground parking lot. Construction was immediately halted and the area was cordoned off and Project 23 was developed.

- Over 1 million fossils can be seen at the Page Museum.

- Some of the plant species found in these fossil deposits now only live along the summer fog belt from San Luis Obispo to Oregon or on the Channel Islands. Other species occur today in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains between 4,000 and 6,000 feet elevation. This suggests that the late Pleistocene climate at Rancho La Brea was cooler and wetter than it is today.

- The brown color of the bones results from staining by the asphalt in which the bones were preserved.

- The land was capable of sustaining vegetation, and plants and even trees took root here, enticing animals and insects to venture out over the pits. This is what led to many prehistoric creatures, large and small, becoming trapped in the sticky lakes.

La Brea Tar Pits

1. Draw a picture of your favorite part of your trip.

2. What is one thing you learned about the "tar" in the pits?

3. What is one thing you learned about prehistoric animals?

4. Describe or draw a prehistoric animal.

5. Describe or draw your favorite specimen found in the pits.

6. What is one thing you learned about mammoths?

BONUS:

The Tar Pits have many little outcroppings all over the area. Can you find one in the parking lot? What about in the lawn? Explain the affect the unpredictability of the pits might have on surrounding buildings.