**UNIT 39 Cultural Trends. Archaeology in Fiction and Films**

**WARM-UP EXERCISE.** *Read the following quotes and discuss one or more of them in class. You can keep notes of your ideas before and after the discussion*.

[*Jean M. Auel*](https://quotlr.com/author/jean-m-auel) (Writer: Clan of the Cave Bear):

* Science Fiction is not just about the future of spaceships travelling to other planets, it is fiction based on science and I am using science as my basis for my fiction, but it's the science of prehistory - palaeontology and archaeology - rather than astronomy or physics.

[*Thomas Pickering*](https://quotlr.com/author/thomas-pickering) (American politician and writer):

* In archaeology you uncover the unknown. In diplomacy you cover the known.

[*Paul Virilio*](https://quotlr.com/author/paul-virilio) (*French* [*cultural theorist*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_theory)*,* [*architect*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architect) *and* [*aesthetic*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetic) *philosopher)*:

* The field of vision is comparable, for me, to the terrain of an archaeological dig. To see is to be on guard, to wait for what emerges from the background, without any name, without any particular interest: what was silent will speak, what is closed will open and will take on a voice.

[*Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton*](https://quotlr.com/author/edward-bulwer-lytton-1st-baron-lytton) (novelist, playwright, politician):

* Archaeology is not only the hand maid of history, it is also the conservator of art.

**NOTES.**

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**NAVIGATION. KEY TERMS.** *Study the following terms prior to reading the text*.

**fiction**: (literature) narrative works in prose form with a plot, events and characters that are totally or in part based on imagination/ something untrue

**fictive**/ **fictional**: relating to fiction or the writing of fiction, imaginary

**narrative**: (adj. & n.) in the form of narration - story, tale, yarn, an account of events

**narration**: relation

**narrator**: a character who tells a story

**disjuncture**: disjunction, separating, disconnecting

**illustrate**: use pictures in a book, journal, et al; show, explain

**illustration**: the act of illustrating, i.e., using pictures in a book et al

**plot**: events in a novel, story or film that are interrelated; storyline

**round characters:** in fiction, we have ‘flat’ characters and ‘round’ characters. The latter evolve and change by the end of the story

**decontextualize**: remove or consider something (a sentence, text, work of art, situation, et al) out of (its) context

**decontextualization**: removing or considering something out of context

**trend**: evolution, development, change

**READING Cultural Trends. Archaeology in Fiction and Films**

Archaeology is not only a discipline of purely scientific interest. One might say it is Art in its own right, but also, it is Art in that it has been widely used in literature and filmmaking as well as in sculpture, painting and photography, among other arts. Viewed as art that keeps an eye on cultural trends or that crosses ‘pre-set’ cultural boundaries, archaeology can be a source of inspiration, new perspectives and worldviews, whereby people can see a past world in new dimensions.

Some fiction writers, such as Agatha Christie, John Preston, David Gibbins, and the authors of the *Indiana Jones* adventures as, for example, Campbell Black, James Kahn and Rob MacGregor, have used archaeological sites as settings to their stories, and their main characters are involved in complex mystery cases.

Detective fiction author Agatha Christie, married to archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan, went on lots of trips in the Middle East, providing her with inspiration to write some of her best-selling books, which were consequently made into films for the big screen and for TV series. The story in *Murder in Mesopotamia*, for instance, is set on an excavation site, whereas the settings in *Appointment with Death*, are Jerusalem (in British-ruled Mandatory Palestine) and Petra in Jordan. In *Death Comes as the End*, the setting is ancient Thebes, Egypt, in 2000 BC.

One of the most beloved characters among readers and film-viewers of adventure stories in literature is Dr. Henry Walton "Indiana" Jones, Jr., distinguished professor of archaeology and daring adventurer. He has to unearth ancient treasures, but also solve mysteries and battle against enemies who wish to possess what he finds. Allegedly, the fictitious character is loosely based on ‘the life of U.S. paleontologist and explorer [Roy Chapman Andrews](https://roychapmanandrewssociety.org/roy-chapman-andrews/)’. Among the favourite *Indiana Jones* adventure stories are *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *Indiana Jones and the Secret of the Sphinx,* *Indiana Jones and the Peril at Delphi*.

Lara Croft is another fictional character, ‘presented as a highly intelligent and athletic British [archaeologist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeologist) who ventures into ancient tombs and hazardous ruins around the world.’ She is the main [protagonist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protagonist) in the films: *Lara Croft:* [*Tomb Raider*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_Raider)(films 1 and 2)and *The Cradle of Life and Tomb Raider* (film 3).

There are quite a few works of fiction set in archaeological places. Stories or films with a well-threaded plot and round characters that evolve often create suspense, captivating one’s interest and holding one’s attention to the last minute. A good story, which combines archaeology with the pleasure of reading, makes one wonder if it might be a good idea to write articles on archaeological excavations in a more literary fashion. Then, archaeology might appear even more inviting to the eye of the scientist. As Allison Mickel argues in her book *Archaeologists as Authors and the Stories of Sites: Defending the Use of Fiction in Archaeological Writing*, ‘writing fictional narratives makes archaeological research more accessible, more interesting, and even better science.’ Her own fictive account of the 2010 excavation season at Bir Madhkur, a Roman site along the ancient Spice Route between Petra and Gaza, serves as a convincing example that shows how fictional narrative can effectively convey ‘the complexity and excitement of the archaeological research process’.

**TASKS.**

**Task 1.** *Answer the following questions in your own words*.

1. In what different ways does archaeology interest people?
2. Could you name the titles of any fictitious works and/or films, whose plots involve archaeology in a way - apart from those mentioned already?
3. Do you think that literature or other arts, such as photography, filmmaking, or watching a music concert in an archaeological site, can enhance one’s interest in archaeology?

**Task 2.** *Define the following words***.**

1. **discipline**:
2. **scientific**:
3. **consequently**:
4. **plot**:
5. **round character**:
6. **flat character**:
7. **event**:
8. **novel**:
9. **peril**:
10. **Ten Commandments**:



# Picture: *Harrison Ford and Chandran Rutnam on the set of Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Sri Lanka, 1983*.

# (Author: Chandran Rutnam. [https://creativecommons.org/licenses/ by-sa/3.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/%20by-sa/3.0/)).

**Task 3.** *Team Work or Individual Work*.

1. Find and watch a film based on a work of literature that is related to the field of archaeology in some way.
2. Write a summary of the film and then, read it in class. In your summary, include: the main characters and events of the story; the time and place of events; the turning point of the story; the end.

**Task 4.** *Writing*.

Write a paragraph on an adventure you would like to go on. You can use any of the

following words:

**discipline; interest; provide; inspiration; present; protagonist; daring;**

**adventurer; consequently; screen; professor; archaeological; excavations**

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**Task 5.** *Food for thought*.

Read the following questions. Make a choice you are interested in and discuss it with your fellow students and instructor.

1. Adventure stories, such as *Indiana Jones*, seem to have played their part in getting some people interested in the academic discipline of archaeology.
   * Do you think that films/fiction can actually influence one’s *decisions* in choosing their studies or careers?
2. Although plot and characters in literature are fictitious, some elements may be based on facts, which make a narrative/a film more realistic, i.e., true to life.
   * To what extent do you think realism makes a story more interesting?

