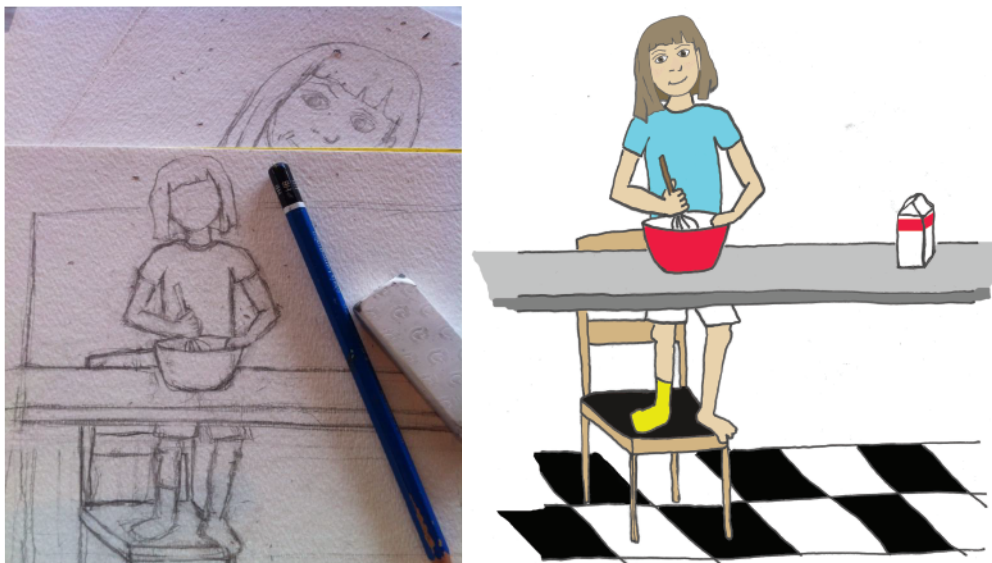


**Final report on the SEAC Public Outreach Grant** by Sarah Nohe  
"The Misadventures of Sandy Trowels" book and programming

*Being awarded the SEAC Public Outreach grant has been such a great experience. Before I report on the results of my project, I would like to simply express my sincere gratitude to SEAC's public outreach grant committee and everyone who helped make my proposal into a reality. Being awarded this grant has directly bolstered my ability to effectively engage a new audience in the study, appreciation, and stewardship of Florida's cultural heritage.*

As a Public Archaeologist, my main focus is on public outreach and education. While working at the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) over the past few years, I noticed there was a lack of children's books involving history or archaeology. And, in a world where any archaeology heroes are chasing money or fame, I felt a better role model was long overdue. I imagined a compelling fictional character that could demonstrate the relevance of Archaeology to a young audience through her own day-to-day experiences. With the support of the SEAC outreach committee, 'Sandy Trowels', who had previously lived solely in my imagination, quickly became the central character to a story.

FPAN's graduate student assistant Rose Gualtieri, shared my desire to inspire young readers to explore their local history and together we started to create a character and map out the story. By refusing to believe an educational read meant it had to be dry, the characters and story idea began to take shape. To be honest, in-depth character development for a children's book seemed extraneous and almost silly. However, nailing down those details and identifying Sandy Trowels as an extremely curious, independent, kind of clumsy, question-asking adventurer, helped to make her more relatable and, consequently, helped us to write a more authentic 'misadventure'.



We illustrated Sandy, her dog and an assortment of other characters and digitally-colored the drawings. It was, all in all, a pretty grueling journey, with many rewrites and a handful of head-to-desk moments, but we loved every minute of it.



We had three main objectives in writing the book and I can confidently say we have achieved them all. The first objective was to make it cool to be interested in local history and to encourage readers to visit historic places. I've happened upon enough mummified chickens in classroom visits to make this a priority. And while I applaud teaching about ancient Egypt (though maybe not through that particular method) and, indeed, about historic cultures around the world, I think local history deserves the spotlight as well.

To accomplish this, we focused the plot of the story on a known local site and real artifact. In the book, Sandy is walking her dog, Buckets, along the New River in Fort Lauderdale and they come upon a piece of historic glass labeled 'wizard oil.' The glass shard described in the book is an actual artifact that was found during recent excavations of a historic trading post at what is now the Stranahan House Museum. The story inspires readers to go explore the history of the area around them. This is important because people of all ages take pride in having that history in their own backyard. Further, you don't have to be an adult to have a stake in the process of preserving that local cultural heritage. At the very minimum, early public engagement with the past fosters an appreciation that can last until adulthood.

The second main objective was to teach preservation. In most cases, preservation means to leave something alone or contact a professional and is, in fact, a very difficult lesson to teach both young and old. Upon finding the 'wizard oil' bottle, Sandy lets her imagination consider all the possible uses for this product, but dutifully records the artifact and seeks out an Archaeologist. In her subsequent discussion with the expert, she recognizes how a single artifact (even one that essentially looks like trash) can inform significant historic data and add to the understanding of the city she lives in. Through Sandy's quest for knowledge, readers learn archaeological concepts, the difference between observation and inference, and the importance of careful recording. Hands-on activities at the end of the story evaluate what they learned along with the character.

Our final objective was to reinforce positive local partnerships. The creative partnership between FPAN and public libraries provided an improved capacity to achieve our education and outreach goals and provide even greater benefits to the public. The funds from the SEAC Public Outreach Grant allowed us to transform the final story, "The Misadventures of Sandy Trowels: The Case of the Wizard Oil," into 100 hard cover full-color books. We distributed these at no cost to south Florida libraries. As an in-kind contribution, the FPAN staff visited libraries throughout our region, which includes Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade, and Monroe. Going along with the library theme Dig Into Reading, we read the book to groups of children and provided associated hands-on programming. The kids at each library were so engaged with the book and eager to communicate what they learned by participating in the activities.

At the end of the experience, we can say that we fulfilled all of our main objectives and much more.





## Evaluation

The short-term evaluation of the project was implemented through the hands-on activities children completed during our Dig into Reading programming. Activities such as mapping a site tested their understanding of definitions and reinforced simple archaeological concepts. We continue to evaluate the book's impact using social media where Sandy's popularity continues to grow. Long-term success of the project is more difficult to measure, but we hope to inspire children and adults alike to appreciate and protect the history around them.

On an unexpected note, we have been approached by a number of Sandy Trowel's adult fans. And, after presenting at this year's Annual SEAC conference, we were told that "The Misadventures of Sandy Trowels: The Case of the Wizard Oil" will be required reading in one professor's Public Archeology course. These experiences have reiterated the fact that an unfilled niche exists for fun and educational books on history and archeology.

The book is available for purchase at [www.lulu.com/spotlight/SandyTrowels](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/SandyTrowels), with proceeds benefitting archaeology education and outreach in Florida. I also encourage everyone to find us at [facebook.com/SandyTrowels](https://facebook.com/SandyTrowels)

