

MYSTERY OBJECTS



Objective

Students will use a series of questions to look carefully at objects and then determine the significance of those objects based on their observations. They will create well-crafted hypotheses based on careful examination and peer work.

Standards

Reading 4.A.2.a (grades 3 – 5)

Social Studies 6.F.2.a, 6.G.2.c (grades 3 – 5)

Grade level

3 - 5

Length of lesson

45 – 60 minutes

Materials from trunk

Object analysis worksheet

Mystery objects in the trunk

- **Bo'suns/Boatsawins** Call
- Tooth Key
- Whirlygig
- Steel Striker
- Flash Guard
- Powder Horn
- Tobacco Twists
- Jaw Harp
- Soldier's Housewife
- Horn Spoon
- Small Tea Tile
- Broadside
- Maple Bones (instrument)
- Battle Rattle

"Catalog Card" for each object

Materials from classroom

- Blank index cards
- Writing material

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• *Overview*

This lesson requires students to use critical thinking and analysis skills, as an **archeologist** might, in order to gather information about objects and the past. Students use questions to guide examination and contemplation of ‘mystery objects’ and gain an understanding of how **primary sources** have information and also that trying to discover that information can be challenging. This activity introduces items in the trunk as well as many extensions.

Teacher Background

Museum **curators**, **historians** and archaeologists use careful examination, critical thinking, feedback from peers and analysis to determine the meaning of and **context** for museum objects. Museum objects and other primary source material can include everything from printed material to art, photographs and media recordings. The “mystery” objects presented here all relate to the War of 1812 or everyday life before, during and after the war. The objects themselves contain clues about how and why they were made, how they were used, and by whom they were used. Accompanying catalog cards provide background information, phonetic spelling and historical context.

Procedure

1. Begin with a discussion of how historians and archaeologists develop theories about what has happened in the past. They use what are available — primary and **secondary sources** — and close examination of **artifacts** (sometimes just broken pieces!) and objects for clues about the past. In museums, curatorial staffs (academics, historians, archaeologists or **preservation specialists**) engage in this kind of analysis.
2. Assign pairs (or small groups of students) one object to work with or let them look at all the objects and then choose one to examine more closely. Provide each group of students with an analysis worksheet to help guide their examination.
3. In small groups, students examine their object and develop information to share with the rest of the class. They use the analysis worksheet to record evidence they see in the object itself, and may reference contextual historical knowledge. After object examination, students write a “catalog card” that explains the significance of their object and summarizes the evidence they found in the examination process.
4. Students share with whole class – either reading the catalog card or presenting the object in a less formal way. Students should also note any questions they still have and additional information they would like to discover.
5. Pass out the official catalog cards for comparison with student-generated cards. These cards have detailed information about each artifact. What is different? What is the same? Ask students to place their objects with the two cards on their desks/tables and have everyone walk around and look at the objects as a group.
6. As a wrap-up activity, imagine that the mystery objects were found together, for example, in an old trunk in an attic somewhere. Who might have used them (e.g. a **militiaman**)? What do these artifacts say as a group? What story can they tell about life during the time of the War of 1812?

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Extensions

- Before sharing mystery objects as a class, ask students to trade their objects with each other and try a second stab at the activity. Did students come up with very different analyses from each other?
- Use catalog cards as “museum” labels for a classroom exhibition of these mystery objects. Consider posting the official JPPM catalog cards with student writing about the examination process.
- Students bring in their own objects from home and trade with a partner. Each student uses the questions with their partner’s object. Then students present each other’s objects. Did students “get” the right information from this simple questioning strategy? Were they very wrong about their hypothesis?

Modifications

- Before splitting students into pairs, model this technique as a whole class with one object.

Related Resources

West, Jean

1998 “Artifact Worksheet,” in *Archaeology of Early Colonial Life: Teaching with Primary Resources, Volume 13*. Peterborough, New Hampshire: Cobblestone Publishing Company.

Link to online mp3s of Boatswain/Bo’ sun’s calls

<http://www.navyband.navy.mil/Anthems/boatswain.htm>

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Object Analysis Worksheet

Historians, curators and archaeologists study objects and primary sources to learn about life long ago. Use the following questions to guide your analysis of your “mystery object.”

Object # _____

1. Physical Qualities

Describe the materials from which the artifact was made (check as many as apply):

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bone | <input type="checkbox"/> pottery | <input type="checkbox"/> metal | <input type="checkbox"/> wood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stone | <input type="checkbox"/> leather | <input type="checkbox"/> cardboard | <input type="checkbox"/> fabric |
| <input type="checkbox"/> plastic | <input type="checkbox"/> other (_____) | | |

2. Special Qualities

Describe the artifact (check as many as apply):

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> shaped | <input type="checkbox"/> sharpened | <input type="checkbox"/> colorful | <input type="checkbox"/> carved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> textured | <input type="checkbox"/> unusual size/weight | <input type="checkbox"/> moveable parts | <input type="checkbox"/> handles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anything stamped, printed on it | <input type="checkbox"/> other (describe below) | | |
-

3. Uses

a. What might have been its use? (check all that apply):

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> sitting | <input type="checkbox"/> sleeping | <input type="checkbox"/> storing objects inside | <input type="checkbox"/> cooking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> eating/drinking | <input type="checkbox"/> keeping clean | <input type="checkbox"/> hunting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fighting | <input type="checkbox"/> building | <input type="checkbox"/> making crafts | <input type="checkbox"/> making tools |
| <input type="checkbox"/> making clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> farming | <input type="checkbox"/> fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> animal care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communicating | <input type="checkbox"/> rituals/religion | <input type="checkbox"/> medical/dental use | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (describe) _____ | | | |
-

need more information to decide

b. Where might the artifact have been used? _____

c. When might the artifact have been used? _____

4. What the artifact tells us about people

a. What problem does this artifact solve (if any)? _____

b. What does the artifact tell you about the culture's values and aesthetics? _____

c. What do you think this artifact is? _____

d. What would be a modern equivalent to the artifact? _____