

ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

Grade Level: 3 to 5

IN THIS LESSON

Artifacts are objects made and used by people that can inform students about what life was like in the past. In this lesson, students will explore and analyze the items in an artifact kit, an important first step in developing historical empathy. The interpretation of these artifacts encourages students to construct their own meaning and ideas about the history that surrounds us.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop habits of historical inquiry by analyzing visual evidence
- To learn how to interpret visual information and improve visual literacy
- To develop language skills and thought processes while working with objects
- To encourage creativity

ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

SUGGESTED ARTIFACTS

EARLY CHICAGO/AMERICA KIT

Note: Replicas of these objects are commonly available.

Voyageur's hat

Lady's country cap

Bilbo catcher

Cloth doll

Biscuit tin

Flint

Maple syrup jug

Ice cream scoop

1933 CENTURY OF PROGRESS EXHIBITION KIT

Chicago's 1933–34 World's Fair in Vintage Postcards by Samantha Gleisten (features postcards of Century of Progress attractions such as the Sky Ride and Hall of Science; available for sale at the Chicago History Museum store or at <http://www.chicagotogo.org/chic19worfai.html>)

Century of Progress souvenirs, such as a spoon, tin bank, or button

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Artifact Analysis worksheets

(<http://www.greatchicagostories.com/classroom/artifact.php>)

Pencils

Magnifying glasses

Index cards

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ACTIVITY

1. Begin by explaining to students that they will use artifacts to study the history of Chicago. For example, their backpacks might one day be artifacts that will tell people how kids carried their stuff in 2008.
2. Present the artifact kit to students. You might want to use some kind of fun container such as an old trunk or suitcase.
3. Let students pick the artifact they find most interesting.
4. Model the process of “reading” the artifact with students. First describe the physical qualities of the object. What is it made of? Who made the object and why? Are objects like this still used today? If so, how have they changed or stayed the same? Lead students in the practice of using good descriptive adjectives.
5. Distribute magnifying glasses and artifact analysis worksheets for each student to complete. You can use Chicago History Museum worksheets (under the “Additional Materials” list) or create your own.
6. When students have completed the worksheets, have them share their findings with the class and make a prediction about the time period the artifact represents. If students are on the right track, have them continue on to step 7. If not, provide hints or clues so students can properly identify their objects before continuing.
7. Have students create a museum label for their object. The label should have a title, date, and the object’s purpose and/or the historical event it is associated with. You might want to provide extra time or have students complete this step as a home connection.
8. Have students make a “mini museum” of the artifacts and labels. This classroom museum can be shared with the rest of the school as an exhibition.

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EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Invite students to bring artifacts from home to add to the artifact kit. Ask them to give a show-and-tell presentation about their artifact and why they chose it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following books offer helpful background information about Chicago:

Chicago by Lynnette R. Brent, Heinemann

ABC History Mystery by the Chicago Historical Society

The Chicago World's Fair of 1893, A Photographic Journey by Stanley Appelbaum

Fire in Boomtown CD, story and songs by Amy Lowe and Megan Wells

Journey Around Chicago From A to Z by Martha Day Zschock

Chicago History for Kids by Owen Hurd and Gary Johnson

Chicago (Cities of the World) by Conrad R. Stein