

HISTORY DETECTIVE

THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS TRUNK

Grade Level: 3 to 5

IN THIS LESSON

Students will become history detectives in their own classroom detective agency to crack the case of the strange artifacts in the mysterious trunk owned by Ms. Nora Nostalgia.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop habits of historical inquiry by analyzing visual evidence
- To develop interpretive and artistic skills
- To improve written and verbal skills
- To make connections between the past and the present

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

Please note: This lesson plan can work with any collection of artifacts as long as several decades are represented.

Wooden meat club/tenderizer

Souvenir spoon from the 1893 World's Fair

Brass spittoon

Iron trivet

Candle lantern

Horseshoe

Metal roller skates (c. 1950-60)

Manual food grinder

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

History Detective worksheets (at end of lesson)

Rulers

Magnifying glasses

Scale

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This lesson was developed and written by Lynda Bradford.

HISTORY DETECTIVE: THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS TRUNK

ACTIVITY

1. Before the lesson, place your artifacts in an old trunk (if you have one) or a box decorated to look like a trunk.
2. At the beginning of class, set the scene for students. Tell them to imagine the classroom is a detective agency. Your agency is unique, because you specialize in solving historical mysteries. Today, you have been hired by a client, Ms. Nora Nostalgia, who recently moved into a very old house built in 1890. Have students do the math to figure out how many years the house has been standing.
3. Over the years, many families have lived in the home, and sometimes they left possessions behind when they moved. Ms. Nostalgia found a trunk in the attic full of mysterious artifacts. She has turned to your detective agency to help her identify the objects and find out how they were used. She hopes this will help her better understand the lives of the people who used to live in her house. She also wants to know how the past affects us today. Do we use items like these now? How have they changed over time?
4. Have a class discussion. What do detectives do? What special tools do they use? What ideas do students have regarding how to best help Ms. Nostalgia? Create a list and post it for continued reference.
5. Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with a ruler and a magnifying glass. Place a scale in the room that all students can access. Pass out the History Detective worksheets and review the instructions.
6. Present students with Ms. Nostalgia's trunk full of artifacts. Invite one student from each group to approach the trunk and pull out an artifact without looking. Remind students to handle the artifacts gently.
7. Have students examine their artifacts and complete their worksheets. Tell them to make sure everyone in the group gets a chance to hold and examine the artifacts.
8. Provide students with books or internet access to research their artifacts. Students should confirm the identification of their artifact and collect any additional facts such as what purpose/function it served, and when it was used. This may be done in class or as a home connection.

HISTORY DETECTIVE: THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS TRUNK

9. Ask students to use their completed worksheets to write a letter to Ms. Nostalgia detailing their findings and officially “closing” her case. This assignment can be completed in class or as a home connection. Alternatively, you can go directly to step 10 and produce one letter to Ms. Nostalgia as a class.
10. Ask each group to present their artifact and share their findings with the class. What did they find out about this object? What did they report to Ms. Nostalgia? You can assign roles for this oral report: one student can summarize the object, a second can review the worksheet answers, a third can report on the research findings, a fourth can discuss if we use anything like the object today, and a fifth can read the final letter to Ms. Nostalgia.
11. Have a final class discussion. What did students like best about being history detectives? Were they able to help Ms. Nostalgia? What was easiest and what was most difficult about solving the Case of the Mysterious Trunk? What belongings do students have that they would like somebody to find in the future? Why did they choose that object?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Introduce this lesson by first reading aloud a short story about a detective solving a mystery (historical if possible). The Meg Mackintosh books by Lucinda Landon feature a young sleuth who solves intriguing mysteries. These titles in particular provide a strong orientation to history and how to act as a detective.

American History Mysteries (Scholastic 1999)

Meg Mackintosh and the Mystery on Main Street (Secret Passages Press, 2000)

Meg Mackintosh and the Mystery in the Locked Library (Secret Passages Press, 1993)

Meg Mackintosh and the Mystery at the Medieval Castle (Secret Passages Press, 1989)

The official Meg Mackintosh website includes ordering information, games, and author information. (<http://www.megmackintosh.com/index.html>)

Take on the role of Ms. Nostalgia (or invite another adult to visit the classroom). Ms. Nostalgia can present her case and deliver the trunk of artifacts. She can also return to hear the investigative results when students present their findings in step 10.

Have students imagine what a history detective 100 years in the future would figure out by looking at some of their own belongings. Instruct students to fill an imaginary trunk with ten items from their own home and then write a short story about how a detective in the future would solve the mystery of their trunk.

HISTORY DETECTIVE WORKSHEET (page 1)

You are a history detective! It is your job to help Ms. Nora Nostalgia learn all about the artifacts she found in her attic. An artifact is an object made and used by people, so artifacts are all around us! Use all of your investigative skills to unlock the clues your artifact provides. Remember, as a detective you need to make close observations and record your notes and ideas.

Description: What do I know?

1. Use the magnifying glass. What color(s) is your artifact?

Draw a picture of your artifact:



Turn to next page

HISTORY DETECTIVE WORKSHEET (page 2)

Description: What do I know?

2. Use the ruler. What are the measurements of your artifact?

3. Use the scale. How much does your artifact weigh?

4. What material(s) is your object made of?

5. This artifact is . . .

Make a guess about what the artifact is. Why is this your guess?

Turn to next page

HISTORY DETECTIVE WORKSHEET (page 3)

Investigation Questions: What do I wonder?

Write three questions you have about your artifact.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Research: What have I learned?

Write down the most important information you learned while researching your artifact.

Turn to next page

HISTORY DETECTIVE WORKSHEET (page 4)

Conclusions

Think about what you will tell Ms. Nostalgia about her artifact.

1. What is this artifact?
2. How was this artifact used?
3. What kind of person might have used this artifact?
4. Do we use anything like this artifact today? If yes, what? If not, why not?
5. What is your favorite thing about this artifact? Should Ms. Nostalgia save this artifact or give it away? Why?