

A TOAST TO THE PAST

Grade Level: 3 to 5

IN THIS LESSON

Students will use their observation, analysis, and research skills to discover the identity and purpose of a mysterious artifact from the past—the non-electric toaster! They will then make a visual timeline of toaster history.

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

Non-electric toaster (you may use more than one style/type)

Electric toasters (several from different decades)

Please note: This lesson will also work with any of the following household goods or kitchen gadgets.

Cherry seeder

Curling iron

Bottle opener

Pan scrubber

Fruit jar wrench lifter/canning utensil

Potato masher

Button hook (for shoes or gloves)

Can opener

Rolling pin

Slate board

Egg slicer

Hand mixer

Cookie cutter

Cheese grater

Ice cream scoop

Whisk/egg beater

Pliers

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Artifact Analysis worksheets

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

Paper

Drawing supplies (colored pencils, markers, or crayons)

Blank timeline templates

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This lesson was developed and written by Yollande Gottlieb.

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ACTIVITY

NOTE: This lesson is an in-depth exploration of the non-electric toaster, but it can easily be adapted for any of the objects on the Suggested Artifacts list.

1. Create a graphic organizer with the heading, What is an artifact? Brainstorm for 15 to 20 minutes. Then list all ideas collaboratively and create a second graphic organizer combining key ideas.
2. Discuss the importance of artifacts and how they help us learn about the past.
3. Show students a non-electric toaster, but do not tell them what it is. In the following steps, students will use their observation, analysis, and research skills to figure it out.
4. Pass out copies of the Artifact Analysis worksheet. Direct students to describe the artifact in as many ways as possible: shape, size, color, material, function, weight. They should state how old they think the artifact is. One student should be selected to record all of the responses.
5. Have students sketch the toaster. Share drawings as a class or in small groups. Discuss why sketching the artifact helps us learn more about it. When students have correctly identified the object, continue to step 6. If they are struggling, provide hints or clues so the class properly identifies the object as a non-electric toaster before continuing.
6. Have students use the internet to research the history of toasters and the invention of the electric toaster (see Additional Resources for suggested websites). Provide each student with a blank timeline template. Timelines should include names, dates, descriptive information (written by students in their own words), and images. Students should list key people who were instrumental in developing the toaster and modifications to this tool over time (about a period of 85 years). Students can print out toaster images that they find through their research.
7. Bring in an electric toaster(s) to share with the class. How does it match up to the students' research? Discuss how the electric toaster is similar to and different from the non-electric toaster. As an alternative to a class discussion, students can complete Venn diagrams.

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8. Share timelines in small groups or as a class. Make sure information covered in the quiz is reflected on the timelines and discussed in class. Give the quiz (see end of lesson). Conclude with a class discussion: How has the toaster affected American society? What can we learn about history from analyzing everyday objects like the toaster?

ASSESSMENT

See quiz at end of lesson.

Answers:

1. Charles Strite
2. Albert Marsh
3. Copeman Electric Stove Company
4. Wonder Bread

The answers to questions 5, 6, and 7 are subjective. We suggest that you grade students according to the accuracy and thoughtfulness of their answers.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Have students create an advertisement for the non-electric toaster imagining that it is a brand-new product. You might want to find catalogs or magazines from the same era as your toaster and ask students to imitate the writing style and graphics of the past.

Have students imagine they are a kid in the future and write an essay comparing the toasters of 2008 to the toasters of 2050.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.idealfinder.com/history/inventions/toaster.htm>

This website features fascinating facts about the invention of the electric toaster.

<http://www.toastercentral.com/toaster20s.htm>

This website features vintage toasters from the early 20th century.

QUIZ: A TOAST TO THE PAST (page 1)

1. Who invented the pop-up toaster in 1919?
2. Who discovered the filament wire needed to toast bread in 1905?
3. What company invented the first electric toaster with an automatic bread turner in 1913?
4. What company first introduced pre-sliced bread in 1928?

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QUIZ: A TOAST TO THE PAST (page 2)

5. State why the toaster was a great invention and describe the effect it had on American society.

6. Describe at least three milestones in the invention and development of the toaster.

7. What will a toaster look like 100 years from now?