

Gathering Information Research Procedures

Elementary Grades and Transitional ESL/Bilingual classes:

Teachers: The class can work as a whole under the coaching of the teacher on one historical object, or work in groups of 2 or 3, on one object per group. The activity can be modified to research a natural object such as a rock or fossil by eliminating questions that pertain only to human-made objects.

Students: Your goal is to research an historical object. You will be finding out as much information as possible from the object itself. Follow these steps to learn more about your object.

1. Bring an object to class to research (or the teacher or volunteers can bring some).

Object criteria:

It's old.

It's useful or decorative.

You don't already know everything about it.

2. Use the following list of questions to research your object:

- a. What is it? (What is the object called? Does it have more than one name?)
- b. How big is it? (measure and weigh it)
- c. What is it made of? (materials)
- d. How was it made? (in a factory, by hand; sewn, welded, glued, nailed, etc.)
- e. What color(s) is it? (natural colors, paint, etc.)
- f. What decoration does it have? How was this made/applied?
- g. Does it have a maker's mark? (on the bottom or back?) Who made it? Where?
- h. How old is it? How do you know? (the date is marked, the owner told you, you found it in a catalog or book, etc.)
- i. What condition is it in? Is it damaged? Are there use marks (evidence of wear) on it?
- j. What is (or was) it used for?

First answer all the questions you can by looking carefully at the object itself. Then look to resources to find other answers.

Some sources are:

people

drawings

video/film

books

photographs

documents

old newspaper and magazine ads or posters (for examples:

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1920/clues/index.html>)

old Sears and Wards Catalogs (for examples:

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1890/clues/catalog1.htm>)

auction catalogs

collectibles catalogs or guidebooks

Internet (use keyword searches)

Grades 7-12 and gifted students:

Teachers: An alternative or supplemental exhibit activity, with essay writing involved, can be reached at <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1950/TeachR/level3.htm>

Students: Start with the above questions, and go on to research more deeply using the following suggested questions.

- k. Who made the object? (research the craft, the artist or group, the factory)
- l. What is the style of the object? (design style, art style, historical style) How do you know?
- m. Who used this object? (Trace the owners/users to the first one)

Ideas:

- 1. Do an oral history of the current or past owners to find out about their lives with the object.
- 2. Look through family photographs for the object.
- 3. Look through any family or public records that might apply.
- n. How does this object relate (in price, quality, style) to other objects of this type in its time? (look in catalogs and at other examples)
- o. What did the object mean to its first owners/users? (e.g., 1880s quilt = comfort, warmth, recycling of clothes, example of fine skill of maker, unity of group quilters)
- p. What does the object mean today? (e.g., 1880s quilt = memories, gift, beauty, collector's item)

After you answer these questions, fill out the "Decorative Arts Catalog Worksheet". This research can be used as information for labels, exhibit wall text panels, and/or as a research paper or oral presentation by an educator in an exhibit (see **Building a Museum in Your Classroom** activities).

Decorative Arts Catalog Worksheet

Object name: _____ Accession Number _____

Classification: _____

Maker/artist: _____

Date of object: _____

Designer: _____

Country: _____ State: _____ City: _____

Techniques: _____

Materials: _____

Colors: _____

Style, type or pattern: _____

Size: _____

Description (50 words or less): _____

Source: _____ Association: _____

Gift, loan or purchase: _____ Date Acquired: _____

Condition : _____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Explain: _____

Location (of object): _____ Entered by: _____

Date: _____