

A Matter of Style: 19th Century Furniture

Analyzing an Object – Upper Grades

- Purpose:** students will find important cultural information by looking carefully at an object and analyzing it systematically.
- Objective:** The students will retrieve historical information from an object by analyzing it with an instrument.
- Materials:** an object of material culture (a piece of furniture or a good picture of one from A Matter of Style <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ms.html>)
pencils
Object Analysis form (B) for each student
- Motivation:** Discuss how an historian can glean information from an object by looking at it carefully and making systematic notes of analysis. Brainstorm what kinds of things one might want to know about an object by making an idea web on the board. Use the printable pdf file from Behind the Scenes titled Gathering Information Research Procedures located at http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/behind/htmls/act_res.html to help you select brainstorming topics. Discuss what the categories for analysis listed on the form and what they can mean. Students can brainstorm what questions they want to pose and answer under each category about the object.
- Then have students choose an object to analyze (individually or in small groups). To AMatter of Style <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ms.html> they could choose a piece of furniture from At Home in the Heartland Objects (1800-1850) <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1800/objects/index.html> and At Home in the Heartland Objects (1850-1890) <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1850/objects/index.html>.
- Discuss where students could go for more information after they get as much as they can from the object – ask people, library books, encyclopedia, Internet sites on furniture, museum labels on similar objects online, illustrations or photographs of similar objects, old catalogs.
- Procedures** Students print out the selected piece of furniture from At Home in the Heartland (Objects) or from other source (e.g., magazine, book, Web site, photograph).
- Using the criteria on the Analysis Form (materials, design, production, use, association, meaning) students write questions for research and discussion about their chosen object. Four-step process for object analysis: (1) Observation: Students explore object in depth and answer as many questions as they can based on their observations. (2) Discussion: students discuss their observations and determine areas for further research. (3) Research and document: students search various other sources for information about their object. Students record their findings in a form of their own design. (4) Interpretation: Determine and write up an interpretation of the meanings, significance and importance of the object based on the observation, discussion, and research.

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Material Culture: Object Analysis Form (B)

Student Name _____

Object Name _____

Materials

Design

Meaning

Use

Association
