



Pieces of the Past

Grade level: 3-5

Time required: 1-2 class periods

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can objects tell us about the lives of people who lived in the past?

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will examine an artifact and document details.
2. Students will make inferences about artifacts.
3. Students will discuss their inferences and provide evidence.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. *Pieces of the Past* Google Slides lesson, which includes content for the examination of 6 artifacts (12 videos total).
2. *Pieces of the Past* worksheet. This activity can be customized based on your class' needs. The activity can be completed by students on the Google Slides lesson itself, or on the physical worksheet. **This activity can be performed as a class, or individually.** You may choose to go through each video with the class, or provide copies of the Google Slides presentation to your students for independent work. This lesson plan will refer to the activity being done as a class.

ACTIVITY

1. Ask students how historians learn about the past. Explain that historians examine objects to learn about the past. Emphasize how looking at objects can tell us information about the lives of the people who used them.
2. Ask students to think of an object they have in their home. What might a historian be able to learn about their life by looking at that object?

3. Let them know that they will be historians today. They will be watching videos featuring objects from the 18th century, to see what objects can tell them about how people lived in the past.
4. Play the first object video. This video will present an object and describe it in detail. An answer key for the object identifications can be found at the end of this lesson plan.
5. After the video plays, have students answer the questions relating to the object (How would you describe this object? What material is the object made from? Does it look like an object you have seen before? Do you have an object at home that does the same job? What is the object? How did people use it?). These questions can be answered directly on the Google Slides presentation, or on the worksheets provided on the Museum's website.
6. Call on a student to present their answers for each object. Have them present their answers to each section of the graphic organizer, so that they are explaining the reasoning behind their identification of the object.
7. Ask students to explain their reasoning **before** revealing if they have correctly identified the artifact.
 - a. **If the students have correctly identified their object:** confirm that they are correct, and give additional historical context for the object. For example, if they have correctly identified the object as a lantern, ask them why someone might carry one? What kind of people in the 18th century might need to carry a light source?
 - b. **If the students have not correctly identified their object:** let them know that they did a good job, even if they weren't totally right. Historians have to make their best guess based on the information they have, and sometimes those inferences might not be completely correct. The explanation of their reasoning should let you know where they went off track, and you can ask questions to correct their misconceptions and lead them to a different answer. For example: many students incorrectly identify the ale shoe, guessing based on the shape (it looks like a shoe), rather than the material and size (it's fairly small and made of metal). You can ask them questions such as "What is it made from? Do you think wearing a metal shoe would be comfortable?" to help redirect them towards the correct answer. You may also ask for input from the rest of the class.
8. Play the next object video. This video will reveal the object's identity and describe how people in the 18th century used it.
9. Repeat the process with the remaining videos. There are 12 videos total: 6 object descriptions and 6 object identifications. Once all objects have been identified,

you may choose to lead a wrap-up discussion. You may also choose to have students answer these wrap-up questions on their own.

10. Congratulate students on becoming historians!

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Each object video is followed by a video revealing the answer. The objects are identified in more detail here:

1. **Sugar nipper-** Sugar was frequently used for food, tea, and alcoholic punch served in taverns. Sugar arrived in the tavern in the shape of a cone, which prevented rats and insects getting into it during shipment. The sugar nippers were used to cut small pieces from the cone; after sugar was cut into lumps, it was pounded with a mortar and pestle to add to drinks and food. They could also be used as tongs, from which the sugar cone was held and slowly dissolved into a hot beverage.

White sugar was imported from the West Indies and was very expensive. White and brown sugar—as well as molasses, which is made from sugarcane juice—were a key part of the Triangular Trade and were grown and harvested by enslaved people on plantations in the West Indies. The importance of the sugar trade was such that the Sugar Act of 1764, intended to increase the price on all non-British sugar imports to the colonies so the British had a monopoly on the trade, provoked great anger among the colonists.

2. **Ale shoe-** An ale shoe was used to warm ales and other spirits in taverns. It could be made from copper or tin. The liquid was poured into the top of the “shoe,” while the “toe” was pushed into the hot coals to warm the beverages. Once warmed, the liquid was poured into individual glasses.
3. **Clay Pipe-** The tavern owner kept clay pipes in a box on the wall for guests’ use. Clay was a popular material because it was inexpensive and easy to mold. Pipe-smoking was a social activity and occurred often in taverns. Due to the lack of knowledge about germs, there was no stigma against sharing pipes. Travelers could make use of the public pipes and could often purchase tobacco at the tavern, though many provided their own.
4. **Powder horn-** Soldiers and hunters carried gunpowder in an ox horn. This

protected the powder from water, which could make it non-flammable, and fire, which could cause it to explode. The gunpowder funneled out the bottom of the horn into the barrel of the musket. Soldiers often inscribed their powder horns with maps of and stories about the places they traveled.

5. **Lantern**- Lighting a home or tavern at night was costly and dirty. People burned candles, rushes (a type of candle made from soaking dried rush plant in fat or grease), or wicks set in oil, all of which were smoky and smelly. For this reason, many people went to bed not long after sunset. This tin lantern was for outdoor use, since streetlights were not common. The holes prevented the candle from blowing out by blocking it from the wind and letting smoke out, as well as letting out enough light to see.
6. **Flint and steel (tinder box)**- A tinder box contained everything necessary to start a fire. Flint (a type of rock) was struck against a piece of steel to create a spark. These boxes also contained tinder, the general name for flammable material like cloth, pine needles, or twigs, which caught fire easily and would be used to light the wick of a candle.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

To further explore how objects can teach us about the past, try *Inventoring the Past*. This activity uses an 18th century inventory to recreate Samuel Fraunces' tavern, and asks students what an inventory of their own home could tell historians about their daily life. This activity can be found on the Museum's [Educational Resources page](#).

EDUCATION STANDARDS

1. New York State Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards
 - 4SL1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, expressing ideas clearly, and building on those of others.
2. New York Social Studies Framework:
 - Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence
3. New York State Social Studies Standards:

- 1.4.3- Students view historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music, and artifacts.

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

