

Many View Points: Object-based Learning for the Global Classroom

Subjects: Language Arts, Social Studies

Suggested Grade Levels: Middle to High School

Time Frame: Variable

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Overview

This lesson promotes a partnership between the Penn Museum and middle/high school educators by offering an opportunity to utilize the Penn Museum’s world-class collections for global learning. Artifacts on display in the Penn Museum galleries represent diverse ancient civilizations and modern cultures. The lesson aims to develop students’ capacity for embodying different perspectives by encouraging students to explore their observations of cultural objects through prompted questions. In this exercise, themes of cultural heritage and identity are highlighted through material culture—the material things that surround us on a daily basis, the things we choose to represent ourselves, our heritage, and our understandings—the things that make us both similar and unique.

Note: This lesson is for use within the galleries of the Penn Museum but could be modified for use in other museums.

- <http://www.penn.museum/on-display.html>

Connection to Philadelphia World Heritage Tool Kit’s Goal

Using the Penn Museum’s collections of archaeological and ethnographic material excavated and collected from all inhabited continents of the world, the lesson incorporates the themes of world cultural heritage as a framework for promoting global competencies of understanding different perspectives.

Core Curriculum Standards

- Common Core
 - Key Ideas and Details
 - Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
 - Speaking & Listening
- 21st Century Skills
 - Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
 - Communications & Collaboration
- National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies
 - Culture and Cultural Diversity
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Global Connections

Objectives

Students will be able to engage with object-based inquiry processes by using cultural artifacts on display at the Penn Museum, engage with culture as dynamic, rather than static, develop global competencies of recognizing and respecting multiple perspectives through cultural object analysis, communicate differing interpretations and meanings of cultural heritage from multiple standpoints.

Essential Question

How can we learn about people (ancient and modern) and their cultural heritage through critical observation of artifacts? What are the differences in perspectives from the people who created these objects and from the people who acquired, preserve and exhibit them??

Materials Needed

Artifacts in the Penn Museum Galleries, Object-based Inquiry Worksheet (1 per student), pencils for writing in the Galleries (1 per student), clipboards for writing (optional, 1 per student, Penn Museum can provide upon inquiry), Classroom Observation Worksheet

Procedure

Introduction: Teacher or Penn Museum staff greets group and talk about Museum rules and the Teacher leads students to destination gallery.

The lesson begins with an open discussion among students to develop a collective definition of an ‘artifact.’ The teacher (a museum educator or a classroom teacher) first solicits students to talk about objects that are important to them by asking questions such as:

- Name one of the objects you care about
- Why is it important to you?
- Does the object you care about tell something about you, your family, or your community?
- Are these associated with specific customs, ceremonies, celebrations, etc.?

By sharing their ideas of an ‘artifacts’ and what it encompasses, the class arrives at their own definition of an artifact. The teacher also facilitates a discussion on what makes an artifact a cultural artifact by asking a question such as:

- Do you consider X (an object that students shared) a ‘cultural object,’ if so, why?

The teacher asks students to elaborate on the artifacts:

- Are these associated with certain cultural rituals and holidays? What makes them cultural artifacts?

Teacher prepares students to look around the designated gallery:

“Things at the museum are considered important cultural artifacts. By looking at the artifacts in the gallery closely, we will explore the meanings they have for different group of people.”

Object-based Learning Activity in the Gallery: In the selected gallery of the museum, each student will choose an object that particularly resonates with them. Students will respond to a set of questions on the object-based inquiry worksheet. The questions allow students to examine and reflect on the artifact both from their points of view and from other perspectives. (Sample worksheet is attached. Questions can be modified based on the teachers’ overall lesson goal.)

Questions are divided into five key sequences:

1. Initial Reactions
 - Why did you pick the object? What attracted you to it?
 - What are your assumptions about the object? (Who do you think used it? What do you think it was used for? Etc.)
2. Concrete Observations
 - Describe the object. (color, size, materials, etc.)
3. Contextual Observations
 - Read the exhibit label. Record as much information as you can from the label.
 - (What story does the label tell about the object? How is the object displayed in the exhibit? Who do you think is the intended audience for the exhibit?)
4. Observations with Multiple Lenses
 - Describe the importance of the object from the perspective of the people who created it.
 - Describe the importance of the object from the perspective of the people who acquired, preserve and exhibit it.
5. Optional - Reflecting on Your Heritage (A pre- or post-museum visit activity)

Now think about an object that has significant meaning to you and your heritage. Write a museum label for your object in 4–5 sentences.

Post-Museum Group Discussion: After the museum visit, students return to their school classroom(s) and break into groups of 3–4. Please use the attached Classroom Observation Worksheet for this conversation and have students take notes on the worksheet; hand out one per group and assign a scribe to take the notes.

In each small group, students will speak about their object and their interpretations, focusing on how they were able to consider their selected artifact from multiple perspectives. Questions for the students to discuss include:

- What did you learn from looking at the object very closely? How was that different than if you just looked at it quickly?
- What assumptions did you make about the object – its use and the people that made it – from just looking at it?
- Did your perspective change after you read the information about the object? How did it change?
- What surprised you most about your observations or what you read on the label?

As a concluding activity with the entire classroom, each group is asked to share information for each question, bring the students' perspectives together to be recorded on a whiteboard, blackboard, or other device. Final recap questions could include:

- What is the definition of a cultural artifact?
- Is it important to preserve cultural artifacts in museums? Why or why not?

Outcome/Assessment

Students will be assessed on the documentation/recording of the object-based analysis worksheet, participation in museum discussion, participation in classroom discussion, and small group discussion notes worksheet.

Assessment should be conducted based on the following skills:

- Details and depths of object observation based on the notes of the ‘concrete observations’ and ‘contextual observations.’
- Critical analysis and reflective thinking demonstrated on the notes of the ‘Observations with Multiple Lenses’ and “Reflecting on Your Heritage”
- Active participation in group discussion – synthesizing and articulating written notes to peer students, active listening during group discussion.

Special Education and English Language Learners Accommodations

To address multiple learning styles and linguistic varieties, Teacher/Museum educator can develop different worksheets. For example, the students could draw pictures based on observations instead of writing notes, English Learners could write down their reflections in their native languages and/or simple English words (rather than sentences). Also, instead of offering a worksheet at the museum or in the classroom, students can interview each other with guided questions while audio/video recording using a mobile phone.

Additional Resources

Web:

Penn Museum Trip Planner (for planning Field Trips):

http://www.penn.museum/documents/penn_museum_trip_planner.pdf

Penn Museum Field Trip Booking Form (to book your fieldtrip): www.penn.museum/k12programrequest

Penn Museum Collection Database: <http://www.penn.museum/collections/index.php>

Penn Museum, Native American Voices, Educational Resources:

<http://www.penn.museum/sites/nativeamericanvoices/educational-resources.php>



Observing Gallery Objects: A Closer Look at Context and Culture

Directions:

1. Find an object in the gallery; make sure it had a descriptive label
2. **Do not read the label** that gives information about the object. Examine it very closely for 3–5 minutes.
3. After your observation time, answer the following questions. You do not have to answer in complete sentences; record your observations through your preferred note-taking style.

Concrete Observations: (3 min)

- Describe the object.
What color and shape is it? What size is it? Does it have decorations? What is it made of? What condition is it in? Do you think it was used alone or with other objects?

Initial Reactions: (3 min)

- Why did you pick the object?
What attracted you to it?

- What are your assumptions about the object?
Who do you think used it? What do you think it was used for? Who do you think made it? How do you think it was made? What caused you to make these assumptions?

Contextual Observations: (10 min)

- Read the exhibit label. Record as much information as you can from the label, such as:
What story does the label tell about the object? Who made it and how was it used? How was the object collected? How is the object displayed in the exhibit? What else is in the display; how do other objects connect to your object? Who is the audience for the exhibit?

Observations with Multiple Lenses: (10 min)

- Describe the importance of the object from the perspective of the people who *created* it.

- Describe the importance of the object from the people who *acquired* and *inherited* it.

Reflecting on Your Heritage: A Pre-Visit or Conclusion Activity: (10 min)

Now think about an object that has significance to you and your heritage.

- Write 5 sentences about the object that begin with “I remember...”

- Write a museum label for your object in 4–5 sentences.



Observing Gallery Objects: A Classroom Discussion

Directions:

1. Divide into groups of 3–4 students.
2. Appoint a scribe who will take notes for your group. It is important that the scribe take good notes about each student's answers.
3. Using your worksheets from your Penn Museum fieldtrip, share your answers to the following questions. Each person in the group should have a turn in sharing their thoughts.

Initial Reactions:

- What did you learn from looking at the object very closely? How is that different than if you just looked at it quickly? (5 min)

- What assumptions did you make about the object- its use and the people that made it- just from looking at it? (5 min)

Concrete and Contextual Observations:

- Did your perspective change after you read the information about the object? How did it change? (5 min)

- What surprised you most about your observations or what you read on the label. Based on your answer, is it important to have information available to visitors to understand more about the objects? (5 min)