

Artifact Research Project

Created by the History & Genealogy Department, St. Louis County Library

Goal: Design and conduct a research project to analyze an artifact for historical insight into a group of people and their community.

Missouri Learning Standard/GLE:

Social Studies: 9-12 American History

5. People, Groups, and Cultures.

Theme 1: Tools of Social Science Inquiry.

A. Using a United States' historical lens, describe how peoples' perspectives shaped the sources/artifacts they created.

Materials:

- Readings (selected articles and pages from recommended books)
- Baseball(s)
- Book Sources (SLCL-History & Genealogy)
- Online Resources (SLCL-History & Genealogy)
- Artifact Inquiry Guide (See Attached)

Background:

Historical Artifact Research:

When first approaching an artifact research project, the first thing to do that will vastly improve your knowledge of the artifact is to gain background knowledge on how historians utilize artifacts to learn about people throughout history. Any object that people have made or modified is considered an artifact according to historians. Therefore, whether you are researching an object as small as a pen or as large as a house, it helps to have a procedure to use when analyzing artifacts. Rather than just glancing at an object and using your own knowledge and

experiences to decide what an artifact is, it is important for researchers to consider the various properties of an artifact. These “properties” deal with the object’s size, purpose, production, designer, and the people for whom the object was made. Just giving a label or name to an object does not help researchers truly understand why an object was made and how it contributed to society. By examining an artifact from all of these various angles, researchers can learn more about the society and community that utilized the artifact and the impact it had on history.

Artifact Analysis

The following is a list of questions and procedures that are helpful in organizing your analysis of an artifact and its various properties.

1. **Type**: To determine the type of artifact you are researching, first describe the materials the object is made of, such as metal, wood, glass, paper, plastic, etc.
2. **Qualities**: Note other unique aspects of your artifact. Consider how the artifact looks and feels. (Shape, color, size, texture, weight, movable parts).
*Also look for any words, names, or symbols written, stamped, printed, or engraved on the object.
3. **Uses**: Consider how your artifact was used, the people who may have used it, where it was used, and when it was used. (Who, what, when, where, why?)
4. **Conclusions/Artifact Interpretation**
 - ❖ What can we learn about the technology of the time period because of the artifact? Consider factors like how the object was made and how it was used.
 - ❖ What can you determine about the people who made and used the artifact? What can you learn about the time period in which the artifact was made and used?
 - ❖ How does this artifact compare to objects in use today that fulfill the same or similar purpose?

Activity:

Goal: Research the history of the baseball utilizing baseballs, photographs, articles, and books to better understand the history of baseball equipment and how it changed over time.

1. Begin by conducting an analysis and fill out as much of the artifact inquiry sheet as possible. If you are able to find baseballs from different time periods, have some groups analyze one while other groups study the others. Once everyone has completed their artifact inquiry and analysis, have students share their conclusions with each other. (If you do not have access to an actual baseball, pictures of baseballs from different eras may be substituted. *Note that you will also want to have the dimensions and other physical attributes of the baseball(s) available with the photos for the analysis.
2. Take the information and the questions formed from the artifact analysis to begin working through the sources on the history of the baseball to further supplement the analysis.
3. Piece together the information learned from the secondary sources with the artifact analysis. Students should be able to see how both steps of the research process (the analysis and the secondary history sources) further their own knowledge of the history of the baseball.

Readings:

#1.: “Material Culture: Artifacts in Family History”-from Katherine Scott Sturdevant’s book entitled, *Bringing Your Family History to Life through Social History*. (pg. 26-30)

#2: “Analyzing and Researching Artifacts”-from Katherine Scott Sturdevant’s book entitled, *Bringing Your Family History to Life through Social History*. (pg. 31-35)

Online Resources:

- Smithsonian.com- *A Brief History of the Baseball*
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-brief-history-of-the-baseball-3685086/>
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers- St. Louis Post Dispatch
The Marvelous New "Jump" Ball. (1909, Jun 13). St. Louis Post-Dispatch
- Baseball History: 19th Century Baseball: The Equipment pg. 3
<http://www.19cbaseball.com/equipment-3.html>
- How Baseball is Made-Material, History, Used, Parts, Dimensions...
<http://www.madehow.com/Volume-1/Baseball.html>

Image(s):



(Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Magazine- <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-brief-history-of-the-baseball-3685086/>)

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Artifact Inquiry Guide

Circle **Type** of Material(s):

Metal	Wood
Glass	Paper
Plastic	Ceramic

Other:

Artifact **Qualities**:

Shape:

Color:

Size:

Texture:

Weight:

Parts:

Uses:

Conclusions: _____

Artifact **Origins/History:** _____
