

GUIDE TO INSTRUCTION

Looking at Objects: Using Museum Artifacts

So much of what we know about our history is rooted in the artifacts from our ancestors. Object Based Learning utilizes the actual artifacts as the basis for learning in a way that encourages interdisciplinary critical thinking. The following steps can be applied to any type of artifact (ceramics, tapestries, paintings, photographs, tools, sculptures, facades, clothing—anything made or modified by a human):

Procedure

Begin by asking students to take at least 1 minute to silently observe the object in front of them, making sure to walk all the way around it if able to.

Describe

Prompt students to describe what they see:

- What colors, shapes, lines, textures, and designs do you see?
- What expressions do you notice? (This includes facial expressions or body position, if there are figures.)
- What stands out to you?
- What condition is the object in?

Analyze

Prompt students to think about why the things they noticed are there:

- What significance do the attributes have?
- What might the colors, shapes, textures, and designs represent?
- How might the arrangement of these elements influence the meaning of the piece?
- What does the condition of the piece tell us about its use or history?
- What questions do you have about the piece?

Interpret

Prompt students to think about why the object exists and what it might tell us about the people who created it and/or used it:

- Who do you think created the object?
- Who do you think used the object? What might they have used it for?
- What can we infer about the culture's society from looking at the object? (Societal structure, governmental structure, role of art/artists in society, technological advances, etc.)
- Have you seen a similar object? What was similar about it and what was different?
- How might other objects connect to this one?

