

Investigation and Discussion Questions for Artifacts and Images

A reference for teachers and students

These are general questions to help students investigate artifacts and images. Use any or all that apply to generate class discussion. You will not be able to answer all of them – the questions we cannot answer are what lead historic investigation! The main points to emphasize as the students respond are:

How do you know? What clues or evidence do you see?

Artifact: A three-dimensional object made or used by humans.

1. Observation

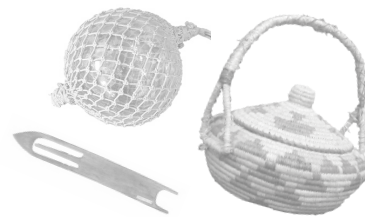
- What does your artifact look like? Describe the size, shape, and colors.
- What is the artifact made of? Describe the materials and texture.
- What marks does your artifact have? Describe the markings, decorations, signs of use, maker's marks, and worn, cracked, or torn areas.
- What parts does your artifact have? How do they go together?
- Where was it made?
- When was it made? (Date or time period)
- Was it handmade or manufactured?
- Who made it?

2. Smart Guesses

- What is it?
- Is it rare or common?
- What is it for or what does it do?
- How was it made?
- Why was it made?
- Was the artifact used by the same person or people who made it?
- How was it used?
- Who used it?
- Where was it used?
- When was it used?
- Why was it used?
- How long has it been in use?

3. Make Connections

- Is it out of date? If so, what replaced it?
- What objects or ideas came before this?
- What does it make you think of?
- What value does it have to its culture?
- What is its significance?
- Does it remind you of anything? Can you connect it to anything in your own life?
- What else do you want to know about the artifact? How could you find out?



Images: Drawings, paintings, and photographs.

1. Observation

- What people, groups, animals, buildings, objects, and/or activities do you see in the image?
- If there are people in the image, who are they? What are they doing?
- How are the people dressed? Is their clothing different from ours?
- When was the image created? What evidence shows the date or time period?
- Where was the image created?
- What is the setting of the image? Indoors or outdoors? Is it natural or is there evidence of humans?
- What is the perspective – above, below, straight-on, far away, close-up?
- Is there any text with the image? What does it add to what you can see?
- Who made the image?
- What did you miss at first glance?
- What can you NOT see?

2. Smart Guesses

- Who is the image for?
- Is there a message to the image?
- Why do you think the photographer or artist made the image?
- What does the image tell you about life at the time?
- What might different groups think when they look at this image?

3. Make Connections

- What would be a good title for this image?
- What would you like to ask the artist or photographer?
- What would you like to ask the people in the image?
- If you could make an image today from the same location, how would your image be different? How would it be the same?

Other sources of information that could help tell the story of your artifact or image include books and periodicals, diaries and letters, first-person accounts, videos, related artifacts and images, maps, and ephemera.

The best artifacts for you to study are the ones you can hold in your hands. For digital exploration, check out the online collections of these local museums:

[Harbor History Museum](#)
[Washington State History Museum](#)
[Tacoma Historical Society](#)
[Fort Nisqually Living History Museum](#)
[Karshner Museum](#)

[Tacoma Art Museum](#)
[LeMay America's Car Museum](#)
[Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum](#)
[White River Valley Museum](#)
[Tacoma Public Library Northwest Room](#)

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