



EduTrend Contents

W4C · HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY · MIDDLE SCHOOL

Artefact Investigators

Separate observation from inference

Ages 11–14

Level: Intermediate

60 minutes

Groups of 3 · up to 30

Activity 03

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 03 · AT A GLANCE

Artefact Investigators

Students rotate around stations with unfamiliar objects or high-quality photos of museum artefacts. For each one they record observations, make inferences and ask questions, then build a short case for what the object was, who used it and when. The session teaches the difference between observation and inference and the use of evidence to support claims.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- distinguish observations from inferences and questions;
- use physical evidence to make reasoned claims about an artefact;
- identify what an artefact cannot tell us on its own;
- present a claim with supporting evidence and a level of confidence.

KEY WORDS

artefact · primary source ·
observation · inference ·
provenance · function · context ·
claim · evidence

CURRICULUM LINKS

History: using sources as evidence (England National Curriculum, Key Stage 3). C3 Framework, Dimension 3: gathering and evaluating sources; Dimension 4: communicating conclusions.
English: reasoned argument.

1

QUESTION

What do we want to know?

2

FIND

Gather sources

3

OBSERVE

Look closely

4

INFER

What does it suggest?

5

CHECK

Compare sources

6

EXPLAIN

Tell the story

Materials (per class)

- 6 stations, each with an unfamiliar object or a large printed photo of a museum artefact (for example a butter churn, sock darning, flat iron, oil lamp, clay pot, coin)
- Magnifying glasses and rulers
- Observation–inference–question (OIQ) cards
- Timer
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Choose objects or photos whose use is not obvious; keep a note of the answers.
- Many museums publish free, high-resolution images of their collections online; print these if real objects are not available.
- Set up six stations with a number and an OIQ card.
- Prepare a slide with one model artefact to demonstrate the method.

SAFETY

Handle real objects over a table and with clean hands. Keep heavy or fragile objects on the table rather than passing them round.

ACTIVITY 03 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Model the difference between “I see” and “I think” with one object before students start. Challenge any inference that has no observation behind it.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Model	Demonstrate OIQ with one object: I see..., I think..., I wonder...	<i>“Which of these is an observation?”</i>
10–35 min Rotate	Groups spend 4 minutes at each station completing Worksheet 1.	<i>“What evidence supports that idea?”</i>
35–45 min Case	Each group chooses one artefact and builds a claim with three pieces of evidence (Worksheet 2).	<i>“How confident are you, and why?”</i>
45–55 min Reveal	Groups present; the teacher reveals the answer and the provenance.	<i>“What did the object tell you that the label didn’t?”</i>
55–60 min Reflect	Students complete Worksheet 3 on the limits of artefacts as evidence.	<i>“What would you need to find out next?”</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Decide what an unfamiliar artefact was, who used it and when, supporting your claim with at least three observations and stating how confident you are.

ACTIVITY 03 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The history in brief

An artefact is any object made or used by people. Historians and archaeologists read artefacts by observing carefully (material, size, wear, decoration), then inferring function, date and users. An inference must always be linked to an observation. Provenance, the record of where an object was found and who owned it, adds essential context.

Artefacts are powerful evidence of everyday life, but they rarely speak for themselves. We may not know who made them, what they meant to people or whether they were typical. Historians combine artefacts with written sources, images and oral testimony to build a fuller picture, and they state how confident they are in each claim.

Common ideas to listen for

- “If it looks old, it is very old.” Wear and style can mislead; provenance and dating are needed.
- “We can know exactly how it was used.” Inferences are probable, not certain, without other sources.
- “Objects in museums were owned by important people.” Many museum objects come from ordinary homes.

Adapting the activity

Support

Give sentence starters for each column (I can see..., It might be used for... because..., I wonder...).

Stretch

Students research the real artefact online, compare the museum’s interpretation with their own and identify any evidence they missed.

WORKSHEET 1

Station record

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Four minutes per station. Keep observations and inferences separate.

Observations, inferences, questions

Station	I observe...	I infer...	I wonder...
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

WORKSHEET 2

Building a case

Choose one artefact and argue for what it was.

Our claim

Evidence

Observation	What it suggests
1	
2	
3	

Confidence (low / medium / high) and why

WORKSHEET 3

The limits of objects

Think like a historian.

What can artefacts tell us that written sources cannot?

What can't they tell us?

One other source I would use, and why

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Separates observation and inference	Supports claims with evidence	Recognises limits of sources

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Artefact Investigators is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C History & Archaeology programme (middle school, level: intermediate). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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