

Analyzing Artifacts

GRADES 3-8



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 3-8. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 45 minutes.

In this lesson, participants will discuss how a historian can analyze objects to learn more about the people who used them.

Participants will learn how to define an artifact, record information from objects and connect the artifacts to objects they have seen in their own lives.



Materials

- Four or five artifacts (about one per six participants) connected to life aboard a Navy vessel. Examples: tools, communication equipment, kitchen equipment, protective equipment
- Artifact information cards (Created by facilitator beforehand for the artifacts being used for lesson)
- Photographs of jobs connected to artifacts
- Artifact Investigation Worksheet



Objective

Participants will be able to identify considerations one should take when analyzing artifacts to learn about the past.



Set Up

Select four or five artifacts you would like the participants to analyze. Create artifact information cards for all the artifacts you would like to show participants.

These cards should contain the following information:

- A photograph of the artifact
- How the artifact was used, material
- Approximate dates of when the object was in use
- Where it was generally found

Sample Artifact Card

Name of Artifact:	Photograph of artifact:
Material:	Dates associated with artifact:
Where/how artifact was used:	If applicable: information about historic owner

Inquiry

Introduce community life aboard a naval vessel and the types of jobs and conveniences they had that were like home, as well as the jobs specific to working on a naval vessel.

If you were serving on a ship for longer than three months, what would you want the ship to have?

Answers may be: include food (cooks on board supply food), water (someone has to turn salt water into drinking water), a doctor, dentist, etc.

Use historic photographs to determine jobs, activities and day-to-day life on a Navy ship. Have participants work in groups to discuss what they notice about the photographs. Ask participants to identify setting, people, activity/event and significant details.

- Are these jobs in your community?
- What do those jobs entail?
- How are they an essential part of your community?
- What does the picture tell us about life on a ship?
- What does the picture tell us about the past?

Investigation

Let participants know that they are going to look at some objects these people might have used. These objects are known as artifacts.

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “artifact?”

Define “artifact.”

Use a pencil as an example. If someone in the future comes to this spot and we are long gone, what might they know about how we lived just by looking at this pencil? They might compare our pencil to whatever they use to write in the future. Let participants know that they will take the role of historians and try to find out information about the people that used these objects.

Present an artifact to the group and guide them through the process of analyzing an artifact by going through the prompts on the “Artifact Investigation” worksheet.

- What does your artifact remind you of?
- What can this object tell us about the people that used it?



Activity

Artifact Investigation

Divide participants into groups of four to six people. Place an artifact on each table. Provide each participant with an “Analyzing Artifacts” worksheet to determine what their artifact is and who would have used it. Once groups have completed the worksheet, distribute the Artifact Info Cards for further investigation. Have participants share their findings with the whole group. If needed, add any historical context that may be missed after each student presents.

- What can artifacts tell us about the past?
- What is challenging about this process?
- What could potential next steps be as a historian?
- What other primary resources could help provide context on this topic?

Learn about Peers through Artifacts

Have participants bring an artifact from home and have a peer attempt to determine information about them using the same artifact investigation sheet.



Lesson Connection

See our lesson, **Create Your Own Exhibition**, to have participants take the role of curators educating the public using a selection of objects.



Background

An artifact is any object made or modified by humans. Historians and archaeologists can learn about the past by analyzing artifacts and comparing them to what we know now. Many museums collect artifacts from the past. Museums document and preserve these items so that future historians can study and learn from them.

The artifacts selected for this lesson should relate to life aboard a Navy vessel. Ships often functioned like cities at sea, where crew members had duties and jobs that contributed to the overall workings of the ship. Several artifacts are connected to these jobs and can be used to provide a lot of insight on who used them.



Additional Resources/References

For access to primary source documents:

<http://docsteach.org/>

<https://www.fold3.com/>

<http://dp.la/>



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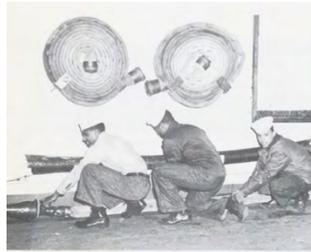
Documents and Images



Navigation



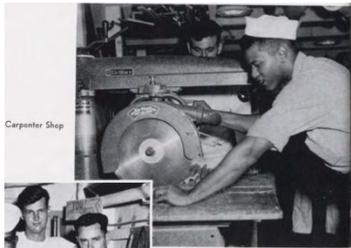
Weather Forecasting



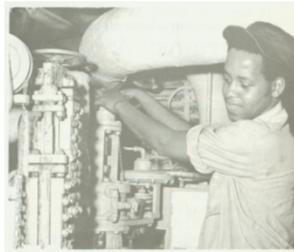
Ship Safety



Photograph Intelligence



Engineering and Repair



Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. 1971, 1956, 1955, USS *Intrepid* cruise book. Gift of printed material and photo, produced in Intrepid Print Shop – Donated by Richard Maxwell LI-3, USS Intrepid 1958-60. A2013.168. Gift of PH-1 Gofrido Garcia USNR (Ret). P2021.11



Fueling & Maintaining Aircraft

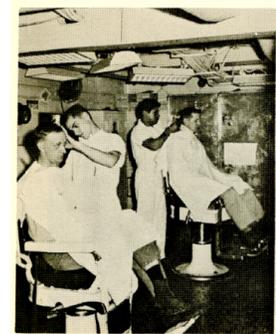
Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. 1973, 1963, 1971, USS *Intrepid* cruise book.



Bakers and Cooks



Mailroom



Barber



Collection of the Intrepid Museum, Gift of Robert & Craig, 2015.24.02.



Ship Newspaper



Communications

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. 1945, 1955, 1967, 1970 USS *Intrepid* cruise book.

ACTIVITY: ARTIFACT INVESTIGATION

1. Describe your artifact:

Shape: _____

Size: _____

Material: _____

Color: _____

2. What does your artifact look like? Sketch it in the box below.

3. Reflection Starters. How do you think this artifact was used?

This reminds me of _____

I am thinking _____

I wonder about _____

4. What information can we learn about life at sea by looking at historic artifacts and photographs?
