Wisconsin 101:

Our History in Objects

Lesson Plan

Analyzing an Object as a Primary Source

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**What is the purpose of this lesson?** Encourage students to think of objects as primary sources that they can use for historical analysis.

**What will students produce?** Roughly 250 words describing an object

**Wisconsin Social Studies Learning Priorities:**

* Inq2.b: Evaluate sources
* Hist4.a: Historical context
* Hist4.b: Intended audience
* Hist4.c: Purpose
* Hist4.d: Point of view (POV)

At Wisconsin 101, we focus on object history meaning that we use physical objects as an entry point for thinking about history. Most of us are familiar with using historical documents as primary sources, but object history lets us think about all sorts of objects as primary sources too. Where a document has an author and intended audience, an object might have designers, producers, distributors, and users. In this activity, students will analyze an object as a primary source and write a paragraph describing this source. Students can use objects from home, [your local historical society](https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3110), or a [field trip site](https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS15312). This can activity can stand alone or be a building block for larger projects such as:

* “Developing Skills in Object History”
* “Classroom Museum”
* “Viewing an Object from Multiple Perspectives”
* Historical essays

## Examine the Object

**What is the object made of?**

| Bone | Ceramic/Pottery | Fabric | Glass |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Leather/Animal Skin | Metal | Paper | Plastic |
| Rubber | Stone | Wood | Other: |

**Can you be more specific about any of these materials? For example, maybe the object is made of deer bone or tin or limestone.**

**How big is the object? (About the size of a quarter? A shoebox? An oven?)**

**Is the object made up of any significant parts? Or is it a part of a larger object?**

## Context

**When was the object made and used?**

**Where was the object made and used?**

**Who made the object?**

**What was this object used for? Who do you think used it?**

## Analysis

**What 3 words describe this object?**

**Does any prior knowledge help you understand this object? How so?**

**Do people still use objects like this today? How are they similar or different?**

**What does this object say to you about the time when it was made and used?**

