

Reading an Object

Location: Modern History Gallery

Intended Grade Level: K-7

Duration: 90 minutes

Objective: This trailhead tour encourages students to explore the meaning and purpose behind museums. Old Town in the Human History Gallery provides a window into the past and offers an opportunity to examine whose stories the museum presents and with what objects. Students will be encouraged to ask questions and think critically about the importance of heritage and the role of preservation to help nurture an understanding of the past.



ROYAL BC
MUSEUM

Introduction: 25 minutes

What is a Museum? What purpose does it serve? Whose stories do they tell using the objects within them?

By most official definitions, a museum is an institution that serves the public by acquiring, conserving, researching, communicating and exhibiting. Whether tangible or intangible, museums preserve and display the heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

The items we will be seeing in the museum are also known as artifacts. Artifacts are objects created, modified, used or moved by people. These objects can represent a cultural activity or stage of development, such as a tool, weapon or ornament. Artifacts are studied to better understand how people lived in the past.

The stories told within museums vary, depending on the objects within it and the people creating exhibits; for example, the Royal BC Museum is responsible for sharing the human and natural history of British Columbia.

Activity Part 1: Learning How to Read Artifacts

Present the students with a variety of artifacts from the handling collection. Some of the objects may be familiar to you and some may not. Begin by briefly explaining to students how they should properly handle artifacts, i.e. use white gloves and/or clean hands, no rough housing, use both hands to move or carry the objects, etc. Explain that each group is responsible for examining, recording and reporting information about their object. Each group will be responsible for only one object. Ask students to pick a table, each with an object already on it.

In the groups, students are asked to use their senses to study the artifact and make some observations. Start by taking turns handling the object.

What can you tell from looking closely at it?

What can you tell from feeling it?

What is it made of?

How do you think it was made?

Who do you think used it?

What was it used for?

Is it valuable?

Is it still used today? If not, why did people stop using it? If so, how do people use it today?

Big Questions to Brainstorm:

What can you learn about the person, or people, who used, created, bought or discarded...this object? What questions would you like to ask that person(s)?

Why were the objects on display in the galleries chosen? Are those the objects you would have chosen to display?

Whose stories are told using these objects?

Exploration: 35 minutes

In their object groups, students take their object with them to explore the Human History Gallery through an object-based lens. This portion of the tour is largely unguided. Teachers may ask prompting questions to help frame students' thinking.

Activity Part 2: Searching for Clues

With your object in the gallery, see if you can use the dioramas to help identify and learn more about the artifact and its uses.

Observe the different ways your artifact might have been used in the past.

Did you choose to make something similar to an artifact in the gallery? Or did you choose to make something different? Why might your object be similar or different?

Did you see any artifacts similar to something you would use today?

Did you see any artifacts that you are puzzled by? What questions do you have? How would you look for answers?

Discussion and conclusion: 30 minutes

Gather together as a group and share the different objects students saw in the gallery. *Did they find an object similar to the artifacts they analyzed in Part 1? If not, why? Why were the objects on display chosen and who chose them? Whose stories are being told in the Human History Galleries, are there any that are missing?*

Back in the Classroom:

Continue the conversation in the classroom: *Were there any objects in the galleries that describe your personal experience? Are there any? What objects would you donate to the museum to help tell your story?* Have students bring in an object from home that they think best represents them. Encourage student to create their own museum exhibit. *What does this object tell about you, your family, or culture?*

Prior to Your Visit

This tour does not require preparation prior to your visit; however, the following questions and activity are here to help prepare your students and enhance the tour experience.

Ask Some Preliminary Questions

Artifacts are objects created, modified, used or moved by people. These objects can represent a cultural activity or stage of development, such as a tool, weapon, or ornament. These objects are studied to better understand how people lived in the past.

Encourage students to study an “artifact” from home to understand how it can be used to tell a story and represent person.

Expand it further, by asking students: *In 200+ years, an archeologist discovers our classroom, completely intact, what they would learn about us from the things they find? Would they learn what class was taught, how many students there are, likes and dislikes, habits?* If applicable, this is an excellent segue into the concept of context. It is not only the object, but place it is found that explains something about them.

