

Activity: Analyze an Object

Objects help bring history to life and make connections between the past and present. Museums collect objects, care for them, and use them to help people understand the world around them.

Teaching with museum collections sparks curiosity, encourages close observation, and strengthens students' connection with the past.

Main Ideas

- 1) Museum collections teach us about the past and present.
- 2) Looking closely at objects reveals information about the people who made and used them.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Practice observation skills by looking closely at a historic object.
- Analyze objects to make inferences about the people who made and used them.

Learning Standards

Alaska History Content Standards: C. A student should develop the skills and processes of historical inquiry.

Alaska Anchor Standards English Language Arts: RI.1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking.

Additional Resources

Teaching Through Collections: bit.ly/uamnobjectlessons

Smithsonian Alaska Native Collections: alaska.si.edu

Alaska's Digital Archives: vilda.alaska.edu

Time Needed: 30-40 minutes

Materials

- Variety of everyday objects (pencils, hats, silverware, small toys, etc.)
- Photos of museum objects (see attached photos, or find more objects on the websites listed above) and Object Cards
- *Thirteen Questions To Ask About an Object* handout
- Paper and pencils



*Coffee Can, 1951.
Courtesy of Denali National Park and
Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 4863.*

Activity: Analyze an Object

Directions

Advance Preparation: Look at the object photos provided and the suggested websites. Choose which object(s) to feature for this activity.

- Hold up an everyday object, such as a pencil, spoon, toy, or hat. Ask students to look at the object closely, then think like detectives and use the object to learn about the person who used it. For example, a pencil with a worn-down eraser could mean that the person who used it had made mistakes while writing and had to erase them. A hat with a sports team logo could mean the person who wore it is a fan of that team.
- Show students a picture of a museum object. Ask students to draw a picture or write a physical description of the object, paying close attention to details.
 - Alternatively, divide students into small groups and give a photo of a different object to each group.
- Have students brainstorm questions they have about the object. This can be done individually, in small groups, or as a class.
 - Use the *Thirteen Questions To Ask About an Object* handout to guide students.
- Hand out the Object Cards with background information. Ask students which questions of theirs were answered and what other questions they have after learning more about the object.
- *Extension:* Find photos of contemporary equivalents of each object. Ask students to list similarities and differences between the historical and contemporary objects. How has this object changed and/or stayed the same over the years?
- *Wrap Up:* Discuss the following questions with your students:
 - Which questions about the object were answered? Which questions remained unanswered?
 - What are some ways you could research your unanswered questions?
 - What surprised you about the object?
 - What did you learn about the people who made and used the object?
 - How does observing historical objects help you understand the past?
 - What could people in the future learn about you from the objects you use every day?



Students brainstorming questions about objects. UAMN photo.



*Projectile Point.
Denali National Park
and Preserve
Museum Collection,
DENA 4703.*

Thirteen Questions to Ask About an Object

1. What are the object's **physical properties**?
 - Material(s)
 - Size
 - Weight
 - Number of parts
 - Is anything written or drawn on it?
2. What are the object's **sensory properties**?
 - Sight, Touch, Sound, Smell, Taste (use your imagination!)
3. Was the object **made or altered** by humans?
4. How do humans (or animals) **interact** with the object?
5. What is the object's **purpose**?
6. What **emotions, thoughts, or ideas** come to mind when you see the object?
7. **How** was the object made?
 - Was it handmade? Was it mass-produced?
 - What techniques did the maker use?
8. **Who made** the object?
9. **Who owned or used** the object over time?
10. What **other objects** relate to this one?
11. What is **special or distinctive** about this object?
12. What **personal meaning** or significance do you find in this object?
13. How would you **explain** this object to others?

[Adapted from "Twenty Years, Twenty Questions to Ask an Object" by the Material Culture Caucus of the American Studies Association: networks.h-net.org/twenty-questions-ask-object-handout]

Object One



Courtesy of Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 405AB.

Object Two



DENA 0004863
02/28/2013

Courtesy of Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 4863.

Object Three



Courtesy of Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 1520 & 1521.

Object Four



Courtesy of Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 1977.

Object Five



Courtesy of Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 4703.

Object Six



Courtesy of Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection, DENA 4199

Object One: Crampons (DENA 405AB)



This is a pair of crampons for climbing boots, with points on the bottom and slotted uprights for boot straps on top. They are made of galvanized sheet metal. The front and back sections are hinged to bend with the boot. Two rivets for the strip attaching front and back sections of the right crampon are missing.

The homemade crampons were left on the Muldrow Glacier on Denali (Mount McKinley) by members of the 1910 Sourdough Expedition. In 1932, the Lindley-Liek Expedition found and recovered them.

In November 1909, four gold miners - Tom Lloyd, Peter Anderson, Charley McGonagall, and Bill Taylor - set out to be the first to climb Denali. They wanted to win a bet, and to disprove explorer Frederick Cook's claim that he had summited Denali in 1906. On April 3, 1910, the group, minus Lloyd, attempted to reach the summit. With a bag of doughnuts, three thermoses of hot chocolate, some caribou meat, and a 14-foot spruce pole, they became the first party to summit the 19,470-foot north peak of Denali. They became known as the Sourdough Expedition, and had met the challenge of climbing with rudimentary gear and no climbing experience. In 1913, the Stuck-Karstens climbing party saw the spruce pole and verified that the Sourdough Expedition had successfully summited the north peak.

Information from National Park Service Centennial One Object Exhibit:
www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/mwLSpGOXWnRSKw

Object Two: Coffee Can (DENA 4863)



This is a Hill Bros. coffee can with a piece of baling wire as a handle. The can is red with white rectangular areas bordered in yellow. The wire is attached through two holes in the can, with the ends of the wire twisted to secure the handle.

Bradford Washburn used this coffee can as a cooking pot during his 1951 expedition (the first ascent of Denali using the West Buttress route).

Washburn was one of the leading American mountaineers from the 1920s through the 1950s. He climbed Denali three times (1942, 1947, and 1951). The 1951 climb was the first ascent of Denali using the West Buttress route. His wife, Barbara Washburn, was the first woman to summit Denali (in 1947). Washburn also pioneered the use of aerial photography to map mountains in Alaska. In 1960, he published a topographical map of Denali.

Information from UAF Project Jukebox: jukebox.uaf.edu/site7/p/2736

Object Three: Snowshoes (*DENA 1520 & 1521*)



This is a pair of handmade snowshoes, constructed with 20 mm dowels lashed together with sinew, nylon cord, and copper wire in a rectangular design. Three dowels across the middle section are intended to support the boot. On one snowshoe, one dowel in the middle section is broken. The webbing appears to be made of nylon coated on one side with a waxy substance.

Einar Nilsson made these snowshoes from tent poles and parachute shrouds in 1942 during the Army Test Expedition on Denali (Mount McKinley). The Army Test Expedition conducted cold-weather and high-altitude equipment tests in Denali National Park. The seventeen members of the expedition camped on the edge of Muldrow Glacier for six weeks, testing everything from tents and parachutes to food rations, stoves, boots and socks.

Einar Nilsson was born in Sweden in 1901. He was an electrical engineer who worked for the the Office of the Quartermaster General during World War II. As a member of the 1942 Army Test Expedition, he climbed the south peak of Denali. Nilsson died in 1989.

Information from www.nps.gov/articles/dena-wwii-training.htm and publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/12199034700/Einar-Nilsson-1901-1989

Object Four: Dog Sled Brake (*DENA 1977*)



This is a three-pronged dog sled brake with bolts for attaching it to the sled. A broken piece of wood is attached. The brake was found in 1982 in Denali National Park. The metal is corroded and the wood is decayed.

Dog mushers use brakes to slow or stop a sled dog team. The brake is attached to the bottom of the sled. When the musher steps on the brake, the claw digs into the snow, causing the sled to slow down.

Alaska Natives have used dogs for transportation for thousands of years. The first superintendent of Denali National Park, Harry Karstens, established a sled dog kennel in 1922. Rangers used sled dogs to patrol park boundaries, prevent hunters from illegally killing wildlife, and haul supplies.

Today, motorized vehicles are prohibited in much of the park. Denali's dogs continue to provide transportation for rangers during the winter months. They help remove litter from the park, transport supplies to repair historic buildings, deliver scientific equipment, assist winter visitors, and perform demonstrations in the summer.

Information from www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/kennels.htm and www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/the-science-of-sled-dogs-distance-learning-program.htm

Object Five: Projectile Point (DENA 4703)



This is a projectile point made from antler, about 14 centimeters (5.5 inches) long. It has five barbs protruding diagonally from the main body; each barb is about 1 centimeter (0.4 inches) long. A long crack runs horizontally across the body of the object.

This projectile point would have been used for hunting animals. The point would have been attached to the main shaft of a spear or arrow. The barbs were designed to catch in the skin of the animal.

The artifact was found near Polychrome Mountain in Denali National Park. Similar artifacts found in Alaska have been dated to between 100 to 1500 years old. It is part of the Athabascan culture, which is well-known for bone and antler tools.

Archaeological artifacts such as this one reveal the history of humans in the Denali area. Indigenous people have lived in the region for over 13,000 years, and continue to live there today.

Information from www.nps.gov/dena/learn/historyculture/archeology.htm and Sam Coffman (archaeologist).

Object Six: Fountain Pen (DENA 4199)



This is a fountain pen with a black plastic body and metal tip. There are reddish-orange mottled spots on the black plastic. The body of the pen is 3.3 centimeters (1.3 inches) wide near the tip, and narrows to 2.7 centimeters (1.06 inches) at the other end.

President Woodrow Wilson used this pen on February 26, 1917, to sign the act creating Mount McKinley National Park. The pen was then given to naturalist Charles Sheldon, who had advocated for the creation of the park.

Charles Sheldon visited the Denali region between 1906 and 1908 to hunt and study Dall sheep. Over the next ten years, he campaigned for the creation of a national park to protect the area's wildlife and wilderness. Mount McKinley National Park was established in 1917. In 1980, the park boundaries were expanded, and it was renamed Denali National Park and Preserve.

Information from www.nps.gov/dena/learn/historyculture/park-history.htm