Get Creative with Historical Objects

Fun, creative writing activities that might change the way you think about objects you see every day.
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Click the link under each activity to see a video about it
About the Author

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What is an Object?

These activities will help you see objects in new and different ways, but what are objects?

Objects are just things – things people have made, or collected from nature. Museums are full of historical objects, so are our homes!

These activities ask you to find objects to write about. These can be old, strange, or as normal as a pen or cup. Grab a box and go treasure hunting with your family to find interesting objects around your home. You can also write about the museum objects on pages 12-16.

GET CREATIVE, and have fun!

PLAY VIDEO
Interesting Object Labels

Objects in museum displays have labels that list information known about an object, such as where it was found, where and how it was made, what it might have been used for. Sometimes, museum experts don’t know exactly what items were, or how they were used, so they might make a guess based on the information they know.

GET CREATIVE: Here are some interesting objects. Pick your favourite, make up what it could be and create a fun label for it. List where it was found, what it is made from, and how you think it was used. See the next page for an example.

On the last page of this booklet you can find out what these things really are. No peeking just yet!
Object: Martian Surgical Tool
Found: UFO crash site. Roswell, New Mexico
Made from: Meteorite and stardust
Use: We believe Martians place this tool on top of their heads to sharpen their brains when they need to think very hard about something, or they may use it to collect and store memories.
A Letter to an Object

GET CREATIVE: Find an object in your house and imagine what it would write in a letter to a friend. Perhaps it’s writing to an object who used to live in the same house before being given away, or an object from the shop where they were both sold.

Maybe your object is replying to a letter? Think about where it lives in your house and anything that has happened to it that it would want to tell a friend about. Even moving from a bottom shelf to a top shelf could be interesting, or a toy being handed down to a younger brother or sister.

In this example, a mug is replying to a letter he received from a mug friend.

Dear Dotty,

Thanks for your letter. I’m glad to hear you’re enjoying living with your posh neighbours in the china cabinet. Have you seen Stripy recently? Is he still holding toothbrushes in the bathroom?

I have news, I got broken last month! Billy was washing up and I slipped out of his hand and smashed into pieces on the kitchen floor. He was so upset, but Mum said “Accidents happen.” She collected the pieces and they glued me back together. I can’t hold drinks any more, but Mum put a little plant in me. Now I live on a sunny windowsill instead of the dark cupboard. It’s so nice here, and I have a lovely view of the kitchen and yard.

Say hi to Stripy from me,

Love,

Chip

PLAY VIDEO
Haiku

A haiku is a type of Japanese poem with only three lines. The number of words doesn’t matter, but there must be 5 syllables in the first line, 7 syllables in the second and 5 syllables in the third line. Haiku don’t have to rhyme.

Haiku are very short so you need to choose your words carefully. The last line often points out something about the subject you are writing about, as in these three examples.

GET CREATIVE: Pick an object to write a haiku about. You could describe it in the first line, say something about its history in the second, then point out something interesting about it in the last line.

**Favourite Cup**

*A chipped china cup*
*Given as a wedding gift*
*Still loved by my gran*

**Retired**

*A police helmet*
*Over a century old*
*Still smells of hair wax*

**First Toy**

*My old teddy bear*
*Tatty fur and missing eye*
*Cuddled every night*
Interview with an Object

Interviewing an object as though it is a person can give it a personality and spark some great ideas for stories.

GET CREATIVE: Choose an object to interview as though it is a person. Use this list of fun questions or make up your own!

- What is your very first memory?
- What is your favourite place? Why?
- What is the funniest thing you ever saw?
- Describe your perfect holiday.
- Who is your best friend?
- Tell me a secret

Interesting object: a Japanese Daruma, a symbol of perseverance and good luck. Darumas have blank eyes when they are made. The owner draws one pupil when they start a project or make a wish. They fill in the other when they finish or the wish comes true.
Acrostics

In acrostic poems, the first letters of each line spell out a word down the side of the page.

Acrostics don’t need to rhyme, and you don’t have to worry about the rhythm of the lines. Each line can be as long or as short as you like, and you can even continue a sentence on the next line.

**GET CREATIVE:** Find an object to write about and write it vertically on one side of the page.

List words or phrases that describe your object or what it does and start filling in the lines with words that begin with the same letters.

If you get stuck, just leave that letter blank and come back to it!

**PLAY VIDEO**
Feejee Mermaids

Fake mermen, and mermaids, were popular tourist souvenirs in the late 1800s and were traditionally made in China. Hartlepool Museum has a merman that everyone calls “Herman.” He’s made from the body of a monkey, a wooden core, and the tail end of a fish. These types of mermen are known as 'Feejee Mermaids’

**GET CREATIVE:** Design your own Feejee Mermaid. Mix one creature that lives in water with one that lives on land. Draw it. Describe it. Write about where it lives, what it eats, and what it likes to do.

*See the next page for an example!*
Feejee Mermaids

Appearance:
The Koaladile has a cute koala head with big fluffy ears and a squat, scaly crocodile body. It has a long tail which helps it to swim, and sharp claws that help it to climb trees.

Habitat and feeding habits: The Koaladile loves water, but prefers hanging out in Eucalyptus trees where it eats the birds that land in its branches. It crunches them up with its sharp teeth and spits out the beaks. You know there’s a Koaladile living in a tree if you see bird beaks around its trunk.
Malfunctioning Objects

In my first Knights and Bikes book, Demelza, one of the main characters, has a Game Gauntlet - a game controller glove. However, it is malfunctioning - not working as it should. Luckily, the broken glove is now the only thing that can stop the curse guarding the treasure she is searching for!

GET CREATIVE: Find an object and imagine the magical things that might happen if it malfunctioned!

A pair of glasses - Allows you to see fairies, secrets, through walls
A watch – Rewinds or fast-forwards time
A game controller – Controls parents, teachers or animals
A hearing aid – Hears alien messages or translates lies to truth.

Pick your best idea and write a story about your malfunctioning object and the adventures and trouble it brings its owner.

PLAY VIDEO
Objects for inspiration

If you can’t find an object you want to write about at home, have a look at the examples on the next few pages to see if they inspire you. Or you can look at museum websites to find interesting items.

The Tees Valley Museums website has some great information on our region’s history and some pictures of interesting objects.

Click here to visit the site
Anglo Saxon Princess Jewels

This jewellery found in the grave of an Anglo Saxon Princess near Loftus. Three gold pendants, two glass beads, one gold wire bead, and part of a jet hair pin were found together. The pendants and beads would have been strung together as a necklace. The pendants are made of gold and jewels.

The large pendant is the most important piece. It is made from gold and contains 57 red garnets. It would have been made by one of the best craftsmen in all of the Anglo-Saxon world!
The Vikings came from the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. They attacked and settled in Britain between AD 793 and 1066. This Viking helmet was found in Yarm in Stockton-on-Tees and would have been worn as armour.

Viking helmets were usually riveted together from pieces of iron and didn’t actually have horns! An eye and nose protector has been riveted to the lower front of this helmet. A curtain of chainmail may have been attached to the lower rim to protect the neck of the wearer.
Roman Baby Bangles

These tiny bangles are made from jet and glass. They range in size from 3½ cm to 7 cm and were made for babies and small girls.

As the girls grew, the bangles would have to be broken to remove them. They would have been symbols of rich or important families and probably worn for protection.

Image courtesy of Redcar and Cleveland Council Cultural Service
Dragonware Vase, Linthorpe Pottery

Christopher Dresser, 1934-1904, designed over 1,000 pots for the Linthorpe Pottery in Middlesbrough. This vase was inspired by his travels in Japan, where he encountered new techniques including Dragonware.

Early Japanese Dragonware includes dragons which usually wrap around the entire piece, like this one. This vase is also decorated with butterflies and flowers.

Image courtesy of Middlesbrough Museums Service
What were the Interesting Objects?

An ocarina. One of the oldest types of wind instrument.

An archer’s ring. 15th century

A lemon squeezer. Designed for Alessi by Phillipe Starck

A Roman ligula. A tiny spoon for scooping out earwax