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Tees Valley Museums

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

USING OBJECTS TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE PAST

Using primary sources to find out about the past is an important part of students' history learning. Being able to handle and explore objects develops students' enquiry and critical thinking skills. As they use their senses, ask and answer their own questions, learning about the past becomes more meaningful, relevant and memorable for students.

Top tip: keep curiosity and motivation alive by not revealing what an object is or the answers to students' questions (if you know them) until the end of an investigation. Do prompt with further questions though!

LOOKING CLOSER

Show the students a mystery object. Ask them to look at it very closely and remember as much as they can about it. Cover the object and ask them to draw it in as much detail as they can remember. Uncover the object part way through for an extra" sneaky peek" to support observational skills.
Uncover the object for a final look. Encourage students to discuss and question from their own observations. Questioning could focus on simple concepts such as colour, shape, size, materials.

OBSERVING, QUESTIONING AND HYPOTHESISING

Pass a mystery object around a class circle. Encourage students to investigate it, and ask them to complete a sentence such as "I notice that…" Pass the object around a second time encouraging students to ask a question about the object. Try to answer it with the help of their peers. Finally encourage the group come up with ideas about what the object might be – it doesn't matter if they are incorrect, as long as they can justify their reasoning with the evidence they have unlocked through their questions and observations. When the investigation is complete, reveal as much information about the object as you know. Any unanswered questions can lead students to further research.

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FEELY BAG

Place an artefact in a bag and let students feel the object. Describe what they can feel as it's passed around a class circle. Encourage children to ask questions and share their thoughts before revealing the object and discussing their thoughts about the object and if they have changed once they can see it.

WOULD I LIE TO YOU?

You will need a selection of objects or images of objects linked to your class topic. Divide the class into teams, one team per object.

Give each team a small piece of information about their object. The students explore the object developing three fictional but believable names, uses and owners to add alongside the truth. Place three lies and the truth into an envelope and pass across to another team.

The other team examine the object and decide which of the four descriptions they believe is correct.

This can be extended by giving students access to secondary sources (books, online, questioning an expert etc) to help with their investigations.

DRAWING FOR LOOKING AND RECORDING

Drawing an object helps us observe it much more closely. It's also a useful way of recording information. The goal is to get down as much detail as possible – it's not about creating a work of art. Try these tips to help students look closely and record accurately and in detail:

1. Divide a piece of paper into six squares. Students look closely at an object and record different details in each square e.g. its overall shape, a label, a pattern, a handle etc
2. Students look at the object and draw what they see without looking at the paper.
3. Students draw the object from an unfamiliar angle – e. g. turn it upside down.
4. Working in pairs one student describes an object and instructs how to draw it whilst the child drawing cannot see the object being described.

5. Students draw a very small object, or part of an object on a very large piece of paper.