

How to Read an Object



National Park Service
with **Teaching MUSEUM** Collections
Management Program
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum>

Your group has a "source of information." What can you learn from it, and what does it tell you? Examine your 'source' closely, discuss each point with your group and answer the questions as best you can. Put a "y" next to the categories of information to which you have access. Where possible, provide some support or reasoning for your action, and indicate 'not available' or 'not known' if appropriate.

How to Read an Object

| Properties of an Object Questions to ask and answer | | Observe, Deduce and Infer What you can find out by looking closely at the object? |
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| Function/Purpose What is it? | What is it called? What is or was it used for? Does it have more than one function? How has its use changed over time? Does it | |
| Physical Features What does it look and feel like? | How big is it? What's its shape, smell, and sound? What color is it? Is it complete? Has it been altered, adapted, or mended? Is it worn? What's the surface like? Does it have identifying numbers? Are there markings or writing on it? | |
| Materials | What's it made of? How many kinds of materials is it made of? | |
| Construction/Technique of Manufacture How was it made? | Who made it? How was it made? Is it hand or machine made? Does it have parts? What does it tell you about the maker's technical skill? | |

| How to Read an Object | | Observe, deduce and infer What you can find out by looking closely at the object |
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| Properties of an Object Questions to ask and answer | | |
| Design and Decoration Does the design suit its purpose? | Were the best materials used? How is it decorated? What influenced its design and appearance? | |
| Context and History What can the object tell us about the society in which it was made? | When was it made? Where was it made? Where was it used? Where was it found? Who made it? Who used it Who owned it? How has it changed over time? How does it compare to similar items from other cultures and time periods? | |
| Value How was it valued? | What kind of value did it or does it have: monetary, spiritual, aesthetic, sentimental, and practical: To the person/people who made it? To the person/people who used it? To the people who keep it? How has the object's meaning changed over time? How does the object reflect the person, community, nation or culture at the time it was made? How does the object expand your knowledge of the period? | |

What else would have been helpful to complete your investigation?