

Learning from Objects

Tips and Tools for Teachers

The Theory

- Applies key principals of ‘active learning’ or learning from doing
- Learning from objects engages all senses – sound, sight, touch, smell and taste.
- Students will absorb more information if they are able to use their senses to **discover** the information. They become actively involved in the learning process.
- Object based learning can connect students to the past through socio-cultural concepts that they already understand. For example a dinner or family meal. Students already understand the basic practices and material culture associated with a modern dinner(eating/people gathering). This prior understanding can be used to connect students to historical ideas through objects.

Introduction

- Discovery – allow the students to handle and puzzle out the object themselves.
- Questions are key – have a list of questions ready about each object. These should be designed to get the students thinking – but not necessarily get the ‘right’ answer. No answer is ever wrong.
- Know the object yourself. Have a cheat sheet of object information and be prepared for any and all questions! **You don’t need to be an expert**
- Relate the object to a central theme with an overall question
 - Example:
 - Theme: Roman dining
 - Overall Questions: What did Romans eat and drink? How was their food prepared and served?
- In our Museum sessions you will be given the themes and overall questions as well as the cheat sheet object information.

Introduction

Ask questions about:

- Physical Features
- Construction
- Function
- Design
- Value

How do we find out?

Observation → Research/Knowledge → Discussion

Discussion → Research/Knowledge → Observation

From here conclusions can be made

The following slides give examples of objects, questions, cheat sheet info, and central themes.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

Roman Amphora



Questions

- Who do you think used this object?
- What do you think it was used for?
- What do you think it is made from?
- How do you think it was made?

Cheat Sheet

- This very large pot was used to transport liquids like wine, olive oil and fish sauce.
- It was made of clay. This type of pot was made on a potter's wheel, which was invented by the Romans.
- The long pointed base made pouring easier and helped stack pots against each other in racks.
- They were functional storage containers. They were not designed to be kept so many were smashed after use.
- An amphora like this would hold 60 bottles of wine!

Central Themes

- Roman dining (food/drink), Roman trade, Roman pottery

Example 2

Roman Glass Cup Fragment



Questions

- What can you see on this fragment?
- What clues does it give you about the life of the person you think it belongs to?
- What do you think the whole object looked like?
- What do you think it is made from?

Cheat Sheet

- This is a fragment of a Roman glass cup.
- The picture on the surface shows a chariot racing. In Roman times this would have been like Formula 1 racing today.
- The glass cup may have been produced as a souvenir.
- In 2004, archaeologists discovered a chariot racing track in Colchester. It is the only one found in Britain.
- The chariot racing track is called a Circus. It held 8000-10,000 spectators. People would have travelled a long way to come and watch the chariots.

Central Themes

- Roman dining (food/drink), Roman trade, Roman glass, Roman luxury, Roman games

Example 3

Gold Aureus of Claudius



Questions

- What pictures can you see on the object?
- What do you think it is made from?
- Why do you think someone chose to use this material to make it?
- Who do you think used this object?
- What clues does it give you about the life of the person you think it belongs to?

Cheat Sheet

- Coins were used for buying things just like we do today.
- The Emperor's head was stamped on to coins. This coin shows Emperor Claudius, who came to Colchester when the Romans invaded in AD 43.
- The other side of the coin shows the triumphal arch which was built in Rome to commemorate the successful Roman invasion of Britain.
- This coin is made of solid gold. Most coins were made from bronze.
- The main coins were Sestertius and Denarius. This coin is a gold Aureus, so it would have been worth a lot of money.

Central Themes

- Roman invasion, Roman money, Roman Emperors

Example 4

Colchester Vase, Roman Vase



Questions

- What are the pictures of on this object?
- What do you think it was used for?
- How do you think it was made?
- Who do you think used this object?
- What clues does it give you about the life of the person you think it belongs to?

Cheat Sheet

- This vase was made in Colchester and shows gladiators fighting. They rarely fought to the death.
- The four gladiators are named on the vase: Secundus, Mario, Memnon and Valentinus.
- Gladiator tournaments were popular entertainment and sometimes took place in large arenas called amphitheatres, the best known of which is the Colosseum in Rome.
- They also took place in theatres or even the forum (town centre or marketplace).
- Gladiator sweat was considered good for the skin and was sold to ladies.
- This is one of the finest pieces of art to have survived from Roman Britain.

Central Themes

- Roman games, Roman pottery, Roman Colchester

Example 5

Roman Replica Wax Tablet and Stylus



Questions

- What do you think this is made from?
- What do you think it was used for?
- How do you think it was used?
- Who do you think used this object?
- What clues does it give you about the life of the person you think it belongs to?

Cheat Sheet

- This was used for taking notes, by scratching writing into the wax. The writing showed up as the wood under the darker wax was revealed.
- The pointed end of the metal stylus was used to write in wax and the flat end used like a 'rubber'.
- Wax tablets like this were used just like we use paper today. They were used by everyone, for school work, shops and sending messages.
- Not everyone could read and write though.

Central Themes

- Roman governance, Development of writing materials

Example 6

Roman Samian Ware Bowl



Questions

- What do you think it is made from?
- How do you think the pattern on the surface was made?
- What do you think this object was used for?
- Who do you think used this object?
- What clues does it give you about the life of the person you think it belongs to?

Cheat Sheet

- This gloss red pottery is called samian ware. It was made from clay from France and Italy
- Bowls and plates like this were mainly used for decorative purposes. It was like getting your best plates out when you have special guests.
- They could just have a smooth finish or a raised decoration on the surface like on this bowl.
- Decorated bowls were made by pushing clay into moulds to create the patterns on the surface, although some decoration could be done by hand using a tool called a stylus.
- In Colchester local potters made their own version of samian pots using local clay.
- However it was not as good quality as samian ware from France and Italy.

Central Themes

- Roman dining (food/drink), Roman trade, Roman luxury

Example 7

Roman Mortarium



Questions

- What do you think it is made from?
- What do you think it was used for?
- Where do you think this object was used?
- Who do you think used this object?
- What clues does it give you about the life of the person you used it?

Cheat Sheet

- The rough surface inside this bowl was made by pressing small stones into the wet clay before it was fired.
- The rough surface was used to crush herbs and spices when sauces were made in it.
- A 'pestle' was used for crushing herbs on the rough surface on the inside of the mortarium.
- We still use a 'pestle and mortar' today for the same purpose.

Central Themes

- Roman dining (food/drink), Roman trade, Work of Roman slaves

Additional Resources

- Pre/post visit object based classroom activities are available from our website (www.cimuseums.org.uk/schools)
- Object Loan Boxes are available to enhance your classroom activities (www.cimuseums.org.uk/article/10556/School-Loans-Boxes).
- Museum Collections and Learning Curators are available to provide support and additional object information to teachers (email: museums@colchester.gov.uk).
- Please don't hesitate to contact us with any further questions