



# THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN

## Artifacts and Trench Tales

Recommended Grade Levels: 9-12

Course/Content Area: History

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### ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

- What can the examination of an artifact tell you about the past?

**SUMMARY:** As history becomes tangible WWI will come alive in the classroom when students work with artifacts. Using their senses, observations, past knowledge and critical thinking skills students will learn to think like a historian to determine what historic artifacts can tell them about the past.

**STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:** *Gathering, Interpreting and Using Evidence*

-Identify, describe, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, photographs, charts and graphs, artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary and secondary sources).

-Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence.

*Chronological Reasoning*

-Articulate how events are related chronologically to one another in time, and explain the ways in which earlier ideas and events may influence subsequent ideas and events.

-Identify and compare multiple perspectives on a given historical experience.

-Describe, compare, and evaluate multiple historical developments (within societies; across and between societies; in various chronological and geographical contexts).

*Geographic Reasoning*

-Distinguish human activities and human-made features from “environments” (natural events or physical features—land, air, and water—that are not directly made by humans) and describe the relationship between human activities and the environment.

See Appendix B for Common Core and national standards alignment

**TIME NEEDED:** One 50-minute class period

**OBJECTIVES:** *Students will:*

- Be able to discuss the challenges of living in a trench during World War I by analyzing and examining artifacts.
- Examine WWI artifacts and gain insight to technological advances of the times.
- Analyze artifacts by completing an artifact analysis chart.

**THEMES & CONNECTIONS:** *Students should have already learned about:*

- the causes of WWI,
- what life was like in a trench,
- and technological advances prior to and during WWI.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- An assortment of WWI artifacts. (These can easily be purchased on ebay. Artifacts should be representative of trench life – e.g. mess kits, shaving mirrors, haversacks, gas mask bags, identity disks, puttees, etc.) You will need one artifact for each student group and one for teacher modeling.
- Artifact Analysis Worksheet – Appendix A – One for each group.
- Thinking Like a Historian companion PowerPoint
- Pencils

These are not necessary, but will add to the realism of the experience:

- Magnifying Glass
- Archivist Gloves

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Students should have already learned about the causes of WWI, what life was like in a trench, and technological advances prior to and during WWI. These videos can be used for review:

[https://youtu.be/\\_G4ZY66BG38](https://youtu.be/_G4ZY66BG38) Life in a Trench | History

<https://youtu.be/XqIhpYlhZKQ> Why Trenches? - WW1 Uncut: Dan Snow - BBC

<https://youtu.be/H9dgQTM28pM> Gassed: The Toxic Legacy of WWI

<https://youtu.be/vhAxTA1EEaw> A Soldier's Food - WW1 Uncut: Dan Snow – BBC

# LESSON

## PRE-ASSESSMENT:

1. Define “artifact”. Provide some examples. It may help to write student responses on the board so you may refer to them later on in the lesson.
2. Brief discussion: What can you learn from the past by examining an artifact?

## DIRECTIONS:

### Modeling:

3. The teacher will take an artifact (preferably one from WWI) and show it to the class. Have the class ask questions about the artifact. Write student responses on the board. After students have posed a few questions they should try to answer the questions as a class. After some discussion have them take a guess as to what the artifact is. As they answer, be sure they explain their guesses by providing some evidence or knowledge of social studies. Emphasize that students may not be able to figure out what the artifact is. Explain that examining artifacts is a process that starts off by asking questions, making observations, and then doing some research.
4. After the teacher models how to examine an artifact explain that the class will be examining an artifact as a group of historians. Tell them that the objects were carried or used by soldiers during World War I. The teacher will ask the class what was life like for a soldier living and fighting in trenches during World War I. Use the photographs in this lesson’s companion PowerPoint and refer to previous lessons to discuss life in the trenches.

### Cooperative Learning

5. Each group of students will receive an artifact and an Artifact Analysis Worksheet. (Appendix A) Students will use what they have learned about WWI as they examine the artifacts and try to identify them and how they were used.
6. Walk around and check in with groups as they discuss their artifacts.

**Some Pivotal Questions to be used during the lesson:**

- Describe life in a trench.
  - What are some things you are going to need to take care of yourself from day to day in a trench?
  - What were some of the challenges of living in a trench?
  - What do you think the artifact is made of?
  - What are some possible uses of the artifact?
  - How and where was it used?
  - Who used this artifact?
  - Why would they need it?
  - Was this artifact new technology for the time?
  - Is this artifact, or one similar, still used today?
  - What role did my artifact play in historical events?
  - Was there any controversy surrounding it?
  - What sources would you use to help you examine an artifact?
  - What can an artifact tell you about the past?
7. One student from each group will report to the class. Have them tell the class what their group thought the artifact is. At this point the teacher will let them know if they are correct in their findings and provide additional information about the artifact's purpose.
8. If time allows, view A Soldier's Kit - WW1 Uncut: Dan Snow – BBC  
<https://youtu.be/DjqdgGb739w>

**Follow up questions:**

- Why were uniforms important?
- Why did the uniforms change?
- How did the uniforms change?

**Homework Assignment:**

Using the knowledge and information gained from this activity, ask students to answer the following questions in essay form.

- How can artifacts be links to the past? Give an example about the artifact you analyzed.
- What artifacts do you think people in the future will refer to when describing your generation?
- How might the artifacts be perceived?

**POST-ASSESSMENT:**

Exit Ticket:

Students will write a response to the question. This can also be done as a class discussion.

What can the analysis of an artifact tell you about the past?

**MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS****Enrichment Activity:**

- Have students bring an item from home that has some historical or personal significance. This could be something they use every day and feel is critical to present day life or something their family owns that they feel represents a specific time period. Artifacts could include anything from a cell phone to a newspaper from the day they were born to a fondue pot from the 1970s. Students should feel free to be creative with their choices.
- Have them share the item with others in the class and complete an Artifact Analysis Worksheet.

# APPENDIX A:

## Artifact Analysis Worksheet

Designed and developed by:

Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC  
20408. <https://goo.gl/fahdKQ>

### Artifact Analysis Worksheet

#### I. TYPE OF ARTIFACT

Describe the material from which it was made: bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cardboard, cotton, wood, plastic, other material.

#### 2. SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTIFACT

Describe how it looks and feels: shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.



### 3. USES OF THE ARTIFACT

- A. What might it have been used for?
- B. Who might have used it?
- C. Where might it have been used?
- D. When might it have been used?

### 4. WHAT DOES THE ARTIFACT TELL US

- A. What does it tell us about technology of the time in which it was made and used?
- B. What does it tell us about the life and times of the people who made it and used it?
- C. Can you name a similar item today?

## APPENDIX B:

### Standards Alignment

**Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading for students in grades 6–12:**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**Common Core English Language Arts Standards for History/Social Studies for students in grades 11-12**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**National Standards for English Language Arts (Developed by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).)**

6. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

**The National Standards for History are presented by The National Center for History in the Schools**

U.S. History:

NSS-USH.5-12.7 Era 7: The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)

The student in grades 5-12:

Understands the changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I.

World History:

NSS-WH.5-12.8 Era 8: A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement, 1900-1945

The student in grades 5-12:

Understands the causes and global consequences of World War I.

**National Standards for Social Studies Teachers prepared by National Council for the Social Studies**

Thematic Standards:

- I. Culture and Cultural Diversity
- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environments
- IV. Individual Development and Identity
- VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
- IX. Global Connections
- X. Civic Ideals and Practices