
CLOSE LOOKING ACTIVITY

Overview

In this close looking activity inspired by Visual Thinking Strategies, students will have the opportunity to examine primary sources in the form of artifacts up-close. Guided by observation and interpretation questions, students will create meaning, think critically, and practice visual literacy. There are no right or wrong responses, everyone is invited to form and share their own observations and analysis.

Resources:

- Images at the bottom of the Relations, Encounters, Legacies, and Navigation pages. They are artifacts, belongings, art, plaques, and more (example: trade axe, telescope, etc.). Click on the images to learn more about what is pictured.

Close Looking Activity

Either follow this activity together as a class or break into groups and assign an image to each group. For either option, assign someone to be the facilitator to ask the questions and respectfully acknowledge and paraphrase each response.

Observe, Wonder, Think

1. Take some time to look at one of the images in silence. The focus will be on the image, but reading the descriptive label can provide some extra insight
2. Begin observing the artifact by asking questions:
 - a) “What do you observe about the artifact?”
 - b) Paraphrase what is said. Encourage someone to expand on their observations by asking “What do you see that makes you say that?”
 - c) If the conversation slows, ask “What more can we find?”
3. Draw the image with as much detail as you can.

Possible prompt questions:

- How is it decorated?
- What material(s) is it made of?
- Does this object have a sound?
- Does it have moving parts?
- Is there evidence of use or wear?

- Is there evidence of who made it?
- Is there evidence of breakage or repair?
- Do you think this is a unique item? Or do you think there are many copies?
- What does the object tell you about the maker's skill?

Analyze

After close looking, split into pairs or groups to further interpret one of the artifacts with deeper context. In this part of the activity, students consider what they observed about the image as well as their knowledge about the historical context.

- Who used it? What did they use it for? Why do you think they valued this object?
- How does the object contribute to your knowledge of this time period? To the culture?
- How does this object compare to similar objects from other cultures and time periods?
- How has this object's importance changed over time?
- How does the object have a lasting legacy on today?