

Object Observation Activity for Self-Guided Tours

“Objects naturally invite high level thinking and provide an authentic context in which to cultivate it.” [1]

Our students experience a highly visual world. Looking closely at everyday objects around them stimulates curiosity as well as *critical* thinking skills. Objects, or in this case picture of objects, can be used effectively with students of any age. [2]

These Object Observation (OO) photographs from the village at Mystic Seaport (accessible from link at the end of this document) offer students an opportunity for in depth examination and questioning before, during or after a visit *to the museum*. Working collaboratively, with facilitation from an adult, students closely examine an object; moving from concrete observations to more complex and subtle ones. Questions may arise organically as students observe, or can be prompted by an adult. The important thing to remember is that the process of observing and problem solving builds critical thinking skills. While for each object there are known facts, this “answer” is not the end goal.

Suggestions for Use:

Inquiry Questions:

These questions are intended to foster close attention and stimulate student questions and discussion, rather than to arrive at one “right” answer.

Examples:

- *What do you notice? Tell me more.*
- *What do you wonder about this? What would you like to know?*
- *What clues does the object give you?*
- *What do you guess/predict? Why do you think so? (Support with evidence from your observation)*
- *Do others agree/disagree? (Use evidence in your argument)*

Before students visit:

Using pictures before they visit leads to the “joy of recognition” once on the grounds, as well as getting students to think about the object’s story before actually seeing it.

Examples:

- *Close looking: Class discussion of one object using questions above*
- *Small group observation: Discussion and sharing among students*
- *Individual: Drawing an object to encourage careful attention*
- *Examine and sort: Which types of objects might be found in the same place? Why do you think so?*
- *What’s the story? Based on student hypothesis, create a story around it, its creation, use or history.*

For self-guided groups on the grounds:

Students and adults are given a map and 3-4 pictures. The students and leader either discuss where they might find the object OR go directly to the building # indicated and use discussion questions. These questions should be discussed among the students first, perhaps asking an interpreter for additional information once they’ve discussed their ideas. The longer students are allowed to focus on the object generally leads to richer questions at a higher level.

Post-Visit:

- **Back track activity: The global economy now and then:** Choose an object (either existing photo or one taken on the trip) to deconstruct-how was it created? What is it made of? Where did those ingredients come from?
- **Revisiting and remembering-** student writing
- **Two Lies and a Truth-** Student teams create short stories to tell their classmates about an object-one story is true and two are false. Using what they can observe about the object the audience then decides which is true and gives their reasons why.

[CLICK HERE to view and download Object Observation Photographs](#)

(Hit “Ctrl” on your keyboard and hold down as you click on the link.)

[1] Tishman, Shari. “The Object of Their Attention.” *Educational Leadership* 65.5 (2008): 44-46. *Educational Leadership: Teaching Students to Think: The Object of Their Attention*. ASCD, Feb. 2008. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb08/vol65/num05/The-Object-of-Their-Attention.aspx>>

[2] Ibid