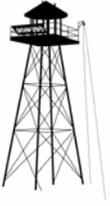


QUESTIONING ARTIFACTS

Teaching with Museum Collections



Overview

The *Questioning Artifacts* curriculum introduces middle school students to an archeological inquiry approach to the analysis of the virtual Museum Collection of Alcatraz. Three sequential lessons, entailing four or five 45-minute class periods, employ student questions that build on the student's prior knowledge of the former penitentiary. In-depth research and discussion reinforce the unique background and experience of each student. Using the *essential question* format as an organizing tool, teachers facilitate student investigations of their own questions. Students experience how research influences their understanding of history as they pose new questions for their future research.

The essential question for the unit is: *How can artifacts help us understand the past and influence our future?*

During *Questioning Artifacts*, students apply archeological methods to explore the complex eras of Alcatraz history. Students encounter research challenges similar to an archeologist digging through layers of earth, excavating artifacts and reconstructing cultures based on often-incomplete material evidence. Students gain a more complete understanding of these challenges, and of the significance of Alcatraz in the American experience, through their online investigation of the museum collections of the three major eras, or layers, of Alcatraz history. Using the archeologist's method of making detailed observations of artifacts, then drawing cultural inferences based on their observations, students compare and contrast their questions and conclusions with other student researchers, leading to a deeper appreciation of Alcatraz history, and how museum collections are an integral part of such discovery.

Museum Collections used in this lesson:

Digital Photographs of the artifacts used in this lesson can be found in the online museum exhibit at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/alca/imgGal.html>.

This exhibit features the extensive collections from Alcatraz Island, also known as "The Rock."

These collections represent the compelling history of Alcatraz. Within the collections are artifacts made by inmates, historic photographs, historic documents, materials related to escape attempts, inmate artwork, and items used by correctional officers. Also included are artifacts from the lesser-known parts of Alcatraz history: the military era, when Alcatraz functioned as a heavily-armed fort and military prison, and the Indian Occupation of Alcatraz, when the abandoned prison was taken by Native Americans in a dramatic example of social protest.

Below are examples of artifacts that represent the diverse layers of history on Alcatraz Island. In this unit, students will select their own artifacts. Students will complete charts for each artifact through their own observations. These observations will then allow them to make educated inferences about the island's history.



Military



Federal Prison



Indian Occupation

For example, if a student selects the photograph of a cap pouch (above left), they would describe it and how it illustrates the island's history. The student might describe the artifact as a black leather pouch. Then, they may infer that it stores items important to a soldier and consider the importance of the required daily uniform pieces.

The prison cell key above, from the federal penitentiary era, could represent incarceration of the prisoners, safety, power, and security for the guards.

The eagle (located above the prison entrance) is from the Indian Occupation of 1969-71, and is the United States of America's symbol of freedom. Here it represents the occupiers' desire for freedom and self-determination.

National Standards in United States and World History – Standards in Historical Thinking - Grades 5-12 (<http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/thinking5-12.html>):

Standard 1 - Chronological Thinking

- A. Distinguish between past, present and future time.

Standard 2 – Historical Comprehension

- D. Evidence of historical perspectives.

Standard 3 – Historical Analysis and Interpretation

- A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.
- D. Consider multiple perspectives.
- J. Hypothesize the influence of the past.

Standard 4 - Historical Research Capabilities

- A. Formulate historical questions.
- D. Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of time and place, and construct a sound historical interpretation.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will develop a better understanding of how artifacts can tell a story by using objects from their own lives and having their peers make observations and inferences regarding those objects.

Standards 3A, 3J

2. Students will pool their collective knowledge, opinions and assumptions about Alcatraz so that they can later reflect about how their thoughts and ideas have changed and evolved throughout the lesson.

Standards 1A, 2D

3. Students will demonstrate the ability to identify the multiple layers and perspectives of history on Alcatraz Island by making observations and inferences regarding the artifacts in the online museum collection.

Standards 3D, 4A, 4D

4. Students will express the conclusions they draw as they hone their ability to make historical inquiries.
Standards 3J, 4D

5. Students will determine how they can debunk myths and stereotypes about a culture or historic resource.
Standards 4A & 4D

Background and Historical Context:

Alcatraz began its history as a military fortress and prison during the California Gold Rush, and protected the San Francisco Bay from the 1850s until 1933. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, it opened as a maximum security federal prison to incarcerate notorious inmates. Alcatraz served as a symbol of freedom to American Indians when it was occupied for 19 months from 1969-1971. The island became a part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in 1972.

For more information on the history of Alcatraz visit the National Park Service at:

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/alcatraz/mil.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/alca/historyculture/index.htm>

Materials Used in this Unit Plan:

- Personal Object – each student will be required to bring in a small, personal object
- Access to computers and Internet
- Definition of archeology from the vocabulary list
- *How to read an Object* chart – One copy for teacher reference. Download from:
www.nps.gov/history/museum/tmc/docs/How_to_Read_an_Object.pdf
- *Observation or Inference* worksheet – One per student. Download from:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Observation_worksheet.pdf
- *Military Period Artifact Chart* - One per student. Download from:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Military_artifact_chart.pdf
- *Federal Prison Era Artifact Chart* - One per student. Download from:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Federal_Prison_Artifact_chart.pdf
- *Indian Occupation Artifact Chart* - One per student. Download from:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Indian_Occupation_artifact_chart.pdf
- *Alcatraz Artifact Inquiry* worksheet – One per student. Download from:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-artifact_inquiry_worksheet.pdf
- Pencils
- Chalk or white board
- Flip chart paper
- Paper for student drawings, notes and reflections
- Crayons or colored pencils

Vocabulary

Archeological resource - Any resource that provides additional information for finding clues about the way people live.

Archeology - The scientific study of the life and culture of peoples through artifacts and ecofacts.

Artifact - An object made by humans that provides clues about past ways of life.

Bureau of Prisons - The federal agency that administers federal prisons.

Catalog number - A unique identification number assigned to each item in a museum collection. Since the items found in the Alcatraz online exhibit are all part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area collections, the catalog numbers include the four letter designation (GOGA) for this national park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Context - The relationship of an object to its surroundings, and to other artifacts or ecofacts near it.

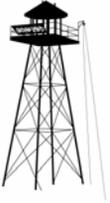
Culture - The way of life of a particular group.

Ecofact - Things found on an archeological dig that give information about past environments, such as seeds, soil and animal bones.

Inference - A conclusion made from observations.

National Park Service - The federal agency that preserves and protects national park lands and National Historic Landmarks.

Observation - Recognizing or noting a fact or occurrence.



Lesson 1

Title: Artifact Interview

Length of Lesson: 45 minutes

Essential Question: *How does my stuff tell you who I am?*

Objectives:

- Students will develop a better understanding of how artifacts can tell a story by using objects from their own lives and having their peers make observations and inferences regarding those objects.
Standards 3A, 3J

Resources/ Materials:

- Personal Object
- *How to Read an Object* chart for teacher reference:
http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/tmc/docs/How_to_Read_an_Object.pdf
- *Observation or Inference* worksheet for each student:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Observation_worksheet.pdf
- Pencil
- Definition of archeology from the vocabulary list, written on flip chart paper for class viewing
- Blank paper for each student to list observations of student object

Procedure (a day before conducting this lesson):

- Ask each student to bring to class a personal object that represents his/her life.
- **Teacher Tip:** You may want to put a limit on the type, size or value of the object. Let students know that someone else in the class will examine their object.

Procedure (the day of lesson 1):

- Activity 1. Constructing a definition of Archeology (10 min)
 - ✓ Write the term "archeology" on the board and brainstorm as a class what students think archeology is and why it may be meaningful.
 - ✓ After the class has exhausted all their thoughts and ideas on the subject, place the definition from the vocabulary list on the board and compare this definition with the one the class created.

- Activity 2. Observation or inference? (15 min)

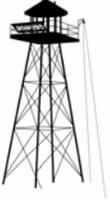
- ✓ Discuss briefly the definitions and differences between observation and inference.
- ✓ Have students complete the *Observation or Inference* worksheet. Review the worksheet as a class.

When discussing item #11 of the worksheet, ask students the following questions:

1. Do you think this photo is a complete representation of Alcatraz life in the 1860s?
2. How are our inferences influenced by what is missing in this photo?

- Activity 3. Pair Share -- Personal object analysis (20 min)

- ✓ Select several questions from the *How to Read an Object* chart, and post them on the board or flip chart paper. The questions you choose may be based on the types of personal objects the students have brought to class.
- ✓ Assign pairs of students to work together. Have the students take out their personal object that represents their life. Have each pair of students spend about 10 minutes analyzing the other student's object. Have students jot down as many observations as they can about the other student's object. Write the following key questions on the board to help guide the students' analyses:
 1. What are my observations of this object?
 2. What are my inferences about this object?
 3. What does this object say about this student?
- ✓ In addition to the three questions above, direct students to look at the additional object chart questions you posted to help the students generate observations.
- ✓ Ask some of the students to present the object observations and inferences, and what they learned from analyzing the personal object of the other student.
- ✓ Ask students to explain how well their stuff represented them. Then pose the following questions:
 1. How does our stuff tell a story about us as a class?
 2. Is this the story we want our stuff to tell?
 3. How can we change our stuff to tell a different story?



Lesson 2

Title: Alcatraz Assumptions

Length of Lesson: 45 minutes

Essential Question: *What do I already know about Alcatraz?*

Objectives:

- Students will pool their collective knowledge, opinions and assumptions about Alcatraz so that they can later reflect about how these thoughts and ideas have evolved. **Standards 1A & 2D**

Resources/ Materials:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Crayons
- Flip chart paper or blackboard space

Procedure:

- Activity 1. Prior knowledge of Alcatraz (30 Min)
 - ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the students' prior knowledge of the island. Record the students' statements regarding Alcatraz on the board or flip chart paper for the duration of the unit.
 - ✓ After a brief discussion, give each student a blank piece of paper on which they can draw their impressions of what Alcatraz represents to them.
 - ✓ Have several students present their drawings to the class and briefly describe how their drawings represent Alcatraz.
 - ✓ Display these images in the classroom for the duration of this unit. They will be used again during Lesson 3.
- Activity 2. Follow-up discussion (15 min)
 - ✓ Discuss with students how they think a museum collection might help them learn more about Alcatraz. Remind students how well their stuff represented them. Ask the following question:

What kinds of artifacts do you think you would see in the Alcatraz museum collection?
 - ✓ Record student responses for future reference.



Lesson 3

Title: An Archeological Approach to Alcatraz History

Length of Lesson: Two 45-minute class sessions, and one homework assignment

Essential Question: *How do artifacts help me to see the layers of Alcatraz history?*

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to identify the multiple layers and perspectives of history of Alcatraz Island by researching the artifacts in the online museum collection. **Standards 3D, 4A, 4D**
- Students will express the conclusions they draw as they hone their ability to make historical inquiries. **Standards 3J, 4A, 4D**
- Students will determine how they can debunk myths and stereotypes about a culture or historic resource. **Standards 4A, 4D**

Resources/ Materials:

- Artifact charts for each layer of history:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Military_artifact_chart.pdf
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Federal_Prison_Artifact_chart.pdf
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-Indian_Occupation_artifact_chart.pdf
- Alcatraz artifact inquiry work sheet:
http://www.nps.gov/goga/forteachers/upload/Questioning_Artifacts-artifact_inquiry_worksheet.pdf
- Computer/Internet
- Online Museum Collections, including multimedia slide shows, sound clips and virtual tours:
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/alca/overview.html>
- Paper for student drawings
- Pencils, crayons or colored pencils

Procedure for first part of lesson 3:

- Activity 1. Investigation of artifacts from three layers of Alcatraz history (5 Min)
 - ✓ Ask students to recall how their stuff told them a story about them. Explain to the class how they will now use artifacts from Alcatraz to make similar observations and inferences about the different people who lived on the island.
 - ✓ Distribute each of the three artifact charts to each student.
- Activity 2. Online research assignment (20 Min)
 - ✓ Have students visit the virtual museum collection for Alcatraz at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/alca/imgGal.html>. They should select two artifacts from each period of history (six artifacts total).
 - ✓ Students then complete an artifact chart for each of the three historic periods.
- Activity 3. Discussion and analysis of Alcatraz artifacts (20 Min)
 - ✓ Teacher assembles the class into groups of four to five students each.
 - ✓ Students compare the artifacts they chose and discuss the following key questions:
 1. Did I choose the same artifacts as everyone else in my group?
 2. How did I go about choosing my artifacts?
 3. How do the objects I selected influence my inferences about Alcatraz history?
 - ✓ Students present their findings to the class on one of their selected artifacts. The findings should include the layer of history of the artifact, its physical description, and inferences about the people and culture of that time.

Procedure for second part of Lesson 3:

- Activity 1. Further online research (20 min)
 - ✓ Students revisit their questions from their artifact charts and select one artifact they wish to investigate further.
 - ✓ Provide each student with an Alcatraz artifact inquiry worksheet and go over the assignment with the class.

- ✓ Have students investigate their artifacts more deeply by going to the following three web sites: <http://www.nps.gov/archive/alcatraz/mil.html>
<http://www.nps.gov/alca/historyculture/index.htm>
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/alca/overview.html>

Encourage students to view slide shows and multimedia segments.

- Activity 2. Re-visiting our impressions of Alcatraz (15 min)
 - ✓ Have students look at their drawings of their impressions of Alcatraz from Lesson 2. Then have the students make a new drawing of Alcatraz.
 - ✓ Have students compare their new drawings to their original ones.
- Activity 3. Analyzing our new impressions of Alcatraz – small group discussion (10 min)
 - ✓ Working in small groups, have students discuss the following questions:
 1. Does my new drawing appear different from the earlier one? If so, how?
 2. How did my research influence my impression of Alcatraz?
 - ✓ Have each group of students report to the rest of the class the key points of their discussions.
- Homework. Written reflection
 - ✓ As an assessment tool, ask students to prepare written responses to the following questions:
 1. What did I learn about Alcatraz as a result of my research?
 2. How could I go about researching my new question about Alcatraz history?
 3. How do the objects included in a museum collection influence my inferences about the story of a place or people?
 4. How do the objects omitted from a museum collection influence my inferences about the story of a place or a people?