



Artifact Activity

Sharing artifacts that have meaning in their lives gives students a chance to talk about memories and share symbols of their culture with others. This activity works well with all levels since it gives students a chance to talk as much or as little as they can since much of the message is carried by the item itself. Hearing about artifacts important to others invites students to ask authentic questions, a process that builds community. From a broader civics perspective, artifacts that have personal meaning can extend to exploring cultural icons that are displayed in one's own city and to discussing national symbols such as flags or key monuments. Students can explore to what extent their own cultures are represented in museums or in public art and what can be done to create greater awareness of the contributions that different cultural groups have made to civic life. In classes where students differ by ethnicity, artifact activities provide a glimpse into world cultures and history.

TEACHER NOTES:

Steps in the Process

1. Use a prompt to introduce the idea of artifacts to the group. Consider both well-known traditional icons associated with the culture of your students (craft, paintings, sculptures) and everyday items. Discuss these items with the class, asking questions such as “what are they? Where do they come from? What do they do?”.
2. Explain the concept of artifacts as having both cultural and personal meaning and bring in an item that has memory for you to share with the students. Invite students to ask you questions and tell them more about both the history and the meaning of the item.
3. Ask each student to bring in an item from home and be prepared to share the item with the class. Ask students to focus their explanations on three simple questions such as, “what is it?” “what is it used for?” and “what are your memories?” Invite students to share ideas and ask each other questions.
4. Take pictures of individual students and their artifacts and ask them to write a few sentences or paragraphs about the item and the meaning it has for them. Display pictures and writings for others to see.

Civic participation:

- Ask students to discuss the cultures represented in their community and the artifacts that represent them, in terms of both traditional and popular cultures.
- Investigate cultural artifacts that are on display in your town. Arrange a visit to a museum or gallery. Ask students to predict what they might see and have brainstorm questions they might ask. If you know what artists will be represented, create a web search to help students become familiar with the art.

Examples of Student Work:

- [“Artifact Activity”](#)

Materials:

- Actual artifacts or pictures; cultural or national icons
- Personal artifact that the teacher brings from home
- Artifacts that students bring to share
- Materials (paper, colored pens, pictures, photographs etc) to create culture books
- Technology needed for presentations (video; Power Point)

Skills Being Developed

Language and Literacy Skills:

Literacy skills

- writing short descriptive paragraphs and personal narratives
- reading what others have written
- developing interview questions

Oral communication skills

- social interaction skills (asking and answering questions)
- Short presentations to the class

SCANS/Essential Skills

Essential Skills Related to Project work

- Working as part of a team to create a product
- Presentation skills

Technology Skills

- Internet research to explore cultural icons
- Word to write up paragraphs
- Power Point

Extension Activities:

- For family literacy programs, ask parents to think about what they want their children to know about these artifacts. Work with the child educator to create books for children that contain stories that center around memories central to the artifact written by parents and illustrated by children (see
- Ask students to interview family members to flesh out information about their artifacts. Create memory books based on oral histories.
- Have students explore and research cultures in their community and prepare a PowerPoint to share with others.
- Invite students to create a “culture museum” on their computers that includes both pictures and sound. Use visuals and music at your next pot luck.
- Explore software such as Encarta Encyclopedia (<http://encarta.msn.com>)
- Create a [museum treasure hunt](#), and have students use hints to identify a particular piece of art (e.g., find a painting that uses the Aztec calendar and write down the name of the artist)
- Consider having students write personal poems and produce a book.
- Discuss archeology with students and introduce the idea of using artifacts to examine a lost culture. Ask students to bring in items from home that would give scientists a good sense of who we are and how we live in the 21st century. Consider “trashcan archeology”. Invite students to investigate what is left in school trash cans at the end of the day. Have them write about the significance of each item and what it says about the daily life in the school. Have them write an article from the perspective of a scientist who has just dug up these materials.

Follow-up: After discussing scenarios, we invited representatives from various social service agencies to talk with students about community issues. Students discussed topics they wanted to see addressed and prepared questions to ask. We then followed up with a unit on Small Claim's court. We also talked with students about the different levels at which laws are created and did some exercises that have them explore which laws are made on the federal level and which laws get determined on the state or city level. We also introduced students to the ideas in the Declaration of Universal Human Rights to discuss rights that are not associated with being a citizen of a particular country. From there, we introduced [quotes of notable people](#) addressing issues of human rights, including quotes by Zapata, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Ann Frank and others.

Student Artifacts



Juana Pasillas

Yo soy Juana nací en 1962 en ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Me case hoy tengo 3 hermosas hijas. Conservo este sartén como recuerdo de una bajilla nueva que me dio mi mama antes de casarme y en ella hice el primer guisado para esposo mi meta en la vida es ser una mejor madre y una resignada esposa.

Juana Pasillas

I am Juana Pasillas. I was born in Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua. I got married in 1986 and right now I have three beautiful girls. This pan means a lot to me because my mother had the whole set of pans. She told me when you get married I'll give it to you and she did it. So the first pan were I cook for the third time to my husband. It's been 16 years and I still have it. My goal in life is to be a good mother and a good wife.



Maribel

Soy origin aria de Cd. Delicias Chih. Méx. Mi reliquary son 3 fotos. Que guardo pues son muy especial para mi, 2 fotos son mías, una de ellas me la tomaron a los 10 meses de nacida. El vestido que traía puesto lo mando hacer mi mama de su bata de maternidad que uso cuando estaba embarazada de mi. La otra foto me la tomo mi papa en el campo, tenia aproximadamente 3 anos, y la otra foto fue la ultima foto que me tome con mi papa.

Maribel

I am originally from Delicias Chih., Mexico. My artifacts are 3 pictures that are very special to me. In one of them I am 10 months old. The dress I am wearing my mother had made out of her maternity robe. The other, my father took of me in the fields I was about 3. The last one was the last photo I took with my father.