B.D. Minard
Illwaco Heritage Museum

Teaching and Learning with Material Culture

Why do we save things?

"The women sat among the doomed things,
turning them over and looking past them and back…
no, there isn't room…
How can we live without our lives?
How will we know it's us without our past?"

John Steinbeck

What is an artifact?

An artifact is any object made by or used by human beings.

What is the value of an artifact?

50% = fact that it exists and still survives.
50% = the story, place, names or events it represents.

What is a replica?

A replica is a copy or model of an artifact. It is made by a contemporary craftsman.

Reading an object.

"…everything that someone makes, or decides to use, is a crystallization of that person's choices, ideas and values pursued within the context of a society that offers certain expectations, limits and possibilities. I also know that a careful, critical 'reading' of an object can uncover at least some of those choices values, ideas, expectations, limits and possibilities."

John Hennigar – Shuh

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Become an Investigator.

Object-centered learning does not depend on your expertise with the item. It relies on using what you already know to ask questions about the object in order to gain more knowledge.

Take a Closer Look.

Ask questions:

Of what kind of materials is this object made?
How was this object made? Who made this object? Why?
Who used this object? How was this object used?
Does the design of the object suit the purpose and/or use?
Are there any marks, stains, changes, damages, alternations on this object?
What size is the object?
Is the object decorated? How? Why?
Is this an item a person might have one or several? Why?
Are other items made out of the same materials? How?
Is this object used with other items? How?
Is this object made by using other items as part of the process? How?
Is this object used to make other items? How?
Are any items today similar to this object?
What are the similarities or differences? Why?

Piece Together the Bigger Picture.