

# Looking at Our Own Cultural Artifacts

## Overview

There is no single objective way to describe why an artifact is significant to a culture. Objects are important to different people for different reasons. To make this idea personal, students will be invited to bring to class important cultural artifacts from their own lives. Each object will be “interpreted” by a student anthropologist who will make hypotheses regarding the importance of this object. The student anthropologist will also determine what this artifact says about the culture of the owner. The owner of the artifact will get a chance to tell their actual story.

## Concepts

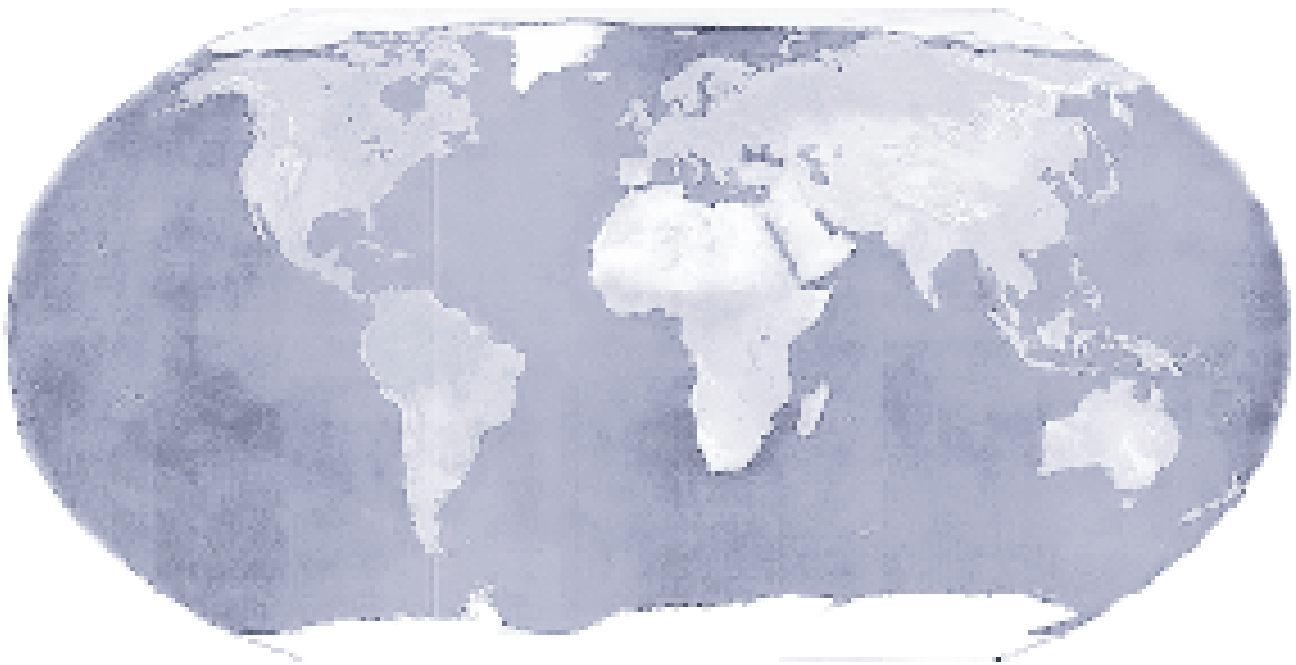
Cultural and personal artifacts of value; creating hypotheses related to value and significance.

## Objectives

- ▶ Distinguish between objects of personal and cultural importance.
- ▶ Select objects from home of cultural importance.
- ▶ Observe and analyze an object of cultural significance and determine what you can about the culture it comes from: its values, beliefs, worldview.
- ▶ After listening to descriptions of the role of the artifact in the culture, modify your own conclusions to include new information.

# Contents at a Glance

Standards and Assessment . . . . .	3
National Science Education Standards . . . . .	4
Standards for the English Language Arts . . . . .	5
Curriculum Standards for Social Studies . . . . .	6
Teacher Strategies . . . . .	10
Readings	
Letter to Students . . . . .	11



# Standards and Assessment

## Standards

The materials in this unit are closely correlated to the National Science Education Standards, Standards for the English Language Arts, and Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. A listing of the standards follows. A check mark indicates the standards that are addressed.

## Assessment

This unit provides tasks that can be used to assess students' understanding of the information presented. Use the following questions to assess each student's reasoning, responses, understanding, and interaction.

- How well did the student use his or her observation skills?
- How well did the student demonstrate an understanding of the information provided?
- How well did the student communicate the observations he or she made?
- How well did the student explain concepts and ideas to other students?
- Was the student able to use evidence to support his or her conclusions?
- How well did the student complete the tasks outlined?
- How well did the student participate in all aspects of cooperative work?

# National Science Education Standards

GRADES K-4

National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment, National Research Council

Science as Inquiry	
Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry	✓
Understanding about scientific inquiry	
Science in Personal and Social Perspective	
Characteristics and changes in populations	
Types of resources	✓
Changes in environments	
Science and technology in local challenges	
History and Nature of Science	
Science as a human endeavor	

# National Science Education Standards

GRADES 5-8

National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment, National Research Council

Science as Inquiry	
Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry	✓
Understanding about scientific inquiry	
Science in Personal and Social Perspectives	
Populations, resources, and environments	
Science and technology in society	
History and Nature of Science	
Science as a human endeavor	
Nature of science	

# Standards for the English Language Arts

GRADES K-8

National Council of Teachers of English

Students read to build an understanding of texts, themselves, and the cultures of the United States and the world.	✓
Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.	
Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.	✓
Students employ a wide range of writing strategies to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.	
Students apply knowledge of language structure, conventions, and figurative language to create, critique, and discuss texts.	
Students conduct research; generate ideas and questions and pose problems; gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources; communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.	✓
Students use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information.	
Students develop a respect for diversity in language use.	✓

# Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

GRADES K–4

National Council for the Social Studies

<b>Culture and Cultural Diversity</b>	
Explore and describe similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures address similar human needs and concerns.	✓
Give examples of how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.	✓
Describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music, and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence behavior of people living in a particular culture.	✓
Compare ways in which people from different cultures think about and deal with their physical environment and social conditions.	
Give examples and describe the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups.	✓
<b>Time, Continuity, and Change</b>	
Demonstrate an understanding that different people may describe the same event or situation in diverse ways, citing reasons for the differences in views.	✓
Demonstrate an ability to use correctly vocabulary associated with time such as past, present, future, and long ago; read and construct simple timelines, identify examples of change; and recognize examples of cause and effect relationships.	
Demonstrate an understanding that people in different times and places view the world differently.	
<b>People, Places, and Environments</b>	
Construct and use mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size and shape.	
Interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the Earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs.	
Use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as atlases, databases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps to generate, manipulate, and interpret information.	
Locate and distinguish among varying landforms and geographic features, such as mountains, plateaus, islands, and oceans.	
Describe and speculate about physical system changes, such as seasons, climate and weather, and the water cycle.	

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies	GRADES K-4
continued	
Describe how people create places that reflect ideas, personality, culture, and wants and needs as they design homes, playgrounds, classrooms, and the like.	
Examine the interaction of human beings and their physical environment, the use of land, building of cities, and ecosystem changes in selected locales and regions.	
Explore ways that the Earth's physical features have changed over time in the local region and beyond and how these changes may be connected to one another.	
<b>Individual Development and Identity</b>	
Describe personal connections to place—especially place as associated with immediate surroundings.	✓
Identify and describe ways family groups and community influence the individual's daily life and personal choices.	✓
<b>Individuals, Groups, and Institutions</b>	
Identify roles as learned behavior patterns in group situations such as student, family member, peer play group member, or club member.	
Give examples of and explain group and institutions influences such as religious beliefs, laws, and peer pressure, on people, events, and elements of culture.	✓
<b>Production, Distribution, and Consumption</b>	
Give examples that show how scarcity and choice govern our economic decisions.	
Distinguish between needs and wants.	
Describe how we depend upon workers with specialized jobs and the ways in which they contribute to the production and exchange of goods and services.	
<b>Science, Technology, and Society</b>	
Identify and describe examples in which science and technology have changed the lives of people, such as in homemaking, childcare, work, transportation, and communication.	
<b>Global Connections</b>	
Explain ways that language art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements may facilitate global understanding or lead to misunderstanding.	✓
Explore causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as pollution and endangered species.	

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies continued	GRADES 5–8
<b>Culture and Cultural Diversity</b>	
Compare similarities and differences in the ways cultures meet human needs and concerns.	✓
Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people of diverse cultural perspectives.	✓
Explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.	✓
Explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.	✓
<b>Time, Continuity, and Change</b>	
Demonstrate an understanding that different scholars may describe the same event or situation in different ways but must provide reasons or evidence for their views.	✓
Identify and use key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.	
<b>People, Places, and Environments</b>	
Elaborate mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size and shape.	
Create, interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the Earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs.	
Use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as aerial photographs, satellite images, geographic information systems (GIS), map projects, and cartography to generate, manipulate, and interpret information such as atlases, data bases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and more.	
Locate and describe varying landforms and geographic features, such as mountains, plateaus, islands, rain forests, deserts, and oceans, and explain their relationship within the ecosystem.	
Describe physical system changes such as seasons, climate and weather, and the water cycle and identify geographic patterns associated with them.	
Describe how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like.	
Examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes.	✓



Curriculum Standards for Social Studies continued	GRADES 5–8
Describe ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.	✓
Observe and speculate about social and economic effects of environmental changes and crises resulting from phenomena such as floods, storms, and drought.	
<b>Individual Development and Identity</b>	
Describe personal connections to place – as associated with community, nation, and the world	✓
Describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.	✓
Identify and describe ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.	✓
<b>Individuals, Groups, and Institutions</b>	
Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.	
Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture.	✓
<b>Production, Distribution, and Consumption</b>	
Give and explain examples of ways that economic systems structure choices about how goods and services are to be produced and distributed.	
Describe the role of specialization and exchange in the economic process.	
Explain and illustrate how values and beliefs influence different economic decisions.	
<b>Science, Technology, and Society</b>	
Examine and describe the influence of culture on scientific and technological choices and advancement, such as in transportation, medicine, and warfare.	
Show through specific examples how science and technology have changed people's perceptions of the social and natural world, such as in their relationship to the land, animal life, family life, and economic needs, wants, and security.	
Seek reasonable and ethical solutions to problems that arise when scientific advancements and social norms or values come into conflict.	
<b>Global Connections</b>	
Describe instances in which language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding.	✓
Explore causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as health, security, resource allocation, economic development, and environmental quality.	

# Teacher Strategies

## MATERIALS

**Letter to Students.** All students are invited to bring in an artifact that has personal cultural significance (see guidelines in the letter).

## PROCEDURE

1. Before beginning the unit, distribute the Letter to Students and read it together as a class. Students should understand that they are asked to bring an object from home that has cultural significance. Make sure to explain the difference between personally significant and culturally significant. This artifact should speak to their family, their town, their beliefs, traditions, etc. Some examples might be a doll from the country their parents came from, a postcard from a grandparent, a baby shoe, a book, a recipe, a cookie, etc. Stress that students should not bring in anything valuable or anything that can be easily broken.

2. On the day of the activity, each student should bring an object to class in a bag that keeps it hidden from the rest of the class. Students will privately put their objects on a table. Once everyone has placed their cultural artifact on the table, each student will choose an object that seems interesting to them.

*Note: Consider bringing in extra artifacts to ensure that all students will have one.*

3. Write the following questions on the board: *Why did you choose this object? Describe what you see. What can you infer about the person who brought the object?* Invite students to sit in a circle, and one by one to discuss as anthropologists, the artifact they have chosen, explaining why they chose the object, what the object is, and what they think it says about the person who brought it in. Firm ground rules will need to be set initially so that no stereotypes are made and no negative comments are permitted.

4. After the anthropologist has presented, the owner of the object should be given a chance to describe why the object is important to them, correcting any misinterpretations that may have arisen. The class then discusses the similarities and differences between the owner's story and that of the anthropologist.



FROM THE DESK OF

---

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Students:

As a part of our study of material culture (things people make), we are asking you to take part in a special anthropology research experiment. In order to make this experiment work, you must bring in one object from home that has cultural significance. Keep in mind that cultural significance is not the same thing as personal significance. Your object should either have importance to your family, your town, or your country, or represent something about your beliefs, values, or traditions.

When choosing an object, consider the fact that you must bring this object to school and allow other people to handle it. Therefore, do not bring in an artifact that is valuable or easily broken.

For the purpose of this activity, it is important that you keep your artifact a secret from the other members of the class. When you bring it in to school, keep it in a bag or case that is not see-through and do not take it out until I tell you to do so.

Please remember to be respectful of differences at all times and honor everyone's cultural traditions equally. Dealing with people's cultural values can be a highly sensitive activity.

Happy artifact hunting!