

Teachers' Notes

Why use Objects in History teaching?

We are surrounded by objects, we use them every day without noticing or thinking about them and understanding this helps us to look at objects from history used in the same way and start to make deductions about them. By helping learners to understand objects used today we can help them make links with objects from the past and more importantly with the people who used them.

Objects can tell us stories about the 'invisible' people from history- those who weren't important enough to be written about and who might otherwise be unrepresented in histories. If it is possible for pupils to handle real objects this can give a direct connection to the past for them and they can start to imagine the people who made, used and perhaps lost the object. Objects in museum cases which can't be touched can still tell their stories learning to use them to think about the past helps pupils to develop a range of skills:

- Observation
- Description
- Deduction
- Comparison
- Understanding structure and function
- Understanding materials
- Questioning

Discussion of a range of concepts can be sparked by using objects

- Beauty v utility
- Change through time
- Technological advancements
- Meaning behind decoration
- Symbolism
- Selection of materials
- Taste and fashion

This resource will give you some ideas for classroom sessions to help your pupils develop confidence in learning from objects. You can find and download activities to copy and use during a visit in the Pupils' booklet 'What can we find out from objects in the Museum?'

The last section in this booklet describes an approach, 'Take one Object,' developed by the National Gallery and used by some museums and suggests an object for you to focus on.

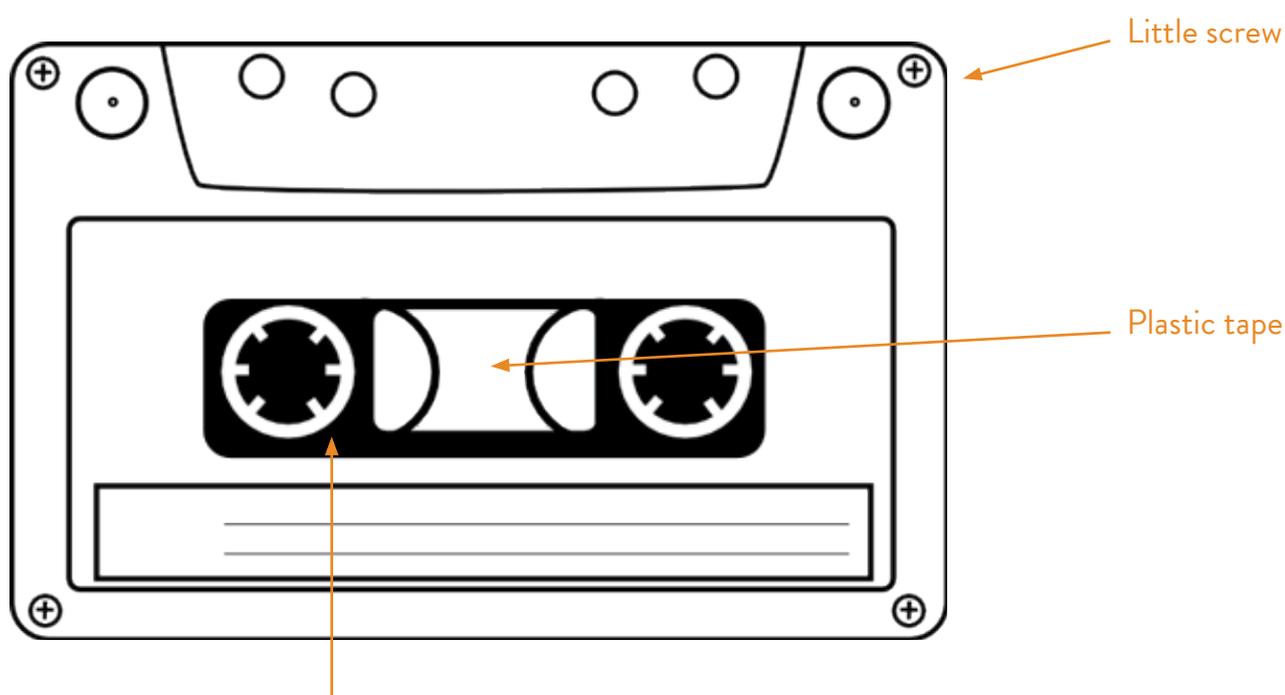


Learning to look

Have a look around home or school for a few objects that will be unfamiliar to children. You may think you don't have anything but you would be surprised- will children recognise a cassette tape, a CD player a film camera or an old telephone? You will almost certainly be able to find or borrow some things to use.

Give small groups of children an object to look at and talk about. Try to dissuade them from making quick decisions and immediately labelling the object. Encourage pupils to look closely, pick the object up and look at it from all angles. Ask them to consider what material the object is made from and what properties that material has. Do they think that the object was designed to be beautiful, useful or both? Do they have the whole object or is it broken? Can they see any wear that suggests how it was used?

Suggest that children draw the object. This could be a simple sketch or a more complex, measured drawing. Encourage them to label different parts of the drawing with their ideas.



I think the tape goes around inside a plastic case because these bits go round.

Finally ask groups to tell the rest of the class what they have found out and what they think the objects are, and most importantly why they think this. You can now reveal what the objects actually are but the aim of this activity isn't necessarily to get the right answer but to look closely and talk about their ideas.



Evidence from everyday objects

Collect a range of clean packaging – the sort of thing that would usually be put into your recycling bin. Give small groups of children one item of packaging to look at. Ask them to think about:

How do they know what was in the packaging?

Would they still be able to find this out if they weren't able to read the words?

Who might have used the contents of the packaging?

Now ask them to imagine that they are aliens who have just landed and the only information about us is what they can find out from the packaging. If you use an empty tin of example baked beans they will be able to say, for example, that

- humans should eat 5 a day (although they may not know of what!)
- how many calories and how much fat, salt and sugar humans should eat every day
- that cans are recycled
- what baked beans look like
- the sort of things humans eat
- what date the beans should be eaten by

and evidence of where the contents came from, how they can be cooked. They might also start to make some decisions about what humans like by looking at the design of the label and how they design things by looking at the packaging. They could start to think about communication (there is a phone number and address on the label).

By encouraging children to look closely at everyday objects- such as an empty box or a baked bean tin- they will start to understand the wealth of information that archaeologists and museum curators can find out from everyday objects from the past.

If there enough mugs in the staffroom borrow few different ones and ask children to look at them (or you could photograph these and show them on the whiteboard). Try and find a range of mugs so you have an advert or logo on one and others plain, decorated, chunky and fine.

Ask children to decide what sort of person might like which mug and whether they are giving clues about likes and dislikes from the choice of mug. You could ask whether they have lunchboxes with pictures of favourite singers or cartoon characters on so that they start to understand that choices people make about the everyday objects they use can leave clues about them and what they liked.



Developing a chronology

Archaeologists and museum curators will often be able to date objects found by their style, decoration and technology. To help children understand this you can use everyday objects to create a 'timeline' If you look around at home and ask colleagues to do the same you can collect items such as old telephones and mobile phones, record players, CD players and early MP3 players or film cameras and digital cameras. Ask your class to put these objects in order from the oldest to the most recent.

To help with understanding of how style and decoration can help tell how old things are you could ask children to think about characters on lunchboxes. Which characters were popular two years ago, last year or when they started school? (How far back you go will depend on the age of your class). You could look for images online and build a timeline- or typology- of lunchboxes.

Other ways of understanding how objects change through time is to think about technology. The speed of change today is rapid and it is easy for children to understand, for example, how phones change because they see a launch of new mobile phones every year. Although the pace of change in the past was slower improvements in technology will have affected horseracing from changes in tack, improvements in the care of horses to the technology used to prove who has won a race.

The galleries at NHRM have lots of examples of how horseracing has changed through time and you could challenge your class on a visit to pick an example of something (for example saddles or trophies) and to look for lots of different examples of these throughout the museum.



Take one object

This concept was originally a project developed by the National Gallery and focussing on paintings. It has since been developed to look at objects, buildings, sites and documents. The fundamental idea is to use one object as a starting point for enquiry-based, cross curricular learning.

The object that this section is based on is the Rous Candelabrum and you can find an image of this at the end of this resource. This object has been chosen as it has links to an important Newmarket resident. The candelabrum was presented to Admiral Henry John Rous in 1866 to celebrate twenty-five years 'Service to the Turf.' He was an important local figure in Newmarket and was reputed not to have missed a race there in the 41 years of his involvement. Rous was an influential figure in horseracing throughout his lifetime. He introduced the system of handicapping, much of which is still in place today. After his death in 1877 a memorial fund in his name was launched to build a hospital for those involved in the racing industry. Forest Heath District Council converted the hospital to warden-controlled flats in 1966. Racing Welfare now manages Rous Memorial Court.

The candelabrum is a nine light candelabrum with a statuette of Rous in Admiral's uniform standing on the top. The candle holders are elaborate branches decorated with scrolling acanthus raised on a central column that is mounted on a square plinth. Around the column stand four Greek goddesses representing Justice, Wisdom, Courage and Navigation.

The panels of the base show HMS Pique (a ship Rous had commanded), an ordinary horserace, the Admiral's coat of arms and fourthly, an inscription reading 'From the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the English and Foreign Turf 1866, In Memoriam of 25 years valuable, zealous and disinterested service'. The plinth stands on a quatrefoil platform applied with six racehorses and two foals. It is a large object standing 128 cm high

The children are going to investigate this object and hopefully be inspired by it without, at first, being given lots of information about it. Try and avoid them making snap decisions about what it is and looking for the 'right' answer and encourage them to question.

Some ideas for introducing the object to your class

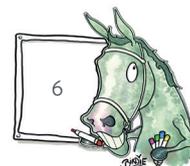
Put a picture in the classroom without explaining what it is and ask children to write their ideas on post it notes. Leave this for a few days so that they can build on their and each other's ideas.

Have a picture in the classroom which is covered and slowly reveal parts of the picture.

Show a picture of the object on a whiteboard for a short period of time, remove it and then ask children to write a description of what they can remember.

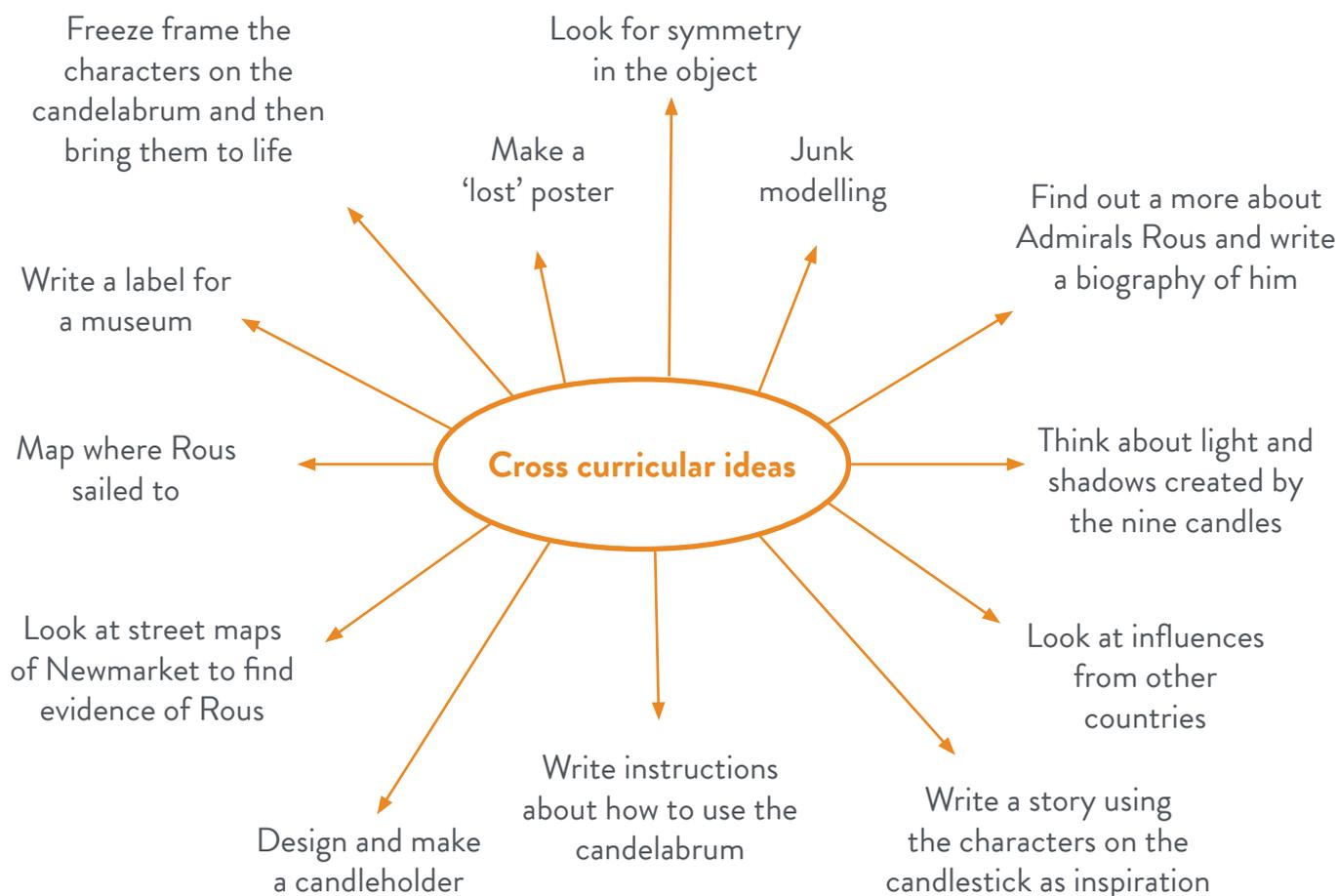
Describe the object (or part of it) to the class and ask them to draw it from your description without seeing it.

Print a picture of it and cut it out like a jigsaw- ask children to piece this together.



A few possible questions to kick start an enquiry

- What do you recognise when you look at the object?
- Imagine you have just woken up and this object is on the floor- what would you do?
- Do you think it should be in a museum?
- Where does it live?
- Who has something like this or where have you seen something like this?
- What are all of the ways it has been decorated?
- What sort of person might have made it?
- What sort of person might have owned or used it?
- How might it work?
- Do you need anything else for this to work?
- Who do you think the person standing on it is?



Plenary

To celebrate your children's work take them to see the candelabrum as part of a visit to NHRM - You can find information about how to plan and book a visit here

<https://www.nhrm.co.uk/learning/schools>

The candelabrum is in the Mileposts display area but rather than taking your class straight there why not set them the challenge of finding it and showing you.

Once located ask children if it is what they expected- bigger, smaller, shiny, beautiful?
If they have written about the candelabrum they could read out stories or poems in front of it.

This approach can work well for transition projects where different schools take their own approach and then meet other schools at the museum to share what they have done. Contact the education team at NHRM if you would like to discuss planning an event of this type.

