

Artful Artifacts: Objects that Tell Stories



- Grade level 7th, 9th grade
- Subject area/s Social studies, Visual arts
- GPS/Common Core Standards
 - Georgia Performance Standards for Social Studies**
SS7G5
SS7G8
SS9WH5
SS9WH12
 - Georgia Performance Standards for Visual Arts**
VA7CU.2
VA7C.1
VAHSDRCU.1
- Objective The student will develop and deliver a presentation on a piece of Ottoman, Safavid, or Mughal art that addresses its original purpose and context as well as the significance of its decoration.
- Materials
 - ✓ Audio copies of (or access to) *A History of the World in 100 Objects*
 - ✓ Research materials – lists of books, websites
 - ✓ Handout
- Instructions
 - Discuss the importance of objects and their ability to tell stories about the culture from which they originated. A wonderful example and resources is the '[A History of the World in 100 Objects](#)' series (see Resource section); if possible listen to one or more 15-minute podcasts with students to get an idea of what objects can tell us.
 - Have students create their own 'History of Ottoman Turkey/the Safavid Dynasty/the Mughal Empire' series by creating a few-minute presentation on an object from a certain time period. (For objects and further resources see Resource section of this guide.) You may want to use the page, below, as an introductory handout/guideline for the project
 - Encourage students to answer certain questions in creating their presentation, including the usual 5 W's but also several 'hows,' such as: How was this object made? How was it used? How is it representative of the Empire it came from? How does it reflect other cultures? (Think about trade and exchange of goods.) How is the same kind of object used today, if at all? (And how does it look different?)
 - Have students relate their objects to other objects (or one another's

objects).

- Provide peers with a task during presentations to ensure they're actively listening to the work of others.
- Evaluation
 - Use this project as a formal assessment to evaluate students' understanding of the empires they're studying – perhaps create a rubric that addresses areas on which your class is particularly focusing.
- Accommodations
 - Provide assistance or materials for those who might have difficulty conducting research on their own or who might have limited access to the internet.
 - If one or many students are struggling, consider making this a group project, with pairs or small groups.
- Extensions
 - After hearing all the presentations, determine different ways the objects could be organized. You could even plan different 'exhibitions' based on these organizations. The MWNF has many examples of such virtual exhibitions. (See Resources.)
 - Create your own podcast! Record some, or all, of the presentations – perhaps you can get a spot on the morning announcements.

- Resources

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/a_history_of_the_world.aspx

The above site, part of the British Museum, offers a guide to each of the objects featured on the program. Objects are organized chronologically by theme.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/>

At the BBC site you can listen to the 15-minute podcasts (audio files) that describe each of the objects and their significance.

<http://www.discoverislamicart.org/learn/>

The Museum With No Frontiers (MWNF) is a totally online museum with a database of thousands of images and information. In addition there are new exhibitions (at <http://www.discoverislamicart.org/exhibitions/ISL/>), often curated with prominent museums, constantly being added. The 'learn' section is designed for students.

http://www.discoverislamicart.org/learn/zone_en.html

This part of the website explains to educators how to use the website for their students' benefit.

ART OR ARTIFACT? OBJECTS THAT TELL STORIES

Most art from the Middle East is not painting or sculptures, but rather everyday objects that were made beautiful. These objects tell us so much about where they came from—not just in how they were used but in how they looked and why.

Prayer Carpet. Tabriz, Iran, late 19th c.
Silk. Huntington Museum of Art.



Charger. Iran, first half of 18th c.
Underglaze-painted fritware.



For example, the carpet above was made to resemble a mosque, because it was used for prayer. (Do you see the arch, the columns, the lamp?) The plate above uses white and blue that was popular in China—this type of pottery was traded all over the Middle East and widely imitated by native potters.

YOUR TASK

Listen to a few episodes of *A History of the World in 100 Objects*.

You'll be creating your own episode (or presentation) with an object from the Ottoman, Safavid or Mughal empires.

Be sure to address the following questions in your presentation.

- ◆ Where did this object come from (what period and place)?
- ◆ What is it made of? How does that relate to where it came from?
- ◆ What was it used for? Who commissioned it, or who may have used it?
- ◆ What does this object tell us about the person who created it, the person who used it, and the society it came from?
- ◆ Is the object inherently religious? Why or why not?
- ◆ Why is it decorated the way it is? Does it have writing on it? Geometric patterns? Flowers? Animals? People? What is the significance?
- ◆ How does your relate to other objects? Are there connections to other artwork from the same empire? What about other empires? How does it reflect the connection between various cultures?

TAKE IT FURTHER

All together the stories and objects assembled tell fascinating stories about these three empires. See if you can create a virtual exhibition of these objects and put it on display as a class somewhere in your school.

Think about the everyday objects we use today.

Your shoes, for instance. Or your notebook.

How do they reflect today's society?

Where were they made?

How are they decorated?

In the year 2600 what do you think someone might guess about our society based on these objects?