

# Primary Source Analysis — Artifacts: Suggestions for Teachers

Primary sources are firsthand evidence that provide glimpses into history. The Collections Search database (<https://history.house.gov/Collection/>) contains works of art and historical artifacts related to the U.S. House of Representatives. By analyzing these materials, students can better understand historical events, American culture, and the House itself. Below are some suggestions to help facilitate analysis and discussion of objects as primary sources. While these suggestions will guide you through analyzing artifacts in our Collections Search, we invite you to use this graphic organizer with any primary source that your class is examining.

- 1. Select an artifact and review the catalogue record before introducing it to your students.** Collection Search provides detailed information about each artifact, and links to further information about the subject and the historical context. The detailed description and links to related material will help you get started.
- 2. Save a copy of the image.** Expand the image in the Collection Search record, and save by right-clicking on the image. This makes it easy to project the image on a screen for the whole class to view together or print copies for individuals or groups.
- 3. Provide students with our Primary Source Analysis graphic organizer.** There are three different organizers for different types of objects in the Collections Search database: artworks, artifacts, and photographs. The graphic organizer will guide students as they analyze the object. The worksheet can be used as a classroom activity, homework, a supplement to student notes, or a formal or informal assessment.
- 4. Use the graphic organizer to model the process for analyzing primary sources.** Before asking students to analyze an artifact individually or in small groups, demonstrate the process for the entire class. Encourage questions about artifacts as primary sources, analysis, and the worksheet itself.
- 5. Allow students to analyze artifacts in small groups or individually.** Allow students to work through the process on their own. If possible, encourage them to annotate a printed image, noting questions, comments, unfamiliar attributes, etc.
- 6. Facilitate a class discussion.** After completing their graphic organizers, students should share their analyses with the class. As the leader of this discussion, you should highlight for your students the artifact's connections to the historical era or unit being studied.

# Primary Source Analysis — Artifacts

## Identify

What is this artifact? When was it made?

What prior knowledge do you have about this type of artifact?

Describe the artifact.

What prior knowledge do you have about the time period when it was created and used?

## Step 2: Understand

What was the purpose or function of this artifact?

Who do you think used this artifact?  
Why do you think so?

Is this type of artifact still used today?  
Why or why not?

## Step 3: Connect

What does this artifact tell us about the time period when it was created or used?

Why do you think this artifact was chosen to be part of a museum collection?

# Primary Source Analysis — Artifacts: Completed Example

## Step 1: Identify

### What is this artifact? When was it made?

Bella Abzug Handbill  
1970

### What prior knowledge do you have about this type of artifact?

Mailed information about candidates has been sent to voters for a long time, and still is.

### Describe the artifact.

The handbill is a large piece of paper folded in half. The front shows a photo of Bella Abzug and her campaign slogan. The inside has more photos and information about who she is and what she thinks about different issues.

### What prior knowledge do you have about the time period when it was created and used?

In the 1960s and 1970s, women were fighting for more rights and respect, and more of them were getting elected to government. Civil rights and the Vietnam War were also important issues at the time.

## Step 2: Understand

### What was the purpose or function of this artifact?

To promote Bella Abzug as a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives: the text and pictures show what she believed and also showed her personality.

### Who do you think used this artifact? Why do you think so?

Abzug's political campaign sent this handbill to voters in her district so they could learn more about her. The purpose is to convince people to vote for her.

### Is this type of artifact still used today? Why or why not?

Yes, paper handouts like this are still used, though this kind of information is now also shared in emails or social media.

## Step 3: Connect

### What does this artifact tell us about the time period when it was created or used?

The language tells us that it was still unusual for women to run for public office and that the Vietnam War was an important issue. Also—and similar to today—the handbill's text also addresses America's relationship to Israel and helping all of the people in diverse cities.

### Why do you think this artifact was chosen to be part of a museum collection?

This handbill is worth preserving because it tells a great deal about what issues were important in 1970. The photos add to this, as we can see what New York looked like and how the Congresswoman presented herself to and interacted with her constituents.