Artifacts in the Classroom

Objectives: Students will be able to define “artifact,” “specimen,” and “collection,” and will begin to examine an artifact as a source of information. Students will then analyze artifacts and will consider how objects from their own lives may function as artifacts. Students will also implement writing and research skills to develop a classroom exhibit that can be tailored to any social studies curriculum.

The Artifacts in the Classroom lesson is adaptable for grades 4-12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Connections</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Common Core Language Arts</strong></td>
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<td>11th Grade</td>
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<td>12th Grade</td>
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</table>
Part One: What is an Artifact?

Objectives: Students will be able to define “artifact,” “specimen,” and “collection,” and will begin to examine an artifact as a source of information.

Materials: Internet access; National Park Service’s How to Read an Object; Mississippi Museums and Their Missions; Five (5) Manship House Museum Artifact Cards (print single-side and then cut apart individual cards).

Procedures:

Activity 1: Defining Terms
1. Introduce class to the following terms:
   - Artifact: An object made by humans that provides information about how people live.
   - Specimen: An object or part of an object that is found in nature and is not man-made.
   - Collection: A group of artifacts or specimens that have certain characteristics in common. Possible commonalities may include place of origin, maker/manufacturer, material, function, etc.

Discussion Points: Ask students to share about their personal collections.
   a. What items do they collect?
   b. What do the items in each individual's collection have in common?
   c. What is the purpose of the collection?
2. Explain that:
   a. museums collect, interpret, and exhibit artifacts that are considered valuable for a variety of reasons (such as historical, political, cultural, artistic, etc.).
   b. a museum collects artifacts that relate to its mission, or central purpose for being.
   c. share examples from the Mississippi Museums and Their Missions handout with the class and discuss the relationship between a museum’s mission, the types of artifacts that are collected, and its reasons for collecting.

Activity 2: Analyze Artifacts from the Manship House Museum
1. Introduce the class to the Manship House Museum and its mission: “to preserve the home of the Charles Henry Manship family and to interpret the family’s lifestyle through educational programming and collecting and exhibiting related artifacts.”
   b. Explain that this museum is focused on the life of Charles Henry Manship and his family members, but also depicts what life was like for a middle-class family living in Jackson, Mississippi, in the years following the Civil War.

Discussion Points:
   a. Given the Manship House Museum’s mission, what types of artifacts would students expect to see on a tour the nineteenth century home? Consider artifacts related to recreation (toys, games), education (books, school materials), communication (paper, tools for writing letters), domestic labor (tools for cooking and housekeeping), and other categories that may be represented in the home.
   b. What types of artifacts would students not expect to find in this museum (TV, radio, electricity, etc.)?
2. Divide the class into five groups and distribute the artifact cards.
3. Ask students to identify the item and its function (they may guess) using the following questions as guide:
a. Who is the maker?
b. What are the materials?
c. After giving students time to discuss, identify the object and explain its function.

4. Distribute the NPS *How to Read an Object* handout to students and ask students to answer the questions using the artifact on the card.

**Activity 3: Personal Artifacts**

1. Ask each student to bring a small artifact from home that reflects an aspect of his/her life (specify that object should have limited monetary value and not be fragile).
2. In preparation for Part Two, each student should write a descriptive paragraph that identifies the object and its function, describes its physical characteristics (size, shape, materials, texture, etc.), and explains its personal significance.

**Extension Activity: Built for Comfort Traveling Trunk**

Borrow *Built for Comfort: The Manship House Traveling Trunk* from the Museum Division of MDAH. Climate and geography have affected the lives of Mississipians dramatically throughout history. This trunk compares modern methods of climate control to those employed during the nineteenth century. Supplementary materials on design and architecture are a special added feature to this trunk that encourage students to find the architectural history of their own neighborhoods. The trunk comes equipped with books, films, maps, and artifacts related to life in nineteenth century Mississippi.

Access more information online about the *Built for Comfort* and other available Traveling Trunks at [http://www.mdad.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/traveling-trunks/](http://www.mdad.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/traveling-trunks/) or contact the Outreach Programs Coordinator at 601-576-6997.
Part Two: What Can We Learn from Artifacts?

Objectives: Students will continue to use the NPS *How to Read an Object* guide to analyze artifacts and will consider how objects from their own lives may function as artifacts. Students will also implement writing and research skills to develop a classroom exhibit that can be tailored to any social studies curriculum.

Materials: National Park Service’s *How to Read an Object; Guide to Writing Exhibit Labels; Basic Tips for Caring for Your Collection*.

Procedures:

Activity 1: Presenting Personal Artifacts
1. Keep the class in the five groups formed during Part One.
2. Have students present their artifacts brought from home to their group using their descriptive paragraph as a guide.
3. After a student presents, the other group members should be able to analyze the artifact's characteristics and value using the NPS *How to Read an Object* guide.
4. Display all of the artifacts in a central location in the classroom. As a class, consider the types of artifacts that are represented and explore what these artifacts reveal about how members of the class live and what they value.

Discussion Points:
   a. What do the artifacts have in common? How are they different?
   b. How might artifacts be divided into groups based on shared characteristics? Would groupings change if artifacts are classified by function or purpose rather than appearance?
   c. If an outsider came to the class, what would his/her impression be of the artifacts on display? What might this person learn about the class? What message would the class hope to communicate to the outsider?

Activity 2: Classroom Museum
1. Select a topic that the class is studying and develop an exhibit within the classroom. Ask students to bring in artifacts from home that relate to the topic. For example, students may develop an exhibit on Mississippi's geographic regions and bring items from home to represent the natural resources or products from a particular area (e.g. products made from cotton or soybeans that can be found at home).
2. Use the *Guide to Writing Exhibit Labels* to develop an outline for the exhibit and write interpretive text labels. Depending on the scope of the project, students may use a folding display board (like the type used for science fair projects) or the teacher may designate a space in the classroom for a larger exhibit area.

Extension Activity: Caring for Artifacts
1. Using artifacts brought from home, have students research proper methods for caring for their artifacts using the *Basic Tips for Caring for Your Collection* handout and the resource websites.
2. Students should write a paragraph detailing the appropriate methods for caring for their artifacts and then share the information with their classmates.
Your group has a “source of information.” What can you learn from it, and what does it tell you? Examine your ‘source’ closely, discuss each point with your group and answer the questions as best you can. Put a “y” next to the categories of information to which you have access. Where possible, provide some support or reasoning for your action, and indicate ‘not available’ or ‘not known’ if appropriate.

### How to Read an Object

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties of an Object</th>
<th>Questions to ask and answer</th>
<th>Observe, Deduce and Infer</th>
<th>What you can find out by looking closely at the object?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function/Purpose</strong></td>
<td>What is it called?</td>
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<td>What is it used for?</td>
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<td>Does it have more than one function?</td>
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<td>Does it</td>
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<td><strong>Physical Features</strong></td>
<td>How big is it?</td>
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<td>What’s its shape, smell, and sound?</td>
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<td>What color is it?</td>
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<td>Is it complete?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Has it been altered, adapted, or mended?</td>
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<td>Is it worn?</td>
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<td>What’s the surface like?</td>
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<td>Does it have identifying numbers?</td>
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<td>Are there markings or writing on it?</td>
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<td><strong>Materials</strong></td>
<td>What’s it made of?</td>
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<td>How many kinds of materials is it made of?</td>
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<td><strong>Construction/Technique of Manufacture</strong></td>
<td>Who made it?</td>
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<td>How was it made?</td>
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<td>Is it hand or machine made?</td>
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<td>Does it have parts?</td>
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<td>What does it tell you about the maker’s technical skill?</td>
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<td>Properties of an Object</td>
<td>Observe, deduce and infer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions to ask and answer</td>
<td>What you can find out by looking closely at the object</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design and Decoration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Does the design suit its purpose?</td>
<td>Were the best materials used? &lt;br&gt;How is it decorated? &lt;br&gt;What influenced its design and appearance?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Context and History</strong>&lt;br&gt;What can the object tell us about the society in which it was made?</td>
<td>When was it made? &lt;br&gt;Where was it made? &lt;br&gt;Where was it used? &lt;br&gt;Where was it found? &lt;br&gt;Who made it? &lt;br&gt;Who used it? &lt;br&gt;Who owned it? &lt;br&gt;How has it changed over time? &lt;br&gt;How does it compare to similar items from other cultures and time periods?</td>
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<td><strong>Value</strong>&lt;br&gt;How was it valued?</td>
<td>What kind of value did it or does it have:&lt;br&gt;monetary, spiritual, aesthetic, sentimental, and practical:&lt;br&gt;To the person/people who made it? &lt;br&gt;To the person/people who used it? &lt;br&gt;To the people who keep it? &lt;br&gt;How has the object’s meaning changed over time? &lt;br&gt;How does the object reflect the person, community, nation or culture at the time it was made? &lt;br&gt;How does the object expand your knowledge of the period?</td>
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What else would have been helpful to complete your investigation?

**Mississippi Museums and their Missions**

A museum collects artifacts related to its mission or central purpose. Share examples from the list of mission statements below with your students to consider how a museum’s mission shapes its collecting focus.

**Old Capitol Museum, Jackson:** “The Old Capitol Museum shall educate the public about the history, people, and architecture of the building, the governmental processes of the state, and the importance of historic preservation.” [http://www.mdah.ms.gov/oldcap/](http://www.mdah.ms.gov/oldcap/)

**Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Jackson:** “The mission of the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science is to promote understanding and appreciation of Mississippi’s biological diversity through collections, research, scientific databases, education, and exhibits; and to inspire the people of our state to respect the environment and to preserve natural Mississippi.” [http://www.mdwfp.com/museum.aspx](http://www.mdwfp.com/museum.aspx)

**Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs:** “To preserve the art and legacy of Walter Inglis Anderson, his family and kindred artists, to celebrate Walter Inglis Anderson's life message of the spirituality of nature as experienced on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and to educate and to awaken the imagination to the importance of creative expression.” [http://walterandersonmuseum.org/](http://walterandersonmuseum.org/)

**Choctaw Museum of the Southern Indian, Choctaw:** “The Choctaw Museum of the Southern Indian displays exhibits that help preserve the history of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, whose Cultural Affairs Program offers activities to strengthen cultural knowledge among Choctaw people as well as the general public.” [http://www.choctaw.org/culture/museum.html](http://www.choctaw.org/culture/museum.html)

**Mississippi Armed Forces Museum, Hattiesburg:** “The mission of the Mississippi Armed Forces Museum is to collect, preserve, interpret, exhibit and hold in public trust for the exclusive benefit of the people, significant historical property related to the history of the State of Mississippi and its contributions to the Armed Forces of the United States from the early nineteenth century to the present.” [http://www.armedforcesmuseum.us/](http://www.armedforcesmuseum.us/)

**McComb Railroad Depot Museum, McComb:** “The purpose of the McComb Railroad Depot Museum is to preserve the railroad history of Southwest Mississippi through educational means and to promote economic development through heritage tourism.” [http://www.mcrrmuseum.com/](http://www.mcrrmuseum.com/)

**Tunica County Museum, Tunica:** “The Tunica County Museum will interpret the history of Tunica County through exhibits, education programs, research and collections. Topics include the natural setting, Native American prehistory, early European exploration and settlement, and 19th and 20th century social, agricultural, institutional, political, military and commercial history. The exhibits will reflect the rich ethnic diversity of the County.” [http://www.tunicamuseum.com/](http://www.tunicamuseum.com/)
Manship House Museum Artifact Cards

Divide class into five groups. Cut out artifact cards and distribute one per group.

Artifact Card 1: assembled (left); dissembled (center and right)

Artifact Card 2: side view (left); front view (right)
Manship House Museum Artifact Card Descriptions

Share the following information about the artifacts with students after they examine each item.

Artifact 1: Wooden Butter Mold with Double Star Design – After butter was made, it was modeled into blocks to be measures, stored, and sold. Printed butter received a higher price on the market but it could also be purchased in tubs and then printed at home to make it more attractive for the dinner table.

Artifact 2: Fluting or Pleating Iron – As fashions evolved and crimped collars, cuffs, and ruffles became ever-more popular, fabric crimpers or fluting machines were necessary. As these machines evolved alongside fashions, many of them were invented or modified by women. This fluting iron was invented by Mrs. Susan R. Knox of Newark, NJ, and patented on November 20, 1866. For the 1876 Centennial she re-issued the model with her picture.

Artifact 3: Washboard – No one really seems to know when the washboard was invented, but the first wooden frame board with a piece of “fluted tin, sheet iron, copper or zinc” was patented in New York in 1833. They quickly became a standard piece of household equipment but at a cost; washerwomen had raw, chapped hands from scraping their knuckles against the board. For washerwomen who acted as servants within a wealthy household, they were usually paid some of the highest wages among the staff because of the toll the board and the washing chemicals took on their hands.

Artifact 4: Stoneware Butter Churn – Churns such as this were available during the early 20th century from the Sears and Roebuck Company for as low as 78 cents each. Butter is made by separating the cream out of whole milk and then agitating the cream to create fat globules which thicken into butter.

Artifact 5: Stereoscope – A stereoscope takes a side-by-side pair of images depicting left-eye and right-eye views of the same thing and turns it into a 3-D image. They were invented in 1838. This is an 1861 Holmes Stereoscope or Mexican Stereoscope (created by American Oliver Wendell Holmes), a model that emerged during the height of the stereoscope’s popularity. The Eliseaus von Seutter Collection includes 35 stereocards of Jackson, Mississippi, taken immediately after the Civil War. The collection resides at the Department of Archives and History and can be viewed online in the MDAH’s Digital Archive.
Guide to Writing Exhibit Labels for Classroom Exhibits

Consider these three questions prior to writing exhibit text:

- **What is the big idea?**
  - The big idea is similar to a thesis statement in an essay or the topic sentence of a paragraph. This single sentence outlines the scope and purpose of the exhibit. It is the central theme: everything within the exhibit must relate to and support the big idea.

- **Who is the intended audience?**
  - What do you know about your potential visitors?
  - What is their reading level?
  - Do they have any prior knowledge of the exhibit’s subject?
  - What expectations might visitors have for their experience?

- **What are the communication goals?**
  - What information should the exhibit convey to visitors?
  - What do you want visitors to think about after they leave the space?

**Types of Labels**

**Title Labels** identify the name of the exhibition. A title may be creative, thought-provoking, or even humorous, but it should always be relevant to the big idea.

**Example:** Charles Henry Manship: The Master of Disguise

**Introductory Labels** consist of a brief paragraph or paragraphs that orient visitors to the big idea of the exhibit. These statements should also introduce visitors to the organization of the exhibit.

- What types of artifacts will they encounter?
- How are the artifacts grouped?
- What should the visitor expect to learn?

Remember to write clearly and be concise: visitors may be distracted by the sights or sounds of the exhibit space and are anxious to begin exploring.

**Example:** Charles Henry Manship, a native of Talbot County, Maryland, spent many years apprenticing and learning the art of stenciling and painting. In February 1835, Manship moved to Jackson, Mississippi, where he took advantage of new construction throughout the city. Manship became known for his ornamental painting of wood and marble finishes. Explore the techniques and tools he used to achieve these magnificent facades. Will you be able to tell the difference?

**Section Labels** introduce visitors to a subtheme in the exhibit. This label often includes more researched content than the previously mentioned types, but is more general than very specific object labels. Section labels should help visitors understand why artifacts in this section are grouped together and how this subtheme relates to the big idea.

**Example:** Why all the Faux Finishes? – Charles Henry Manship painted pine and cypress doors to resemble mahogany, dining room paper to look like oak paneling, and wooden materials in imitation of marble. Graining and Marbling, as this type of painting is called, was a fairly common device used in the 19th century to enhance a home and to make readily-available materials look less ordinary and more expensive. It took Charles Henry Manship about ten years to complete the decoration of his house.
Object Labels interpret individual artifacts within the context of the section but also within the larger exhibit.

- Why is the artifact significant?
- What was its function or purpose?
- What does it tell us about how people lived or what people valued during a particular time period?
- How does the artifact illustrate the subtheme?
- How does it relate to the big idea?

Example: This fireplace mantel may look like marble, but it is really pine. This mantle, originally marbled by Charles Henry Manship, was restored by Malcom Robson of Surrey, England, a fifth-generation master grainer and marbler, in 1978.

You may also include Identification Labels for an individual artifacts or a group of artifacts. This type of label is not interpretive. It is sometimes described as a “tombstone” because it contains only the most basic information about the object or objects. In this label, you might provide details such as the name of the artifact, maker, date of manufacture, place of origin, name of lender, or materials.

Example: Sitting Room Mantel made by Charles Henry Manship, circa 1857; from the collection of the Manship House Museum, Jackson, Mississippi.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Label</th>
<th>Length of Label</th>
<th>Font Type</th>
<th>Font Size (recommended)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>1-7 words.</td>
<td>Serif or Sans Serif</td>
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<td>Introductory</td>
<td>50-75 words</td>
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<td>Section</td>
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<td>Object/Interpretive</td>
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<td>Regular - Medium (15-20 point)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>10 words max.</td>
<td>Serif</td>
<td>Regular (12-15 point)</td>
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Resources:
Basic Tips for Caring for Your Collection

Objects in your collection can be comprised of many different materials (paper, metal, plastic, etc.). Each material has specific care instructions, but below are some basic tips that can help to increase the life of any object in your collection by reducing exposure to harmful elements and implementing proper handling and storage procedures.

- Minimize Light – By minimizing light exposure (both natural and artificial light) you can prevent damage such as fading, discoloration, or embrittlement due to heat. Moving objects away from windows and out of heavily lit spaces will increase your collection’s life. Papers, photographs, and textiles are highly sensitive to light.
- Maintain Consistent Temperature and Humidity – Depending on where you are storing or displaying your collection, it is important to maintain a consistent temperature (around 70 degrees F) and humidity level (around 50% RH). Large fluctuations can cause objects to dry out and become brittle and possibly crack or to retain moisture, which can cause objects to swell or grow mold.
- Pests – Pests, such as insects and rodents, can be very harmful to objects. Depending on the object, a pest can use it as food or make it a home. Harmful pests common in Mississippi include: mice, carpet beetles, and silverfish.
- Pollution – Pollutants, such as smoke, can speed up deterioration and deposit particles causing irreparable damage.
- Handling – All objects should be handled with the greatest of care. The less you handle an object, the better. Human hands have dirt, salts, and oils that can be transferred to the surface of an object. This transfer causes deterioration or discoloration that may not be seen immediately, but can appear over time.
- Storage & Display – An enclosed space (such as a display case, storage box, or album) in a low-traffic area is highly recommended. If you are storing an object or collection using paper products, such as boxes, files, or albums, it is recommended you use acid-free products which can be purchased from archival supply companies.

Web sites with care instructions for specific objects:
http://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html
http://www.thehenryford.org/research/caring.aspx
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS
TEACHER EVALUATION
COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME ___________________________________________________________________________

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS ________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) __________________________________________________________________________

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS_____________           GRADE LEVEL _________________________________

LESSON TITLE *Artifacts in the Classroom*

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?

2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students’ attention span?

3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?

4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?

5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
   ___multi-day unit   ___multi-week unit   ___other

6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?
Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.  
*4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate*

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<tr>
<td>Directions and Notes</td>
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<td>Curricular Connections</td>
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<td>Interactive Activities</td>
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<td>References and Resources</td>
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<td>Part One: Activity One - Defining Terms</td>
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<td>Part One: Activity Two - Analyze Artifacts from the Manship House</td>
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<td>Part One: Activity Three - Personal Artifacts</td>
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<td>Part Two: Activity One - Presenting Personal Artifacts</td>
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<td>Extension Activity - Caring for Artifacts</td>
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<td>Overall Unit</td>
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We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.