



Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center  
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This lesson was created by a teacher participating in a Wisconsin ESEA Improving Teacher Quality grant entitled Inquiry Based Technology-Mediated Teacher Professional Development and Application.

- Title: Point of View
- Submitted by: Cheryl Awtrey
- Grade Level: With some minor changes, this lesson could be used with any grade level
- Subjects: Science, Social Studies
- Objectives: In interpreting these “artifacts” students will
1. Experience the role that background experience plays in drawing conclusions.
  2. Articulate the biases they might bring to interpreting the past.
  3. Understand some of the difficulties inherent in archaeological interpretation.
- WI Standards: -Science A.8.3, A.8.4, C.8.4, C.8.6  
-Social Studies B.8.4
- Duration: One class period: 40 – 45 minutes
- Materials/Supplies: -Inkblot.  
-The worksheet attached with the illustrations or actual examples of the items (check out the local goodwill and/or historical society for examples or pictures).  
-Observations worksheet for each student
- Vocabulary: Artifact - any object made or used by humans
- Background: Science and, more specifically, archaeology depend on the scientific method to make sense of the world and items within the world. One of the primary tenets of the scientific method is that the experimenter/observer will be able to objectively describe and interpret what is seen. Reality suggests that the observer’s background and experience are both going to color the interpretation given to any set of observations. Multiple examples of personal biases affecting the interpretation of observations

can be found throughout the history of science. Such biases occur in many fields where objectivity is prized. Take the time to read articles from various services around the world dealing with the same event and the cultural biases within the media become immediately apparent.

For science to be done well, it is important for the observer to be aware of her/his biases. This exercise will help students to become more aware of how their own experiences color how they see the world.

- Setting the Stage:** Use your own inkblot test. Hold up the inkblot for a few seconds and have students quickly write down what they think they see in the blot. Have students share what they have seen. How has their experience colored what they see?
- Procedure:**
1. Give a copy of the artifact sheet to each student. They will initially work alone to interpret what they see. (You may choose to limit the number of artifacts used in the interest of time.) Have each student write her/his own interpretation of what the object is used for on the observations sheet.
  2. Put students into small groups of 3-4. Each member has the task of recording the groups' discussion and observations regarding the artifacts.
  3. Students are to explain what each artifact is and/or what it was used for. They must explain why they think that was the purpose for the item.
  4. Bring the students back together to share results with the class.
  5. Have the groups share their interpretations.
- Closure:** As a group, discuss the how the experiences of various group members colored the interpretation of items found. Some of the group members will have some knowledge of the objects in question because of reading, television, parents and/or grandparents. Some may have no working knowledge of the time and will be forced to interpret from the position of knowing only their own times. Archaeologists face this issue every time they try to interpret a dig. They are a product of their own culture and will be influenced by that culture even though they may try to eliminate such biases.
- Evaluation:** Have students summarize the experiences or lack of experiences that influenced the various group interpretations of the artifacts in a short essay.
- Links/Extension:** Links: [Intrigue of the Past](#) Lesson 2. "Culture Everywhere", Lesson 3. "Observation and Inference", Lesson 7. "Scientific Inquiry"
- Extension: Have students look at the items chosen by various groups to include in time capsules around the country. What items did they feel best represented their culture? How do you think future cultures might see

such time capsule contents? Would these selected items be likely to be preserved if they were not in a capsule? How is a time capsule different from the kind of items usually found in an archaeological dig?

References:

For other examples of artifacts, there are any number of antiques sites on the internet from which pictures may be drawn. To use illustrations from Wisconsin history, access the Mississippi Valley Archaeology website: <http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/PreEuropeanPeople/EarlyCultures/index.html>

Name:

Artifact Number	Description	My interpretation of possible uses	Group interpretation of possible uses



## ARTIFACTS



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

## ARTIFACT IDENTITIES

1. Antique Colander
2. Butter Mold
3. Chopper - kitchen
4. Soap Saver
5. Metal Jar Opener
6. 1-gallon Butter Churn





Inkblot 1



Inkblot 2