DARMUSEUM

Lessons from the American Home
Out of Many, One: How to Research Primary Objects
Suitable for 6th-12th grades

Summary:

Students will use the DAR Museum's collection database to conduct primary object research. Students will make observations through close looking strategies and use secondary sources to complete an evidence-backed interpretation of a primary object. Through the process of observation, contextualization, evaluation, and interpretation—students will learn to think like object historians and discern the benefits of material history.

Learning Objectives:

- Strengthen observation skills via close looking and object-based learning strategies
- Build skills in navigating a primary object database and generating searches
- Practice evaluating secondary sources to elevate the quality of primary object research
- Think critically about material history using primary and secondary sources
- Evidence the interpretation of a primary object through the application of sources

Time: ≈ 40 minutes   Required Materials: Internet access and materials included in this packet.

Curriculum Timing Suggestion: This lesson plan complements Unit 0 of sources and/or any discussion of primary and secondary sources. Included are objects that both commemorate and critique George Washington (object from 1805), detail women's property rights in Colonial America (1716), and comment on enslavement at the start of the Civil War (1861).

Skills, Sources, and Concepts	Examples
Compelling and Supporting Questions	What data can we retrieve from historic objects from observation alone? How do secondary sources contextualize primary objects? How can we use material history to augment our understanding of the past? How can material history research be used to develop historical arguments? How do we determine authenticity of historical objects? What information can be found in archival databases and how can the affect historic interpretations?
Sources/Evidence	Historic objects, secondary sources, museum databases, observations made from close reading and object-based learning strategies
Key Concepts	Technology, human agency, historical significance, perspective, material history, social stratification, social inequality, evidence (to make claims)
Key Strategies and Skills	Critical reading and thinking, close reading objects, object-based learning, evaluating primary and secondary sources, synthesizing information between primary materials and secondary sources
Evidence-Backed Interpretations	Using secondary sources to contextualize material history, using secondary sources to make claims and arguments about historical objects, using primary materials to make arguments about secondary sources
Action and Communication	Students will become informed and critical consumers of material history, students will hone strong descriptive language, students will practice analysis and exercise reasoned reflection

Warm-Up Discussion on Primary Object Research

Discussion (>5 minutes): Use the following prompts to discuss and acquaint students with primary object research.

What is research? *Research is both a process and product. The research process challenges us to be curious and observant; ask questions and find answers. In addition, the research process requires us to evidence our work in facts to reach new conclusions and discoveries. At the DAR Museum, research helps historians tell the stories of objects and the people who used them. We call this an interpretation, a product of research. In short, interpretations are arguments/claims made by historians that present the facts and findings that were revealed during the research process.*

What is a source and how are they used? *There are different types of sources including primary and secondary sources. Examples of primary sources include original documents, objects, and artifacts that provide first-hand witness or evidence to an event, research, or discovery. Secondary sources build off primary sources through analysis, critique, commentary, comparison, and interpretation. Secondary sources include biographies, reviews/critiques, summaries, and textbooks. Together, primary sources and secondary sources are used for research.*

Today we will focus on primary sources that are objects (primary objects) and an array of secondary sources.

What is a database? *A database virtually stores both primary and secondary sources for easy access, viewing, and use. The DAR Museum collections database houses thousands of objects and materials—to find what you are looking for, use keywords to conduct searches.*

Who would use a database? *Libraries and museums are among those that use databases to document, store, and share their collection with others who are conducting personal and professional research. Researchers include historians, genealogists, archivists, archaeologists, filmmakers, artists, writers, journalists, lawyers, educators, and students like you.*

What do you think can be found in a database produced by museums? *Objects and materials that tell us something about history, people, places, culture, etc. Usually museum collections have a theme, the DAR Museum's theme is the material culture and history of the American home.*

Predict, how would you use primary objects and a collections database for your own research in class?

In this activity you will use the DAR Museum database to produce your own material research!

Activity Sequencing

Goal: Students will interpret 3 preselected primary objects using close looking strategies, a collections database, and secondary sources.

Part 1: For each of the objects, students will begin by making predictions and conducting a close looking of an object. To facilitate insightful observations, provide them with the below object-based learning prompts/questions to answer about the objects (these can be discussed, projected onto a screen, or printed onto the worksheets). As they respond to the prompts/questions, provide little to no background information of the objects as their answers will help generate keywords for database searches.

In the next step, students will input their keywords into the DAR Museum Collections database search engine to populate results (each object may require a few searches and some page browsing to find the exact image they are tasked with finding). Once the student has located the object, they will be asked to fill out the object's identification information. This information will glimpse students into some of the topics they will further explore when reading, analyzing, and evaluating secondary sources. Included is a space for students to jot down miscellaneous notes.

Part 2: Students will read, summarize, analyze, and evaluate the provided secondary sources for each of the primary objects. The secondary source analysis and evaluation section is customizable, and complements the use of strategies like SOAPstone, HIPPO, and HAPPY.

Part 3: Students will synthesize and blend all of their observations, predictions, findings, and evaluations from their research process to produce an interpretation. These interpretations should aim to be both a summary and argument of the research they produced and found.

Object-Based Learning Prompts/Questions

· What was the first thing you noticed? Why?

· How would you describe this object to someone? Consider the colors, textures, shapes, lines, designs, and size. What details would you emphasize? Why?

· Describe this object with other sensory details. How would this object feel in your hands? How would the object move? Does this object seem sturdy or fragile? What sounds would it make? What does it smell like? Does it have a taste?

· How would this object be used? Who would use this object? Why?

· Where could you find this object? Is it unique or common? Why?

· Is this object familiar? Have you seen something like this before? Compare and contrast.

· Are there any symbols, motifs, or messages on this object that may reveal a deeper meaning? Why would the artist/maker include this imagery and/or words? Predict their meaning.

Post-Activity Discussion

Discussion (>5 minutes): Use any of the following prompts to discuss and debrief what students learned when conducting their primary object research.

· Are there any connections between the three objects? Explain.

· Did your interpretations change throughout the research process? How?

· What questions do you still have about the objects you researched today?

· Where could you look for more information on primary objects and research?

· Who could you ask for help when conducting primary object research?

· What advice would you give to a fellow primary object researcher?

· Which data and keywords would most efficiently help you find the object again?

· How would you improve future searches?

· Explain the differences between primary and secondary sources.

· Describe the secondary sources provided. What were the strengths and limitations?

· List other types of secondary sources that you could have used in this research process.

· Did this activity change how you think about research, namely primary object research?

· Has this activity sparked curiosity or interest in further primary object research?

· Is there an object you would like to research in the future?

· After this activity, would you still use a collections database for your own research? Explain.

· How can you continue to incorporate primary objects into future research or curiosities?

· Is primary object research relevant or helpful in everyday life? Imagine a scenario.

· Today you approached primary object research through the lens of material culture—what would primary object research look like in other academic disciplines and jobs? What kind of primary objects could be used in these fields?

Primary Object Appendix

These are collection items from the DAR Museum that students will find and interpret.

Primary Object 1—George Washington Medal

Catalog Number: 87.65   Date: 1805

Artist/Maker: Daniel Eccleston   Place: Lancashire, England

Widely distributed in America, but struck in England, the bronze Eccleston Medal was designed and developed by Daniel Eccleston in 1805. Eccleston, a pro-American Quaker, was especially fond of George Washington; he even visited Washington at Mount Vernon. The portrait of Washington was the largest on any medal at the time. He appears in profile and in armor. The reverse is inscribed "He Laid the Foundation of American Liberty . . ." while depicting a Native American and the phrase "This Land Was Ours." Eccleston supported the cause for American liberty, and likewise considered the treatment of Native Americans.

Guiding Question – What does this object say about George Washington?

Primary Object 2—Mary Burt Chest

Catalog Number: 47.1   Date: 1716

Artist/Maker: Unknown   Place: Northampton, Massachusetts

Chest owned by Mary Marshall (née Burt) who was lived from October 9, 1695 to March 5, 1775. In 1716 Mary Burt married Preserved Marshall. Though married, Mary kept possession of the chest at a time in which it was illegal for women to own personal property. The chest is made of oak and is etched with Mary's maiden name and an array of motifs. The *u* in Burt is instead a *v,* this is due the letters being considered allographs at the time. Prior to the rise of using the letter U, the letter V represented both V and U.

Guiding Question—What does this chest tell us about women and property rights in Colonial America?

Primary Object 3—David Drake Jar

Catalog Number: 2007.24   Date: 1861

Artist/Maker: David Drake   Place: Edgefield District, South Carolina

This utilitatian jar wass made and inscribed by David Drake, who was an enslaved African American potter. The inscription on the jar was made at a time in which literacy laws prohibited enslaved people from reading and writing. The object documents a possible act of anti-enslavement resistance during the Civil War. The inscription of the jar reads, "x LM April 25 – 1861 Dave". LM represents the initials of David Drake's enslaver, Lewis Miles.

Guiding Question—What is the significance behind the potter's inscriptions?

Primary Object 1	Predictions & Observations
  Object Name: Catalog Number: Artist/Maker: Location: Date: Other Notes: 	*List keywords to help you search the database:*

Sources	Synthesis
Use this space to summarize and take notes of the provided sources. While engaging with the sources evaluate the author/speaker, intended audience, and the purpose of the document.	

Primary Object 2	**Predictions & Observations**
  Object Name: Catalog Number: Artist/Maker: Location: Date: Other Notes:	*List keywords to help you search the database:*

Sources	Synthesis
Use this space to summarize and take notes of the provided sources. While engaging with the sources evaluate the author/speaker, intended audience, and the purpose of the document.	

Primary Object 3	Predictions & Observations

Object Name:

Catalog Number:

Artist/Maker:

Location:

Date:

Other Notes: | *List keywords to help you search the database:* |

Sources	Synthesis
Use this space to summarize and take notes of the provided sources. While engaging with the sources evaluate the author/speaker, intended audience, and the purpose of the document.	

Sources for Primary Object 1
Guiding Question – What does this object say about George Washington?

1. DAR Museum Catalog Record for object 87.65
"Widely distributed in America, but struck in England, the bronze Eccleston Medal was designed and developed by Daniel Eccleston in 1805. Eccleston, a pro-American Quaker, was especially fond of George Washington; he even visited Washington at Mount Vernon. The portrait of Washington was the largest on any medal at the time. He appears in profile and in armor. The reverse is inscribed "He Laid the Foundation of American Liberty . . ." while depicting a Native American and the phrase "This Land Was Ours." Eccleston supported the cause for American liberty, and likewise considered the treatment of Native Americans."

2. Excerpt from *Medallic Portraits of Washington*, by Russel Rulau and George Fuld, 1885.
"This piece apparently was issued with a twist of subtle satire. The obverse of the medal depicts Washington in a heavy suit of armor [like a conquistador's armor] – 'a singular conceit,' notes Baker. The reverse has an Indian standing head downcast, with an arrow in his right hand and leaning on a bow. Then, surrounding the Indian at center are the words THE LAND WAS OURS. The medal appears to be more of a commentary on the expropriation [forceful acquisition of property] by colonists of Indian lands than a tribute to Washington.

Yet the phrase beginning 'Innumerable millions yet unborn' is truly laudatory of the nation's first president and commander-in-chief during the Revolutionary War."

3. Excerpt from *Quaker Studies: Daniel Eccleston of Lancaster 1745-1821*, by Carolyn Downs (University of Lancaster), 2006.
"By 1769, Eccleston was travelling around Montreal as well as the Hudson Valley and Great Lakes region… the time he spent with native Americans may have helped develop Eccleston's Quaker outlook on the value of people, for his vision of a world in which all were equal and all valued, no matter what their race or religion."

"He [Eccleston] recalled: 'During my residence in Virginia, when at Alexandria, I had the pleasure, and I may also add, the honour, of meeting with General Washington, who gave me an invitation to call and spend a few days with him on his estate at Mount Vernon.'"

"What is certain is that Daniel Eccleston was a man who engaged with, and to an extent, anticipated, the issues and themes of his time… he deserves serious consideration as a leading example of the development of a significant body of provincial Enlightenment thought. He was part of the radicalization of England that took place in the wake of the American and French Revolutions… there remains no doubt that the man himself lived life to the full and left a legacy of value…"

Sources for Primary Object 2
Guiding Question – What does this chest tell us about women and property rights in Colonial America?

1. Summary of *Hadley chests among the first American collectibles* by Lita & Sally Solis-Cohen for The Baltimore Sun, 1993.
Although the outdated tradition of gifting young girls a chest to store clothing and keepsakes was popular in both the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not until 1883 that the Hadley chest got its name by antique collector Henry Wood Erving. Why the name *Hadley*? Erving was in Hadley, Massachusetts when he purchased the chest, from then on collectors began to refer to this type of furniture as the Hadley chest. The Hadley chest can be identified by the following features: it is wide, wooden, and heavy! The chests were made by skilled carpenters in colonial Massachusetts who often decorated the pieces with etchings and paintings of leaves and flowers. The Hadley Chest also typically features the etched names or initials of the young women who were gifted these chests. Hadley chest expert and historian, Philip Zea estimates that about 500 to 600 Hadley chests were made between the years 1680 and 1740.

2. Provenance [origin and history of an item] Entry from a DAR Museum Curator Work Sheet for object 47.1
"Joined chests were often made for adolescent girls. Mary Marshall, née Burt [maiden name/name before marriage] (b. 1695) would have been 15 years of age in 1710—just old enough to receive such a gift. In this chest Mary could store and secure needlework and other valuables that she would take to a new household upon marriage. Proclamation of her maiden name on the chest, even after marriage, allowed Mary to retain her own personal identity (Ulrich 57) In a patriarchal society where men owned "real" property like land, women owned "movables" like furniture. According to Ulrich, women in a sense became movables themselves (Ulrich 55)."

Entry cites *Furniture as Social History: Gender, Property, and Memory in the Decorative Arts* by Laura Thatcher Ulrich, 1995.

3. Excerpts from *Women and Property Across Colonial America* by Deborah A. Rosen, Ph.D., 2003.
"In [Colonial] America the husband owned and controlled all of the personal property that his wife brought to the marriage; he could sell that property or spend her money as he wished. He also gained the right to manage any real estate belonging to or inherited by his wife; though he could not sell it without her consent, he owned any income earned from the real property, just as he owned any property or money earned by the couple during marriage. A married woman could not sell or bequeath (gift) personal property without her husband's consent, and even with her husband's consent she could not sell or devise her real estate."

"How did these provisions of the law affect the extent of women's property ownership in colonial America? Wills, probate inventories, lawsuits, and deeds from colonial America show that women's limited legal rights in the British colonies acted as a very real constraint on their legal and economic activities".

Sources for Primary Object 3
Guiding Question – What is the significance behind the potter's inscriptions?

1. Passage from *Dave the Potter,* by Thomas Mack, Ph.D., 1999.
"Besides their extraordinary size, Dave's pots are unusual for their inscribed texts. In 1840, Dave began signing his work, not by merely stamping his initials on the base as was the custom but by boldly writing "Dave" on the shoulder of most vessels. It is theorized that Dave may have learned to read and write while working as a typesetter for one of his owners, Abner Landrum, who published a newspaper entitled The Edgefield Hive. Regardless of the source of his literacy, Dave is known to have signed and dated over 100 jars, and on some he wrote verse. This was a remarkable gesture. At a time when the education of slaves was forbidden, Dave was publicly demonstrating his ability to read and write."

2. Excerpt from *Eloquent Vessels/Poetics of Power: The Heroic Stoneware of "Dave the Potter",* by Aaron De Groft, Ph.D., 1998.
"His [David Drake's] wares go beyond mere pottery. They became a usable medium and vehichles of covert, yet overt protest in that Dave not only signed and dated his creations but also incised verses into his pieces before firing. The literature concerning David is not wide ranging, and his idea of protest has never been investigated. However, such an examination reveals that Dave's work does not fit neatly within the regional pottery tradition, nor does it fit exactly into the broader tradition of pottery. That uniqueness stems from the artist, his life, and his use of his craft and writing as a form of self-expressive protest especially at a time when all forms of general self-expression by slaves and free African Americans were condemned."

3. Excerpt from *We Slipped and Learned to Read: Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865,* Janet Cornelius, Ph.D., 1983.
"Slaves themselves believed they faced terrible punishments if whites discovered they could read and write. A common punishment for slaves who had attained more skills, according to blacks who were slaves as children in South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and Mississippi, was amputation, as described by Doc Daniel Dowdy, a slave in Madison County, Georgia: "The first time you was caught trying to read or write, you was whipped with a cow-hide, the next time with a cat-o-nine-tails [a whip with sharp metal pieces at the end of several attached strands] and the third time they cut the first jint [joint] offen [off of] your forefinger." Another Georgia ex-slave carried the story horrifyingly further: "If they caught you trying to write they would cut your finger off and if they caught you again they would cut your head off. None of the 272 slaves in this study actually suffered any such punishments as they learned to read and write, but some had personal knowledge that such atrocities had occurred."

4. From *The Bill of Rights* of the United States of America, 1791.
"Amendment I: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religon, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof: or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press: or the right of the people peacebly to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievences."

Works Cited and Additional Resources:

For more on the George Washington Medal, see:

Downs, Carolyn. "Daniel Eccleston of Lancaster 1745-1821: A Man Not Afraid to Stand on the Shoulders of Giants." *Quaker Studies* 10, no. 2 (November 7, 2014). https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol10/iss2/5.

Rulau, Russell, and George Fuld. *Medallic Portraits of Washington*. 2nd ed. Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 1999.

For more on the Mary Burt Chest, see:

Rosen, Deborah A. "Women and Property across Colonial America: A Comparison of Legal Systems in New Mexico and New York." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2003): 355–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/3491767.

The Baltimore Sun. "Hadley Chests among the First American Collectibles." Accessed April 15, 2022. https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1993-02-28-1993059231-story.html.

Thatcher Ulrich, Laura. "Furniture as Social History: Gender, Property, and Memory in the Decorative Arts." *American Furniture* 3 (1995): 35–64. https://www.chipstone.org/article.php/82/American-Furniture-1995/Furniture-as-Social-History:-Gender,-Property,-and-Memory-in-the-Decorative-Arts.

For more on the David Drake Jar, see:

Cornelius, Janet. "'We Slipped and Learned to Read:' Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865." *Phylon (1960-)* 44, no. 3 (1983): 171–86. https://doi.org/10.2307/274930.

de Groft, Aaron. "Eloquent Vessels/Poetics of Power: The Heroic Stoneware of 'Dave the Potter.'" *Winterthur Portfolio* 33, no. 4 (1998): 249–60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1215184.

Mack, Thomas. "Dave the Potter." University of South Carolina Aiken, 1995. http://polisci.usca.edu/aasc/davepotter.htm.

For more on Object-Based Learning, see:

"Object-Based Learning | Academic Technologies." Accessed April 15, 2022. https://academictechnologies.it.miami.edu/explore-technologies/technology-summaries/object-based-learning/index.html.