

DARMMUSEUM

Lessons from the American Home

Object Lesson: The Watch

Suitable for 4th-12th grades

Summary:

Students will replicate the “object lesson” from the 1860’s, in which they “close read” (or close look) an object to try to capture and describe as many of its physical properties as possible. Then they will determine its function and use, compare it to other objects like it, and finally, they will reason out its historic value. After trying to reason out this object through observable data alone, they will be given secondary sources that reveal the history and context of the object. They will then re-evaluate their observations and reflect on the relationship between secondary and primary sources, while evaluating the benefits of material history.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will practice observation and descriptive language as applied to material history
- Students will understand the pros and cons of observable data, and the necessity of relevant secondary sources
- Students will be familiar with issues around historical counterfeiting (oooooh, foreshadowing)

Time: <15 minutes Required Materials: All required materials are included in this packet.

Curriculum Timing Suggestion: Breguet watches are produced from the late 1700s to the twentieth century. This watch was made sometime during the early 1800s. Can also be used as an example during Unit 0 of sources or during any discussion of primary and secondary sources.

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
Sources/Evidence	Historic objects, secondary sources, museum databases, corporate/organizational history
Key Concepts	Science and technology, economics (indirectly through talking about counterfeiting), material history
Key Strategies and Skills	Critical reading and thinking, close reading objects, 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

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Object Lesson: Watch – Teacher Copy, student copy begins on page 9

Close Reading (<3 minutes): [*You can remove the text and simply give them the object and prompt. Can be done individually, group, or whole class. The student version is larger.*] Look at the object from the DAR Museum collection below. Write down words or phrases to describe it completely to someone who has not seen it. Do not label it – calling it a watch is not enough. What shape is it? What are the shapes contained within it? What colors does it have and where are they? Describe any images or words you see – what do they depict, what font and color does it use? What materials do you think it is made of? What size is it? What would it feel like if you touched it? Does it make a sound? Try not to stop writing until time timer is up.



Observe (<3 minutes):

[Particularly note the Arabic numerals, the clock hand, the words Breguet (Bruh-gay) and “A P A R I”, the damage, and guess what metal it’s made out of. Have them note the number on the back. Note the key hole on the face and the loop at the top. Optionally, try a drawing activity. Have students try to describe the object and try to draw it out on a computer or white board. It’ll help them refine their language towards a practical goal.]

Reasoning – Function and Function Qualities (<3 minutes): What is this object used for? Do you know or do you think it is used for that purpose? Make sure to distinguish between *assumed knowledge* and *reasoned conclusions*. What physical aspects of this object determine how it is used? What makes it able to do the thing that you think it does?

[It's a watch, used to tell time. Which in turn is used to keep appointments, keep a schedule, know when to eat, when to sleep, when to wake, when to work. It can also be used for health functions, checking heart rate. But how accurately can this watch tell time? It has only one hand. Is that intentional. Point out the damage on the watch face. Do they think that the hands missing were left off intentional or damaged? Which hand is left? How many times a day could this watch be right? Get creative: what does a watch enable us to do? Note that the piece has a loop at the top. What function would that serve? It could be attached to a chain or string, which makes it both portable, and also allows one to keep it safe/not lose it. There is a hole in the face that may look like a keyhole – what could that be for? Its used to set the time. Why would you need to set the time more than once? What do the gears inside enable? Why are some gears on top and some gears hidden behind an additional plate? What powers this watch? Look at the writing, does this imply anything about function? What's the purpose of putting this text here? Look at the remaining hand, why does it have a circle at the top? Does that serve any function?]

Reasoning – Comparison (<3 minutes): Compare this object to other objects like it. How is it different? How is it the same? In what circumstances would their differences be more beneficial? How could this object be improved to suit different scenarios?

[Let's think about other types of watches and clocks. How is this different from a wristwatch? A wall clock? A grandfather or cuckoo clock. What benefits does a pocket watch have over those other types of clocks? What benefits do those other clocks have over a wristwatch? How is this different from an apple watch? What makes it superior to an apple watch? It doesn't need recharged for one. Do all clocks show Arabic numerals? How are the hands different from other clocks? What other materials could this watch be made from? Would those have benefits or take away from its function? What if the body was made of glass? What would change if it was made of gold? Why would a museum keep this object as part of its collection? What may make it special? What value might it hold?]

Synthesis, Part 1 - Read: Read the secondary source(s) below.

Source 1: *From Clareta Olmstead Smith (Ellensburg, Washington), January 4th, 1936 to Mrs. E.R. York (Tacoma, Washington):*

My dear Mrs. York:

September 17 you wrote to our chapter in regard to gifts for the D.A.R. Museum. Our regent has handed the letter to me.

We have an old Breguet [sic] watch that was carried all through the Revolutionary War, at valley Forge, Concord, and many other historic battles. The watch is in as good repair as one could expect it to be. My grandfather carried it through the Civil War and across the Plains and around the “horn” in 1849 [author describing ancestor taking several trips from east to west coast, once by land, once by sea around Cape Horn]. The crystal [cover] is broken and the key is lost, but it will still tick.

Would the D.A.R. Committee care for this watch? I think a great deal of this watch but would be willing for the D.A.R. to have it.

Yours very truly,
Clareta Olmstead Smith

Source 2: Handwritten note from DAR Museum Archives, Catalogue 2882

Mr. and Mrs. William L. Pritchard, Trustees of the National Watch and Clock Museum, of NAWCC, 514 Poplar St, Columbia, PA, 17512, examined this watch Dec. 18, 1990 with [Curator of Mechanical Arts] Martha Toulmin. Their comments:

“Not a real Breguet – a fake. If the name appears on the face, it is not his. He had a secret way of signing it – engraving his name under the enamel, so that held in oblique [angled] light, one could see the indentation of his engraving. This watch is early 19th century [1800s].

Source 3: From Breguet.com/en/history

“Breguet also created his famous open-tipped Breguet hands. He was driven by a desire to clean up the design, and that included Arabic numerals, which he refined, and the case, which he slimmed down. In combination with large and flat enameled dials, these graphic lines would prove highly popular with the public and strongly influence other manufacturers watches.”

“Their very success soon made Breguet’s watches a tempting target for counterfeiters. In 1795, Breguet came up with a counter measure: the secret signature. Etched into the dial, the signature is all but invisible unless the dial is examined in oblique light.”

Synthesis, Part 2 – Reflect (<3 minutes): How did the secondary sources change how you viewed the object? Cite specific examples. Are these sources reliable? What is the audience for each source? If the source makes a claim, is there evidence to back it up? Where would we go to find more evidence about this watch? Look back at your observations – what did you observe accurately, what did you miss or observe inaccurately? Look at your reasoned function and comparisons. Has your concept of the object’s function changed? What additional ways does this object differ from other objects of its type now that you’ve read additional sources? In what ways will this affect how you look at future objects? What questions do you still have? Where would you go to find answers to those questions.

[Source 1 communicates a storied history for this object. Source 2 states that the object is a counterfeit. Which source seems more reliable? How does source 3 add more authority or reliability to source 2? What evidence does source 2 use to back up its claim? How is source 1 evidenced? What might cause this narrative to develop around this object? Is it possible that source 1 has any truth to it? Using evidence from the other sources, what in source 1 cannot be true? Using the clues from source 2 and 3, what observations can you confirm to support their argument? Notice the dates on source 1 and 2, why did it take so long to discover this was a forgery? What knowledge would you need to discover that? Look at the origin of source 3? What makes this source different from the other two – could this source have been used in 1936? 1990? Why would the museum keep a known forgery? What value does it have? How does the item being a forgery correspond with the statements made in source 3? What does it tell you of the value of a Breguet watch, and the value of a forgery in the past and the present?]

Additional Reflection Space:

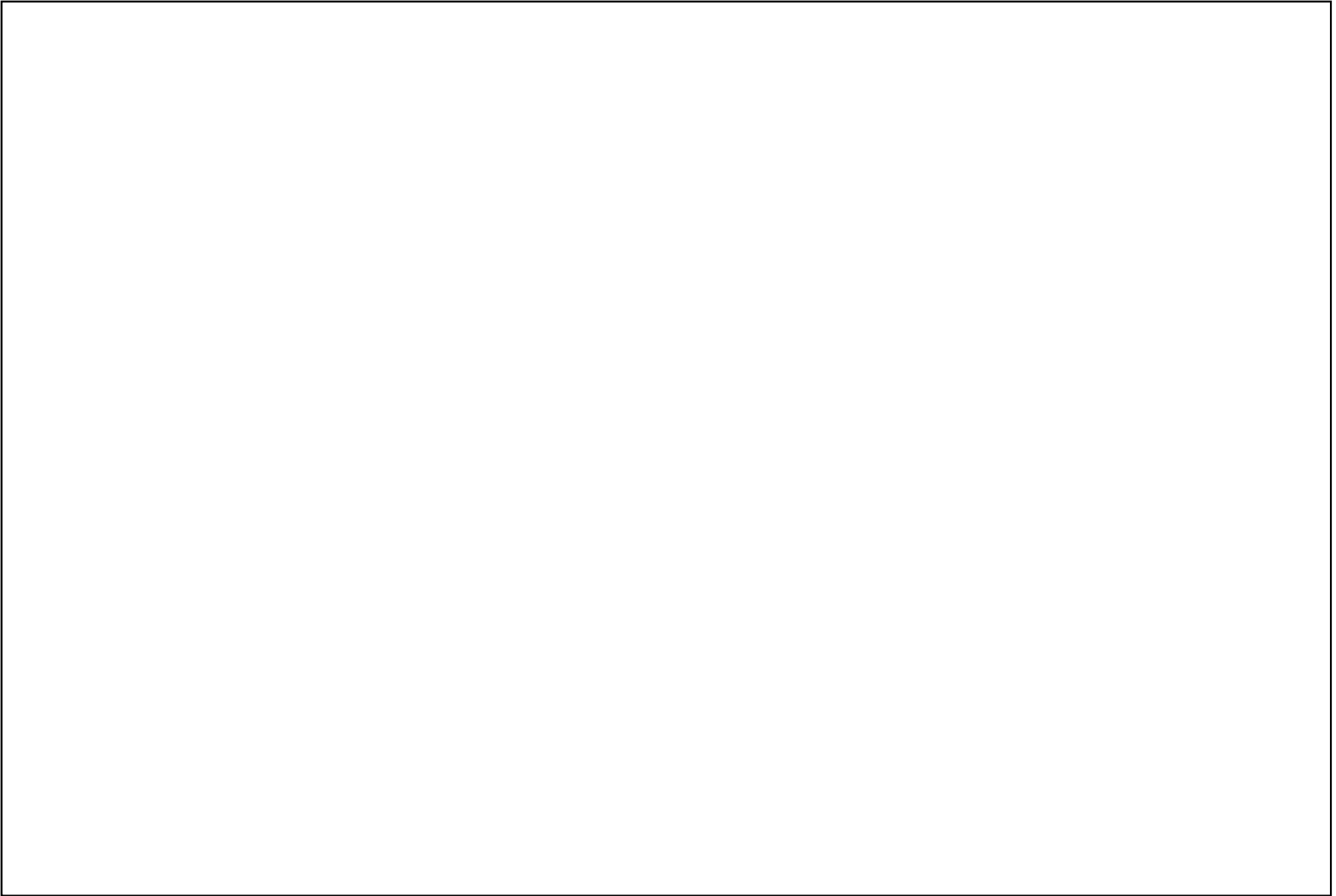
A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for student reflection. It occupies the majority of the page below the text.

Object Lesson: Watch

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Observe:

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Reasoning – Function and Function Qualities: What is this object used for? Do you know or do you think it is used for that purpose? Make sure to distinguish between *assumed knowledge* and *reasoned conclusions*. What physical aspects of this object determine how it is used? What makes it able to do the thing that you think it does?

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Reasoning – Comparison: Compare this object to other objects like it. How is it different? How is it the same? In what circumstances would their differences be more beneficial? How could this object be improved to suit different scenarios?

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Additional Reflection Space:

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