

Historical enquiry through object investigation

Historical objects have tremendous value as a starting point for historical investigation. Object analysis presents an imaginative way for children to begin larger investigations of the past. The opportunity to handle and use physical objects stimulates curiosity and can add to first-hand knowledge about technology, tools and their uses. When guided effectively, this type of investigation can lead to critical thinking, hypothesizing and the development of key historical skills.



Methods of conducting an historical enquiry through object investigation

The following lesson plans provide two useful methods of conducting an historical enquiry through object investigation:

- The British Museum: https://www.tes.com/hugehistory/historical_enquiry.html
- Museums Victoria: <https://museums victoria.com.au/learning/small-object-big-story/>

The resources contained in this package include charts and links to assist in these types of historical enquiry.

Locating historical objects for your students

Wanneroo Regional Museum collections and outreach resources

Wanneroo Museum is now offering a free loan of a 'Technology past and present' museum in a box for schools who book into our updated [Wanneroo Past Investigators program](#). The boxes contain a range of familiar and unfamiliar objects for the students to investigate as part of an historical enquiry. You will have access to this resource after completing our museum education program.

Our [Museum Education Resources](#) page provides a number of object comparison activities with illustrated past and present topics including a PowerPoint of close-up object images.

For other images of life in the past from a local context, see [Picture Wanneroo](#). These are pictorial resources from the City of Wanneroo's Community History Centre.

BYO resources

Students can bring in an old object from home (make sure it is sturdy and not too large) to use as an item of inquiry.

Teachers could also take an op-shop trip for an easy way to amass a range of items, or if there is a HASS committee, create a school collection of historical objects which could be housed in the school library for common use. In this way the collection could grow according to relevant curricular/school directions. You might want to focus on particular themes, e.g. toys; written forms of communication; old school items; clothing; etc.

External websites - images

While the tactile, multisensory nature of objects make them fascinating sources of study for children, if actual objects are not possible to obtain, you can print out images of old objects. You could focus on particular themes (e.g. toys, clothes, cars, telephones, computers, domestic appliances). A few websites for images include

Toys:

- [Aboriginal toys](#) (The Australian Museum)
- [Australian toys through time](#) (Museums Victoria – images of Australian toys from 1810 to 2009)
- [Victoria & Albert Museum of Childhood](#)
- [Toys through time](#) (Sydney Living Museum)
- [Twinkl resources](#) – very attractive pictures and resources

Telephones:

- [In Pictures: 200 year epic journey of phones](#) (ABC Science)

Domestic appliances:

- [Museums Victoria image collection](#)
- [West Australian museum collection](#) (look up key words e.g. washing machine)

Additional websites:

Object Lessons: learning through objects from the Islington Education Library's Handling Services.
<https://www.objectlessons.org>

Everything is alive: ideas for a creative response based on object investigation
<https://www.everythingisalive.com/>

Let us know...

We would be delighted to hear how you have used these resources, and any suggestions for improvements.

Also, if we can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Gabrielle Grime, Naomi Hoyle, Marika Burke
Heritage Education Team
E: Museum@wanneroo.wa.gov.au
T: 9405 5920

Activities to encourage enquiry through object investigation

This resource includes a range of different ideas and visible thinking charts to accompany historical enquiry.

1. Then and now charts

- a. Students can be introduced to Venn diagrams to represent tools, toys, and items that have changed over the years. They can draw pictures of objects that fit into the circle labelled “then” or the circle labelled “now”. Certain items – or aspects of design - may have stayed the same and will go into the middle.
- b. Varying diagrams might be devoted to different themes (for example kitchen tools, telephones, women’s clothing, games and toys).

2. Object timelines

Timelines are a useful visual guide for teaching chronology. Using investigative methods discussed in class, students find out as much as they can about objects brought from home or found in our museum in a box. The students will decide in groups or as a class, where to place the objects on a timeline. Beforehand, you might write in significant dates or personal timeframes (for example, my grandma’s teen years, my parents’ childhood, etc). Students could either draw the objects and have these hung up in sequence, or place the objects chronologically around the classroom.

Vocabulary: For students still learning about chronology and time terminology, having a long piece of rope in the classroom and cards with expressions of time such as *years ago; a long time ago; recently; a while ago; before; yesterday; nowadays; at present; now; in a little while; shortly; soon; afterwards; in the future; light years from now* can also be an entertaining way for students to discuss in groups how adverbs and time clauses work – and their order. This can be a useful lead in to more specific timeline activities with objects.

3. Object examination and further investigation

Questioning and hypothesizing are crucial skills in the study of history. This object examination chart is intended for students to ask questions of their object, search for clues, and to make conclusions based on their discoveries. It is also an opportunity to consider what they *don’t* know, and where they might find that information. This is a chance for students to begin critically asking themselves questions about what they know, what they don’t know and how to find such information through tools such as a K-W-L chart, See-Think-Wonder. It is also a good introduction for assessing what a *reliable* source is.

4. Creative response: Invent the object’s story

Written: Older primary students could write their own stories from the point of view of the particular object. Based on the knowledge acquired about an object and their own abilities to judge the plausibility of various hypotheses, students would write a story which explains key elements of what they have found.

Oral/dramatic presentation: An object’s story could also be done as an oral presentation, with one group of students each presenting as their object each day. Students listening can take

notes and determine the chronological sequence of the items - the students can then stand in object sequence once the class has agreed.

Multimedia: The free online app, *Chatterpix* (available for [Apple](#) or [Android](#)), offers a way for students to make an image of their chosen object talk and to make a small film clip. The app is simple to manipulate. See these examples from the Wanneroo Regional Museum: [Toilet can](#); [Radio](#).

In this way, students could write a short 30 second character speech based on their written or oral presentation to allow their object to “come alive” and present its own story.

Opportunities for deeper reflection

Examining objects, their uses, the people who used them, and the ways they have developed enable exploration of deeper themes in history. The following questions may serve as prompts for students to consider the role of objects in telling stories about particular aspects of history. Depending on the types of objects examined in the class, it could be a good chance to examine questions such as:

- What clues does the object give us about how people have lived? How can we use those clues to find out more about how life in the past?
- What has the object study taught us about the role of technology and what it can contribute to lives in the past and today? (Time? Convenience? Health? Gender roles? Skills? Values?)
- If there is a newer version of your object, what are its improvements and how do they benefit the people using it today? Are there any disadvantages?
- What do material objects contribute to our understanding of history? What can't an object tell us? How else can we find answers to those questions?

Broader questions could include:

- Why home appliances have affected women's ability to work (and be educated) outside the home
- Planned obsolescence/single use items are common today, compared to the long-lasting items of the past. What are the benefits and disadvantages of both sides?

Curriculum links

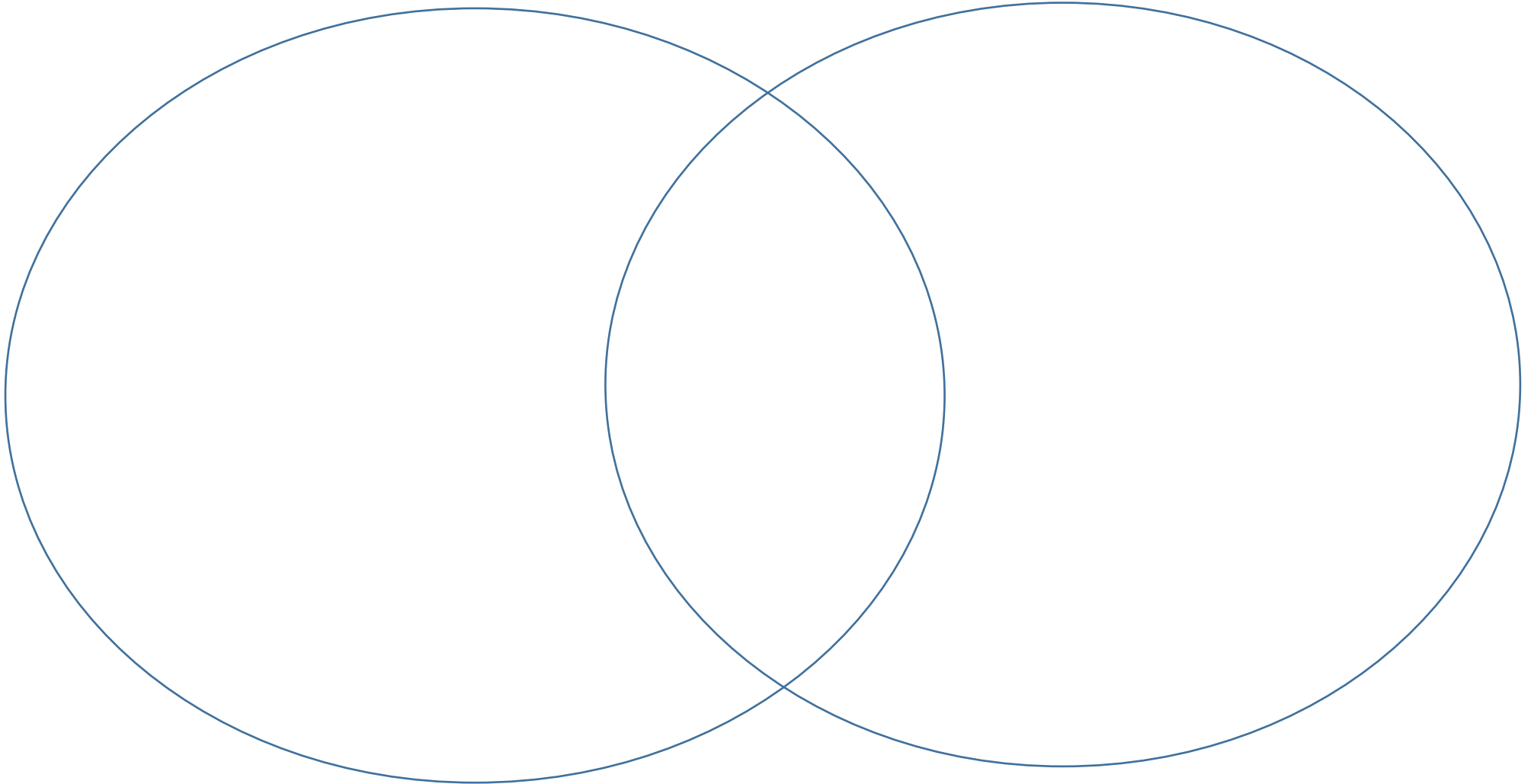
HASS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of changing technology on people's lives and how the technology of the past differs from what is used today (<u>ACHASSK046</u>). • Sort and record selected information and/or data (e.g. use graphic organisers, take keywords) (WAHASS16). • Identify relevant information (WAHASS17). • Process information and/or data collected (e.g. sequence information or events, categorise information, combine information from different sources) (WAHASS18) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in decision-making processes (e.g. engage in group discussions, make shared decisions, share views) (WAHASS22). • Draw conclusions based on information and/or data displayed in pictures, texts and maps (e.g. form categories, make generalisations based on patterns) (WAHASS21). • Present findings in a range of communication forms, using relevant terms (e.g. written, oral, digital, role-play, graphic) (WAHASS23). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop texts, including narratives and biographies, that use researched facts, events and experiences (WAHASS38) • Reflect on learning, identify new understandings and act on findings in different ways (e.g. complete a <u>kwl chart</u>, propose action in response to new knowledge) (WAHASS39) • Compare objects from the past with those from the present and consider how places have changed over time (ACHASSI039) |
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General capabilities: Literacy; critical and creative thinking; personal capability; information and communication technology; intercultural understanding.

Then and now

Draw how your object(s) looked in the past (then) and in the present (now). Are there any similarities between them? Draw or write what they are in the middle.



How have things changed?

Object: _____

When my grandparents were children	When my parents were children	Me
<p>Drawing</p> 	<p>Drawing</p> 	<p>Drawing</p>
<p>Describe the main features of the object (shape, material it's made of, size...)</p> 	<p>Describe the main features of the object</p> 	<p>Describe the main features of the object</p>

What are the biggest changes you notice? _____

Why do you think the changes have happened? _____

Do you think there will be more changes to this object in the future? Why/why not? _____

Draw a future design of your object. Label any changes.



Object investigation

Close observation of an object and consideration of what clues such observations provide are important skills in history. The clues can then allow the students to make preliminary conclusions based on what they have observed. Importantly, such conclusions should not be pure speculation or guessing – they should be a hypothesis based on what has been observed, together with a student's own prior knowledge.

Such questioning is also an opportunity to consider how to find *more* information about the object, and to consider the reliability of the source of that information.

Engage:

- Bring in an old object from home. Show this to the students and do an initial brainstorm using the 'See-Think-Wonder' model OR put up the object examination table on a Smart Board, and do a think aloud. This will be important, particularly to model how to think through what your observations might tell you. Encouraging questioning and answers based on observation is useful for students.

Hmmm... I see this item has a wooden handle, and the rest of it is made of some kind of metal. There's no plastic at all, but I know these are commonly made of plastic nowadays! Plastic wasn't invented until about 60 years ago...so how old might this be?

Look at the rust and the dents in it. The colour is very faded, too. What does a faded colour and rust tell me about where it's been? Yes, it's been outside a lot and has faded in the sun – it's not been indoors. Now, it's interesting that the handle is such good quality. Why would this have been made with such a good handle? Perhaps so that someone would carry it quite far? What about all of these dents? How big are they? What might have caused them? What else should I look for to give me clues about who made this object? The brand name, and where it was made! Let's have a close look...this was made in Australia! Is this common today? Etc.

Explore:

- Students can now undertake their object investigation in pairs or small groups. The use of group work can be helpful here: students can play a key role as a critical thinker for their peers. There may be an opportunity for pairs or small groups to compare their objects and their K-W-L charts and test their hypotheses and questions before researching further.

Resources:

- **Object Examination Table**

A chart for recording observations and conclusions

- **K-W-L Chart**

A graphic organiser for guiding and building on key historical and critical thinking skills; summarizing known information; developing questions and hypotheses.

- **Where can I find out more about my object?**

We can introduce students to the idea that good historians back up their ideas with evidence they have observed and reliable information they have found. With respect to finding further information, introduce the idea of using *reliable* sources. Discuss when/if people are reliable sources (the notion of oral history). What makes a written source (particularly a website), reliable?

Object Examination table

Question	Observations/clues (What I see)	What conclusions I've made from my observations so far... (I think/I know...)
What is it made of? (E.g. plastic, steel, cotton, glass, porcelain...)		
How old is it? (E.g. is it from your grandparents time? Is it before plastic - i.e. more than 60 years old?)		
What condition is this object in? (E.g. poor, good, broken, working, rusty...) Are there any hints to show what might have happened to it?		
How can I tell what it was used for?		
Who used it? (If you don't know, are there any clues to suggest its use?)		
Does it have a brand name on it?		
Does it have any decorations on it? Do they mean anything?		
Is there a modern version of the object? How is it different?		
What could help us find out more and where can I find it?		

See...

Think...

Wonder ...

K-W-L Chart

Know What do I know about my object?	Want to know? What questions do I still have about my object	Learn What have I learned about my object?
<i>E.g. I know it's made of...</i>	<i>E.g. I don't know how it was used.</i>	<i>E.g. I've learned that...</i>

Where can I find out more about my object?

Source (e.g. person, website)	Why is this a <i>reliable source</i> ?	Question to ask or research	Answer
<i>E.g. My mum.</i>	<i>Because she lived at the time when the object was used and she owned one.</i>	<i>How did people use this object?</i>	<i>People used this to listen to music when they were exercising or wanting to listen to music privately. They clipped it on their clothes and used the headphones to listen to the music.</i>
<i>E.g. Sony website.</i>	<i>The object was made by Sony.</i>	<i>When was this object made?</i>	<i>This object was made around 1980.</i>

The following two activities are creative responses linking HASS and English/Drama. The website [Everything is alive](#) provides some interesting examples.

Creative response: What's the story?

Now that you have investigated your object, it's time to give it some life!

You are going to [write/present] a story about your object. Your story will need to answer these questions:

- How old am I?
- Who made me (if known)? Where and when?
- Where have I lived?
- What have I been used for? What are my special features?
- Have I been misused or have I been treated well?
- Does anyone use me now? Where am I kept now?
- Has a newer invention taken my place?

As you [write/speak], think about the **voice of your object**. Would it be cheerful or sad or upset? Would it be proud? How can you give it some personality?

Creative response: Giving life to my object

Resources required:

- Students' objects
- ICT: tablets/multimedia devices with Chatterpix already downloaded and photographing capability allowed
- A timer, so students can rehearse their speech in the 30 second time limit.

Show students the Chatterpix film clip examples of the [Toilet can](#) and [Radio](#) from the Wanneroo Museum.

Tell students that they are going to bring their objects to life by creating a short 30 second film clip using the Chatterpix app. Suggested instructions:

1. Write and rehearse a short speech pretending to be your object. Make sure your speech includes
 - a. How old you are
 - b. What you were used for and any special features
 - c. Whether you're still used now or if a newer invention has taken your place.
2. Practice saying your speech (in a suitable character voice) in 30 seconds. You may have to speak quite quickly!
3. When you are ready and have practised sufficiently, move to the multimedia device.
4. Open the Chatterpix app and follow the instructions:
 - a. Choose your photo from the photo gallery if it's already on the device, (or take one)
 - b. Draw a line to show the mouth on your object
 - c. Record your object's speech
 - d. Play the clip to see how it worked. (You may need a few tries to speak within 30 seconds).
 - e. Show your teacher/class and save the film clip.

If possible, do an example on your device in front of the students first, going through each step. We would love to see any examples of stories or clips produced in class! (Our email: Museum@wanneroo.wa.gov.au).