

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Period \_\_\_\_\_

## Analyzing Artifacts

Historians assess five key aspects of an artifact when studying the past.

- **CREATOR:** Who wrote the document or made the artifact?
- **CONTEXT:** Where and when was it created?
- **AUDIENCE:** For whom was it made?
- **PURPOSE:** What was the intended use of the document or object?
- **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:** How does this object affect our understanding of history?

Studying historical artifacts can help make history seem more real and relevant, and creates a connection with the past that is sometimes difficult to get from books alone.

### Creator:

#### Who wrote the document or made the artifact?

Historians generally begin examining an artifact by asking questions about the item's creator. This enables the examiner to determine the creator's motivations for making the artifact. It also helps to classify the artifact within a particular time and place.

### Context:

#### Where and when was it created?

The next step is to consider the context in which an artifact was produced. Learning as much as possible about the time and place in which an object was created helps you to better understand why it was created.

### Audience and Purpose:

#### For whom was it made?

#### What was the intended use of the document or object?

Examining the possible audience for and purpose of an object helps you to understand how the artifact was actually used. Because the creator's intentions are often very different from the viewer's responses, thinking about both the audience and purpose often leads to new insights about an artifact.

Very often, the audience for and the purpose of a particular artifact will overlap, since both deal with the creator's intention, culture, and responses to the object within and outside of the society.

### Historical Significance:

#### Why is it important for the culture of the people?

Artifacts – the objects we make and use – are part of American history. If we know how to look at them, they can be sources for better understanding our history. Consider each artifact with its many stories as holding diverse meanings for different people, past and present. Think of them as bits of contested history. It is because of the contest and conflict they embody, and the way they combine use and meaning, that artifacts are such valuable tools for exploring the past. Artifacts tell their own stories. They connect people, mean many things, capture moments of history, and reflect changes. Artifacts can be used to understand, explain, and present history.



**Directions:** using the picture of an artifact that you are given, try to answer the questions. If you are uncertain, reason a possible answer.

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