

## Section 2: Artifacts as Primary Sources

### Introduction:

The goal is for students to use artifacts to develop interpretation about the role of the buffalo in the life of the Plains Indians. In “Reading an Artifact” and “History Mystery: What is it?” students will research an artifact to learn about both the past and the present. In “If This Artifact Could Speak” students will give voice to the object. In “Class Exhibit” students will create an exhibit using the artifacts they have researched.

### Objectives:

1. Students will be able to analyze an artifact as a primary source.
2. Students will use an artifact analysis to develop an interpretation related to the role of the buffalo in the life of the Plains Indians.

### Compelling Question:

What can I learn about the past by examining an artifact?

### Trunk Materials Needed:

- Parfleche
- Moccasin
- Pouch
- Spoon
- Mittens
- Flesher
- Shield
- Bladder
- Awl
- Tail
- Sinew
- Cup
- Hoop
- Scapula
- Object cards for each object used in this lesson

Additional materials not in the trunk that could also be used:

- Dried meat or jerky

## Lesson 2a: Reading an Artifact

Additional information about reading artifacts can be found at “Artifacts as Primary Sources’ in the introductory section of this manual.

1. Divide the class into groups if necessary so that each has one object to work with.
2. Provide each student with a copy of Worksheet #1: Artifact Analysis. Students should complete their worksheets as much as possible by looking closely, or “reading,” the object.
3. Next, provide groups with the object card associated with their object. Students should read the text on the card and, using a different color pen, add information to their worksheet that was gained from doing “research” using the object card.
4. Students should then write at least one question they still have about the object. This is to reinforce that historical research is a process of asking questions. No single source can provide all the answers.
5. Depending upon time, students should research their question(s).
6. Students should compare their research and questions within the group. Groups should share their object with the class and what they learned.

### Assessments:

1. Observations and research on worksheet.
2. Student’s question to direct additional research.
3. The oral report’s organization, content and presentation.

## Lesson 2b: History Mystery: What is it?

1. Present the flesher to your class without telling them anything about it.
2. Have students describe the object. What is it made of? How big is it? What does it weigh? Does it have any moving parts? Does it look like it belongs to something else?
3. When students have exhausted all observations, ask students “How was this object used?” There are no wrong answers. The point of this exercise is to get them to start thinking and asking questions. They are drawing on past experience to come up with a hypothesis of how it was used. If students have no prior experience with this object, they will probably make inferences that prove to be wrong. This will help them understand that when objects are taken out of their historical context, we can misinterpret their use or place in history.
4. At some point show the class a piece of tanned hide or rawhide from the trunk. Or hand a student the flesher and the hide. How does the inference that these two items go together change ones understanding about its use?
5. Once it is established that this is a tool used to clean a hide show the class a photo of it in use (Photo on flash drive – #10loc, scraping a hide). Discuss how fleshers were used by the Plains Indians, why it was necessary to clean hides and how the hides were used. How has life changed for people living in Kansas today? Why has life changed? What do these changes say about technology?

## Lesson 2c: If This Artifact Could Speak

1. Assign each student, or group, an object from the trunk and have each research it by reading their artifact and doing additional research. Students can use Worksheet #1: Artifact Analysis or another worksheet such as those developed by the National Archives or Library of Congress.
2. Have students divide into one of three groups – food, clothing, or shelter – based upon what they see as the role of their object in the life of the Plains Indians. Some objects may fit within more than one of these groups. Students should choose one. If more than one student is assigned the same object they do not have to choose the same group. Students should explain the reason they chose the group they did and what their object contributes to that group. Use a Venn diagram to visualize the students' choices.
3. Groups will then create a dialog that gives voice to up to three objects from their group. The dialog will be written as if the objects could speak. The dialog should include what the object is, its function, the material it is made of, and how it shows the place the buffalo plays in this aspect of the Plains Indian way of life.
4. Each group should present their dialog to the class.

### Assessments:

1. Student explanation of why their object fits in the category they chose.
2. Venn diagram.
3. The organization, content, creativity, and presentation of the dialog of their objects.




Venn diagram example

## Lesson 2d: Class Exhibit

Note: For younger students this activity may be simplified by using the object cards as object labels and have students write short main and/or secondary labels.

1. Assign each student, or group, an object to research by reading the artifact and doing additional research. Students can use [Worksheet #1: Artifact Analysis](#) or another worksheet such as those developed by the National Archives or Library of Congress.
2. Have the class design an exhibit based on their research and using the artifacts and photos in this trunk. The process will be similar to writing a research paper as shown below.

| Creating an exhibit  | Example   |
|--|---|
| <p>Choose a theme for the exhibit. The theme will determine the title.</p> <p>Write a label that encompasses the theme of the exhibit. This will be the introductory, or main, label.</p>                    | <p><i>(title)</i> Buffalo: The Center of Life</p> <p><i>(introductory or main label)</i> The buffalo is central to the life of the Plains Indians. This resource provided most of what the Plains Indians needed to survive. The buffalo is often called the general store for these people.</p>  |
| <p>Divide the main topic into secondary themes. Together these will provide the story for the exhibit. These will be the secondary, or section, titles of the exhibit.</p>                                   | <p><i>(secondary or section title examples)</i></p> <p>Hunting the Buffalo</p> <p>Food</p> <p>Shelter</p> <p>Clothing</p>   |
| <p>Write a label for each of the secondary themes, or sections. These labels need to explain how each section is tied to the main theme of the exhibit. These will be the secondary, or section, labels.</p> | <p><i>(section, or secondary, label example for "Hunting the Buffalo")</i></p> <p>Hunting buffalo became a spiritual activity for people who relied so heavily on them. The buffalo meant life. This made hunting them a necessity of life. For centuries the Plains Indians and the buffalo shared the Great Plains. This long connection is seen in the many and varied ways the buffalo was part of their lives.</p> |

| Creating an exhibit   | Example   |
|---|---|
| <p>Use object labels to provide information about specific objects, photographs, or other primary sources in the exhibit. The object labels need to provide evidence or information from your research to support the interpretation offered in the section they are included in.</p>    | <p><i>(object labels for “Hunting the Buffalo”)</i></p> <p><i>(label for a buffalo photo)</i><br/>Buffalo live in herds that migrate in search of food and water. While on hunting trips, Plains Indians followed the herds. Sometimes the Plains Indians burned the prairie grass. New grass that grew after the burn attracted buffalo herds.</p> <p><i>(sinew label)</i><br/>The Plains Indians developed specific tools to hunt the buffalo such as spears and arrows. They used sinew from the buffalo to attach spear and arrow points to wooden shafts. Sinew is the tendons or ligaments in animals. The Plains Indians wrapped wet sinew around the point and the wooden shaft. As the sinew dried it shrank, hardened and held the point solidly on the shaft.</p> <p><i>(hoop label)</i><br/>The hoop is part of a game played by men and boys. The goal was to throw a stick or arrow through a hoop rolling across the ground. The game provided an opportunity to practice hunting skills. The game also held spiritual meaning. It provided a way for the Plains Indians to communicate the importance of the buffalo to the spirits and their hope for large herds and a successful hunt.</p> |
| <p>Write a concluding label to pull the exhibit together. This paragraph is similar to a concluding paragraph in a research paper.</p>  | <p><i>(concluding label)</i><br/>For the Plains Indians the buffalo was similar to today’s superstore. It provided the necessities of life such as food, clothing, and shelter. They asked the spiritual powers to give them life by providing buffalo in the present and the future. While the Plains Indians hunted other game, nothing was as central to their life as the buffalo.</p>  |

**Tips for creating an exhibit:**

- Keep the labels short and simple. Limit the text in each label to eighty words or less.
- Make it easy for the viewer to read the labels by using a plain font that is large enough to read from several feet away.
- Think of object labels as captions. Each object label should place the object within the framework of the section and the exhibit. Examples of good label writing are photo captions in *National Geographic* magazines.
- Use design features to help viewers understand the exhibit's organization and flow. Design elements could include such things as using different colored paper for the labels in different sections; using a hierarchy of font sizes to differentiate the hierarchy of labels; or the placement of objects, photos and labels in the exhibit.

**Assessments:**

1. The content, organization and presentation of the class exhibit.
2. Ability of students to work together on the creation of a class exhibit.

