



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1985 Volume VI: Time Machines: Artifacts and Culture

Introduction

The seminar *Time Machines: Artifacts and Culture* explored modes of utilizing object analysis as a means of enlarging our cultural understanding of other times and places, as well as our own. Artifacts constitute a special category of historical events—things that happened in the past—that not only embody conscious and unconscious beliefs of the culture that produced them, but, unlike other historical events, continue to exist in the present. They can be reexperienced, affording us a privileged mode of nonverbal, affective access to other cultures. This differs from traditional verbal and statistical scholarship, and can lead to new cultural insights. Pedagogically, it opens up the possibility of making other cultures—other ways of life and thought—more comprehensible to students who have difficulty absorbing verbal information, or who are immediately dismissive of cultures different from their own.

Twothirds of the Fellows in this seminar teach in middle schools, onethird in high schools. More than half are middle school art teachers; the others teach English, Spanish, social science and history. The units embrace a wide geographical and chronological range of cultures—Africa (2), PreColumbian Mexico, Ancient Egypt, North American Indian, and contemporary and historical United States.

In this seminar two elements received special emphasis. One was the technique of close object analysis. The other was the craft of writing, to which several special meetings and a program of editorial assistance were devoted. These became the common denominators unifying the disparate skills, interests, and teaching levels of the Fellows. The results are presented here.

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