



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1998 Volume III: Art and Artifacts: the Cultural Meaning of Objects

Introduction

The seminar *Art and Artifacts: the Cultural Interpretation of Objects* focused on close analysis of things, a non-verbal way to learn about other cultures. Valuable methodologically in its own right as a procedure for investigation, close analysis is also useful for engaging the interest of students, including those who have difficulty with verbal materials. Teachers of history, social science, foreign languages, art, English and science are among those who have found this approach useful. This year we devoted entire seminars to such objects as a silver teapot of around 1800, a pre-Revolutionary desk and bookcase, a painting by Winslow Homer, a depression era photograph by Walker Evans, a building, maps of New Haven, and clothing. Each Fellow also examined a single object, one related in some way to his or her curriculum unit, producing short written exercises in description, deduction and speculation. Reflecting the interests of the New Haven school population, the final curriculum units frequently but not exclusively deal with African, Hispanic and Native American cultures. For of the are oriented curriculum units (Belton, Lawrence, Leger, Mullins) consider Native American and/or African cultures, examining and recreating masks, sculpture and other characteristic artifacts. Four other units (Ayers, Calderon, Magaraci, Recalde) concentrate on older or ancient cultures of Mexico (Aztec), the Caribbean (Taíno), Greece (Athens and Sparta), and China (Shang) as manifest in ceremonial and utilitarian objects of bronze, stone and ceramics, and in architecture and city planning. A unit on Mohandas Gandhi (Herndon) includes a study of Gandhi's involvement with spinning as embodied in a spinning wheel to explore his values. Finally a unit based on archaeological work in Wellfleet, Massachusetts (Broker) explores cultural change over two centuries as expressed in artifacts and also as related to the natural environment.

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