

All-Inclusive Heritage Museum

Students investigate a family object as historical evidence and curate a class museum of the heritages in their community

GRADE AND COURSE

Grades 6 to 8: World History, Ethnic Studies, or ELA

TIME

Three class periods of 45 to 50 minutes, plus a family interview at home

APPENDICES

A: Family Heirloom Interview
B: Museum Labels
C: Object Analysis and Museum Walk

Overview

Objects carry history. A cooking pot, a photograph, a piece of jewelry, or a prayer book can tell us where a family came from, what it valued, and what it lived through. When Jews left the Middle East and North Africa in the 20th century, many families could take only what fit in a suitcase, and the few objects they carried became precious links to the homes they lost. In this lesson, students interview a family member about an heirloom, analyze it as a primary source, place it in historical context using an outside source, and curate a class museum that shows the many heritages in their school community.

Essential Questions

1. What can an object tell us about the people who owned it and the times they lived in?
2. How do families decide what to keep and pass on, and what is lost when they cannot?
3. How reliable is family memory as historical evidence, and how can we check it?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Interview a family member and record the story of an heirloom or family tradition.
2. Analyze an object as a primary source, describing its material, origin, use, and meaning.
3. Place the object in time and place on a class timeline and map.
4. Use at least one outside source to confirm or add context to the family story, and explain what family memory and the object cannot tell us.
5. Write an accurate, concise museum label for an audience.
6. Compare objects across the class museum and explain what the collection reveals about migration, culture, and identity.

Standards Alignment

California History-Social Science Analysis Skills, Grades 6 to 8

- Chronological and Spatial Thinking 1 to 3: relate events in time, construct a timeline, and use maps to explain the migration of people.

- Research, Evidence, and Point of View 1, 3, 4, and 5: frame questions, distinguish verifiable from unverifiable information, assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources, and detect points of view.
- Historical Interpretation 1: place people and events in a matrix of time and place.

C3 Framework for Social Studies

- D2.Geo.6.6-8: Explain how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions are connected to human identities and cultures.
- D2.His.10.6-8: Detect possible limitations in the historical record based on evidence from different kinds of sources.
- D2.His.12.6-8: Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to identify further areas of inquiry and additional sources.
- D4.3.6-8: Present explanations to audiences outside the classroom (when the museum is opened to families or other classes).

Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies, Writing, and Speaking and Listening

- RH.6-8.1: Cite specific evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- WHST.6-8.2: Write informative texts, including the museum label and context note.
- SL.6-8.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions.

Also supports the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum's emphasis on identity, family and community histories, and student voice.

Key Vocabulary

- **Artifact:** an object made or used by people that gives information about the past.
- **Heirloom:** an object passed down within a family from one generation to the next.
- **Primary source:** a record or object created at the time, such as a photograph, letter, tool, or first person account.
- **Provenance:** the history of an object: who made it, who owned it, and how it traveled.
- **Oral history:** a recorded interview about a person's memories.
- **Corroborate:** check one source against another to confirm information.
- **Curator:** a person who selects, researches, and explains objects in a museum.
- **Diaspora:** a community living outside its ancestral homeland.
- **Sephardic and Mizrahi:** terms for Jews descended from the communities of Spain and Portugal (Sephardic) and Jews with roots in the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahi, "Eastern"). The terms overlap, and many people prefer a specific identity such as Iraqi or Moroccan Jewish.

Teacher Background

Historians and museums treat everyday objects as evidence. An object can show how people worked, cooked, dressed, prayed, and celebrated, and the story attached to it (its provenance) can reveal migration, trade, and family ties. Family stories are valuable sources, but memories shift as they are retold, dates blur, and details are added or lost. That is why historians corroborate a family story with other sources, such as documents, photographs, or histories of the place and time.

Jewish communities lived across the Middle East and North Africa for more than 2,500 years. Between the 1940s and the 1970s, about 850,000 Jews left or were forced out of Arab countries, and many more left Iran after 1979. In several countries, Jews who left were stripped of citizenship and property, and many could

take only a suitcase and little money. Iraqi Jews who registered to leave in 1950 and 1951 lost their citizenship, and their assets were frozen; thousands of Jews were expelled from Egypt after 1956. For these families, a few carried objects, such as a ketubah (marriage contract), a hamsa, a spice box, a henna dress, a recipe, or a song, became the main link to centuries of community life. The Iraqi Jewish Archive shows the other side of this loss: tens of thousands of documents and books taken from Iraq's Jewish community were found in 2003 in a flooded basement in Baghdad and later preserved and digitized by the U.S. National Archives.

Sources: Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (1991); U.S. National Archives, Iraqi Jewish Archive; Jewish Virtual Library country histories; JIMENA Cultural Heritage pages.

Materials

- A meaningful object or photograph from the teacher's own family, to use as a model
- Projector, and a large world map and class timeline (chart paper or a digital version)
- Student devices or library access for context research
- Index cards or sticky notes, and table space for the museum
- Handouts:
 - [Appendix A: Family Heirloom Interview](#) (one per student, sent home several days before Day 1)
 - [Appendix B: Museum Labels](#) (one label per student)
 - [Appendix C: Object Analysis and Museum Walk](#) (one per student)

Making this lesson work for every student: Not every family has an heirloom. Families who were refugees, who moved often, or who lost possessions may have none, and some students live with relatives, foster families, or adoptive families. That absence is part of history too. Every student may instead bring a photograph of an object, a recipe, a song, a saying, the story behind their name, or a new object they choose to begin a tradition. Valuable or fragile items should stay home; a photograph works just as well. Invite, but never require, personal sharing, and let students choose what to tell.

Procedures

Before the Lesson

- 1 **Send home Appendix A (several days ahead).** Students interview a family member or other trusted adult about an heirloom or tradition and bring the object, a photograph of it, or a description on Day 2. Include a short note to families explaining the project and the alternatives above.

Day 1: Objects as Evidence (45 to 50 minutes)

- 2 **One suitcase (5 min).** Quick write: If your family had to leave home tomorrow and could take only one suitcase, what object would you bring, and why?
- 3 **Teacher model (10 min).** Show your own family object and tell its story: who first owned it, where it came from, and how it reached you. Ask students what questions they would ask to check your story.
- 4 **Vocabulary (5 min).** Define artifact, heirloom, primary source, and provenance together, using your object as the example.
- 5 **Analyze a historical object (15 min).** Project a document or object from the [Iraqi Jewish Archive](#) or an object in a [JIMENA personal story](#). In pairs, students practice the questions in Appendix C, Part 1: What is it made of? Where and when was it made? Who used it, and how? What did it mean to them? What

can it not tell us? Explain that many Jewish families from the Middle East and North Africa left with only a suitcase, and ask: What do the objects people kept tell us about what mattered to them?

- 6 **Discuss (5 min).** How do families decide what to keep? What is lost when they cannot keep anything?
- 7 **Exit ticket (5 min).** Answer essential question 1 in two sentences, and confirm your plan for Appendix A.

Day 2: Researching Our Objects (45 to 50 minutes)

- 8 **Analyze your object (15 min).** Using their object or photograph and their completed interview (Appendix A), students complete Appendix C, Part 1.
- 9 **Find the context (15 min).** Each student identifies the place and approximate time connected to the object and finds one outside source that explains what was happening there then, such as an encyclopedia entry, a museum page, a country page on JIMENA's [Cultural Heritage pages](#), or a family history resource. Students record one fact the source confirms or adds, and one thing the family story tells us that the source cannot.
- 10 **Map and timeline (5 min).** Students add a pin for the object's place of origin on the class map and a date on the class timeline.
- 11 **Draft the museum label (10 min, Appendix B).** Students write a label that names the object, its place and date of origin, its story, its historical context with the source, and why it matters to their family.

Day 3: Opening the Museum (45 to 50 minutes)

- 12 **Set up (5 min).** Students display their objects or photographs with labels.
- 13 **Museum walk (20 min).** Students visit at least four exhibits and complete Appendix C, Part 2: a question for the curator, a connection or feeling, and a similarity or difference compared with their own object.
- 14 **Discuss (15 min).** Look at the map and timeline together. Ask: What patterns do you see? Which objects traveled the farthest, and why did their families move? What did the objects reveal that a textbook would not? How reliable are family stories, and how did your outside source help?
- 15 **Reflect (10 min).** Students write a letter to the person who passed the object or tradition down, or to someone who will receive it next, explaining what it means and how they will carry its story forward. Students who prefer may write a reflection answering the essential questions instead.

Assessment

- **Formative:** Day 1 quick write and paired analysis; exit ticket; Appendix A interview; Appendix C, Part 1; map and timeline entries; museum walk notes.
- **Summative:** the museum label and context research, scored with the rubric below, and the letter or reflection.

Criteria	4: Excellent	3: Proficient	2: Developing	1: Beginning
Object analysis	Describes the object's material, origin, use, and meaning in detail, using evidence from close observation and the interview.	Describes material, origin, use, and meaning.	Describes the object with few details.	Names the object only.
Historical context	Uses a credible outside source to place the object in time and place; explains what the source adds and what family memory alone cannot tell us.	Uses an outside source to give accurate context.	Gives context without a source, or with errors.	No context.

Museum label	Clear, accurate, and concise; includes every required part; written for a museum visitor.	Includes every required part.	Missing a part, or unclear in places.	Incomplete.
Museum walk and discussion	Asks thoughtful questions, makes connections across objects, and explains patterns in the collection.	Completes notes and contributes to discussion.	Completes some notes.	Does not participate.

Differentiation

- **English learners:** interviews may be conducted in the family's home language, and labels may be bilingual; provide sentence frames ("This ___ comes from ___. It was made around ___."); pair with a supportive partner.
- **Students with IEPs or 504 plans:** shorten the interview to the starred questions; provide a preselected context source; allow an audio label or a labeled drawing.
- **Advanced learners:** corroborate the family story with two sources and explain any differences; research how objects like theirs were made and traded; or write a catalog entry comparing their object with a similar one in a museum collection.

Extension Activities

- **Open the museum.** Invite families or other classes; students serve as docents and explain their objects.
- **Oral history interview.** With permission, students record a longer interview with a family member about migration or a historical event they lived through.
- **Change over time.** Students compare older and newer family photographs and objects to see how clothing, homes, and everyday products changed.
- **Digital exhibit.** Combine photographs and labels into an online exhibit with a map linking each object to its place of origin.

For Jewish day schools: Connect the museum to the value of *l'dor vador* (from generation to generation) and to *hiddur mitzvah*, beautifying ritual objects. Invite students to share Jewish ritual objects such as Kiddush cups, Shabbat candlesticks, Torah cases, or ketubot, and encourage students of Sephardic and Mizrahi descent to share objects connected to their families' lives in the Middle East and North Africa. Display the museum at a school holiday program.

Resources and External Links

- [JIMENA: Cultural Heritage, country by country](http://qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage)
qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage
- [JIMENA Personal Stories \(example: Morocco; each country page has its own\)](http://qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage/morocco/personal-stories)
qua.jimena.org/cultural-heritage/morocco/personal-stories
- [Iraqi Jewish Archive \(U.S. National Archives and partners\)](http://www.ijarchive.org/)
www.ijarchive.org/
- [Analyze an Artifact: student worksheet \(National Archives\)](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/analyze-an-artifact-intermediate)
www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/analyze-an-artifact-intermediate
- [Genealogy Activities for Kids \(National Archives\)](http://www.archives.gov/education/family-history)
www.archives.gov/education/family-history
- [Top Ideas for Using Keepsakes to Bring Your Family Closer \(Legacy Project\)](http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/keepsakes.html)
www.legacyproject.org/guides/keepsakes.html

- [JewishGen: Jewish genealogy research tools \(affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage\)](http://www.jewishgen.org/)
www.jewishgen.org/
- [Diarna: Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life](http://diarna.org/)
diarna.org/
- [Getting Started with Primary Sources \(Library of Congress\)](http://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/)
www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/