

Native Americans: Interpretation and Evidence



Secondary Gallery and Handling Sessions

Support Notes for Teachers

Session structure

Handling Session

The handling session will take place in the Clore Education Centre at the Museum. The session will focus on how analysis of relevant objects and photographs can help us understand about the life of native North Americans. The session will open by considering the value of objects as evidence. Focusing on an everyday modern object the whole group will use a series of prompt questions to work through the process of interrogating an object in order to elicit information about the object and the people who used it. The pupils will then split into small groups to handle original native North American objects. Following the questioning model established at the start of the session pupils will explore the nature and use of the objects. The second part of the session will concentrate on using photographs as a source of evidence. Pupils will consider what we can learn from a photograph together with some of the difficulties of using photographs as evidence.

Gallery Session

During the gallery session pupils will work individually within the North American galleries at The British Museum to undertake a data collection task relating to the life of the native peoples of North America. The North American gallery contains a selection of objects which illustrate a wide range of historic periods, cultures and artistic traditions from across the North American continent. Guided by key questions (such as *What was life like for the native people of the American Plains ?*) pupils will examine, and select from, the range of displayed objects in order to collect information which will help them answer this. Pupils will have an opportunity to discuss the objects they select with other pupils and the session leader.

Important Note: Object Conservation

During the course of the handling session the pupils will handle a range of objects drawn from the collection of the Department of Ethnography at The British Museum. The Museum would, therefore, very much appreciate it if pupils attending the workshop could wash and dry their hands before the start of the session to help conserve the objects being handled. As some of the handling objects are composed of organic material, such as furs and worked animal skin, we recommend that pupils also wash their hands after the session, particularly if they are due to go straight into their lunch break.

Native North Americans

Both the handling and gallery sessions will involve the pupils in working with objects. It would be useful before the visit for the pupils to revise their understanding of the range of primary and secondary sources of information used by historians to construct histories of the past. Pupils should already be familiar with the use of secondary material in textbooks together with primary sources such as photographs, and this session will enable them to think about how objects, as a primary source of information, enable us to further explore and understand the past.

Historically, North America has been the home of a wide range of peoples and cultures across a number of diverse environments. Before the visit it would be useful for the pupils to think about the different regions of modern day North America from the Canadian Arctic in the north through the central plains down to the hotter, sometimes desert, regions in the south of the continent.

British Museum Printed Resources

Historical Enquires

A guide to using the native North American gallery for secondary history available from the Education Department priced £5. The guide provides ideas for historical enquiries which support the work undertaken during the handling and gallery sessions. The guide also includes ideas for preparation and follow-up work.

British Museum Photo Packs: Native North America

A pack of 30 A4 laminated colour photographs is available from the Education Department priced £7.50. The pack includes photographs from the American West and the Arctic. Each photograph includes background information and use of the pack supports work undertaken in the handling session on using photographs as evidence.

Curriculum Links

GCSE History

Both sessions support work on GCSE syllabi which include work on *The American West*.

Historical skills

Skills covered include: *characteristic features of past societies and periods, identifying, using and evaluating sources of information, selecting and combining information from different sources, drawing conclusions and communicating knowledge and understanding.*

Native North American objects in The British Museum

There are many objects from North America on display in The British Museum.

A good starting point is the COMPASS website at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass where you can search for North American objects in the Museum collections.

Below are some key cases in the North American gallery which you may wish to focus on during your visit.

Gallery 26: North America

American West (Cases 14, 15 and 21)

Canadian Plains (Cases 12, 13 and 21)

Arctic (Cases 9, 10 and 19)

Subarctic (Cases 11 and 19)

Follow-up activities

The handling session includes work on using photographs as a source of information. Using classroom copies of photographs of native North American people, pupils could discuss what information is available in the photograph together with the advantages and disadvantages of using the photograph as a source of historical information.

Pupils who have taken part in the gallery session will have gathered information from across the North American gallery. On their return to school pupils could work in small groups to prepare a presentation on some of the objects they selected to help them answer their key question. Pupils may find it useful to look at COMPASS, which will include objects they have already encountered in the gallery. Pupils could use a number of COMPASS images to create a picture board explaining how objects help us to find out about the life of native North Americans.

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Please quote the reference *Native North Americans: Interpretation and Evidence Gallery and Handling Sessions* in all enquiries.