

Tangible History: How to Enhance your Curriculum with Museum Specimens

Enduring Traditions of Mesoamerica Activity 1



Essential Questions

- What is tangible history?
- How can we use primary source objects to learn about the past?
- How do we use objects to learn about the most important beliefs and traditions of ancient peoples?
- How can museum specimens be used in the classroom?
- How can we learn about the present by studying objects of the past?

In this activity you will study two objects. Begin by studying vase K6418, then examine plate K1272.

A. 1. Look at the object for 1-2 minutes. What do you see?

2. Study the object for 3-5 more minutes with a partner. What details do you notice?

Then, work together to answer the following questions. Explain your responses. What are the contextual clues?	
3. What materials do you think were used to make this object?	4. What was the purpose of this object?
5. What culture do you think this object represents? What are the clues?	6. What is going on in the scene? Who are the people? What are they doing?
7. What images do you recognize in the design?	8. What questions do you have about this object?
9. Have you seen an object like this before? Where, in what context?	10. If you had the opportunity to title the object, what would you call it?



B. 1. Look at plate K1272 with your partner. Repeat the questioning technique you used during the first object study; note your observations below.

2. Next, compare the two objects. Do you think both objects come from the same culture? Explain your response with specific evidence.

3. What do these objects tell us about the culture that created them? Explain your ideas below.

4. How can you connect these ancient objects across time? Click on the links and reflect below.

Learn more about the Mesoamerican use of cacao across time at *Mexicolore*.

<http://mexicolore.co.uk/maya/chocolate/>



Next, watch the UNESCO video “Traditional Mexican cuisine - ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacán paradigm” to learn about intangible cultural heritage.

<https://ich.unesco.org/es/RL/la-cocina-tradicional-mexicana-cultura-comunitaria-ancestral-y-viva-el-paradigma-de-michoacan-00400>

Look for contemporary examples of food and food preparation that you noted in the object observation exercise.

5. Class discussion

**Enduring Traditions of Mesoamerica
Activity 2 Searching for Objects: Focus on Corn**

Essential Questions																																																													
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How can we use online databases to locate images of museum objects? ➤ How can we trace the importance of maize/corn across time? ➤ How do current events confirm the importance of corn to Mesoamerican peoples in the present? 																																																													
Database Search																																																													
1. Locate museum specimens of maíz/ maize/corn by searching Justin Kerr’s <i>Maya Vase</i> and, the <i>Maya Pre-Columbian Portfolio</i> databases.																																																													
<i>A Pre-Columbian Portfolio</i> by Justin Kerr http://research.mayavase.com/kerrportfolio.html 	<i>A Maya Vase Database</i> by Justin Kerr http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.html 																																																												
2. Search through the variety of objects dedicated to maíz/maize/corn, worship of corn, and corn preparation. What materials were used to make these objects? What iconographic patterns do you notice? What are common themes? List 4 of your favorite museum specimens below. Include the image identification numbers and a brief description of the object, material, and intended use.																																																													
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Current Trends and Conclusion

Learn about corn trending in the news by searching for articles, videos, political cartoons, and or street art that reflects concerns about enduring traditions, genetically modified corn, and the impact of NAFTA on Mexican farmers.

Suggested titles are:

- “National Day of Maize in Mexico: Protecting the Sacred Plant.” *Upside Down World*. 30 Sep 2013 <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/mexico-archives-79/5067-national-day-of-maize-in-mexico-protecting-the-sacred-plant>
- “Photo Essay: Mexico Celebrates World Day Against Monsanto.” *Upside Down World*. 17 June 2013. <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/mexico-archives-79/4334-photo-essay-mexico-celebrates-world-day-against-monsanto>
- “Without Corn There is No Country: Open Letter to President Obama.” *Upside Down World*. 20 April 2009 <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/1824/68/>

Conclude these activities with a class discussion.

- How did the study of museum objects broaden your understanding of the importance of cacao and corn in Mesoamerica?
- What did you learn about cacao and corn from the UNESCO video “Traditional Mexican cuisine - ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacán paradigm”?
- What is the meaning of the Mexican slogan “Sin maíz no hay país” (without maize there is no country)

Lesson extension-research forced labor and child labor in the chocolate industry. Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry. <https://foodispower.org/human-labor-slavery/slavery-chocolate/>



Maya cacao glyph



Maya maize god with cacao



http://research.mayavase.com/kermaya_hires.php?vase=6418





http://research.mayavase.com/kermaya_hires.php?vase=1272