

Handout 3: Analyzing Historical Artifacts

Name: _____ Class Period: _____

Before watching Rajesh Rao's Ted Talk "A Rosetta Stone for a Lost Language" complete these brainstorm questions that have been pulled directly from the talk.

1. "Imagine that it's 4,000 years into the future. Civilization as we know it has ceased to exist—no books, no electronic devices, no Facebook or Twitter. All knowledge of the English language and the English alphabet has been lost. Now imagine archeologists digging through the rubble of one of our cities. What might they find?"
2. "Now let's ask ourselves, what could such artifacts say about us to people 4,000 years into the future?"

While you watch, take notes on these questions.

3. What does Rajesh Rao share about the Indus Valley civilization?
4. What questions does he ask when examining an artifact?
5. What has he accomplished towards his goal of translating the Indus script?

Examining Artifacts: Creative Questions Thinking Routine

A routine for generating and transforming questions

1. Examine each object separately and brainstorm a list of questions about it.
2. Look over the list and transform some of the questions into questions that challenge the imagination. Do this by transforming questions along the lines of:
 - What would it be like if...
 - How would it be different if...
 - Suppose that ...
 - What would change if ...
 - How would it look differently if ...



Image 1: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Image 2: Asian Art Museum - Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture



Image 3: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Image 4: The British Museum

3. Use the Metropolitan Museum, Asian Art Museum - Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, and the British Museum to learn more about each artifact.
4. Now choose a question to imaginatively explore by playing out its possibilities by writing a story or essay, drawing a picture, creating a play or dialogue, inventing a scenario, or conducting an imaginary interview.
5. Reflect: What new ideas do you have about the topic, concept or object that you didn't have before?

Images

1. Stamp seal and modern impression: unicorn and incense burner.
(<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/49.40.1/>)
2. Ritual food vessel (ding), approx. 1300-1050
(<http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/artwork/ritual-food-vessel-ding-approx-1300%E2%80%931050>)
3. Oracle Bone Fragment
(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/42023>)
4. Roman Republican Coins in the British Museum
(https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/online_research_catalogues/rrc/roman_republican_coins.aspx)