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# WI. VETERANS MUSEUM

## Interpreting Artifacts

Grade Level: 9-12

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn the difference between primary and secondary sources
- Learn about the importance of artifacts and how they are used in a museum
- Use reference skills to gather information and to draw conclusions
- Evaluate a variety of primary and secondary sources to interpret the historical context, intended audience, purpose, or author's point of view (Historical Methodology). Standard SS.Hist4

### BACKGROUND

When soldiers joined the army during World War II, they were issued uniforms and gear that they would need, such as canteens for water, bags to carry their gear, a gun, and ammunition. Soldiers also carried personal items such as soap, shaving tools, combs, books, newspapers, letters from home, and writing utensils. These artifacts can tell us what a World War II soldier's life may have been like.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
  - Primary sources: created in the time under study
    - Artifacts (objects used in the past)
    - Diaries, journals
    - Letters
  - Secondary sources: created by someone that did not experience the time under study first-hand
    - Scholarly books and articles
    - Reproduction artifacts
2. Explain what an artifact is, why they are important, and how they help us understand the past.
  - An artifact is an object made by a human being
  - Artifacts are important because they help us understand culture, technology, society, and history beyond what is written down. They also allow us to help tell the service member's story by showing us what the service member used while in service and what the service member felt was important enough to keep from his/her service.

- Artifacts are important because they often reflect objects and tools that were used in the past
    - ♦ This helps us understand what life was like for people in the past
3. Some of the ways to think about artifacts in history are:
- Artifacts tell their own stories
  - Artifacts connect people across time
  - Artifacts capture moments in time
  - Artifacts can show changes over time (Standard SS.Hist2: patterns of continuity and change over time)
  - Artifacts can mean many things to many different peoples
4. Choose a WWII Veteran from the collections list below and look at the various artifacts associated with that service member's collection:

**Thomas Lein:**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Lein%2C+Thomas+N.>

**George W. Fox, Jr.**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Fox%2C+George+W.>

**Gerrit M. Damsteegt**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Damsteegt%2C+Gerrit+M.>

**Burnel Wang**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Wang%2C+Burnel>

**John O'Brien**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=O%27Brien%2C+John+H.>

**Roberta I. Wells Leidner**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Leidner%2C+Roberta+Wells>

**Ray R. Utke**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Utke%2C+Ray+R.>

**Edward L Konopacki**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Konopacki%2C+Edward+L.>

**John S. Ong**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Ong%2C+John+S.>

**Harry L. Data**

<https://wisvetsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/byperson?keyword=Data%2C+Harry+L.>

5. Discussing the artifact is important too...Here are some example topics:

- What do you notice about the artifact?
- What is it made of?
- Are there any symbols on the artifact?
- What do the symbols mean?



- What part of the world did it come from?
- Why do you think the veteran kept this artifact?

Now, take some time to do research on the artifact. While doing research, try to answer the following questions:

- Where was the service member located when the artifact was collected and what historical events were happening there at the time?
  - Can you find any documents, primary or secondary, that are related to the artifact? Identify whether your document is primary or secondary.
  - Can you find any biographical information on the service member who collected the artifact? (Teacher hint: biographical data can be found in the Wisconsin Veterans Museum artifact database. You can also search newspapers from the person's area and time period or do a web search for an obituary for more information)
  - Does the artifact represent anything specific and/or do you think it was collected out of general interest by the service member?
6. Artifacts are more than just material things. They also represent ideas, values, and emotions. Different artifacts mean different things to different people, and those meanings can change over time.
    - Does the artifact you selected represent an idea, a value, or an emotion?
    - What do you think this artifact meant to the service members?
    - Do you think this artifact meant something different to someone else?
    - Do you think the meaning or idea behind the artifact has changed over time (example - the perception of the Nazi swastika has never been a positive one, but is there a difference as to how it was seen during World War II and how it is seen now?)
  7. Once you have finished your research on the selected artifact, you can learn more about Wisconsin Veterans by completing our "Untold Stories" lesson plan, which can be found here:
  8. Another great resource for these veterans' stories is the online Oral Histories section of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum website: <https://wisvetsmuseum.com/oral-histories/>

