



## HISTORICAL OBJECTS LESSON PLAN

Upper Elementary School; Grades 4-5

Related Museum Programs: All; Uses content from the *Meet Victoria* program

**BIG IDEA:** Objects are a tool to learn about people, places, and events.

**DESCRIPTION:** Students examine a collection of historical objects in search of clues. Students work together to compile their research in an effort to discover the story behind the objects—who owned them and how they were used.

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- Understand that objects provide information about people, places, and events.
- Experience how researchers use objects to find clues that help them understand the past.
- Learn the importance of compiling research in order to reconstruct history.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- How do historians learn about the past?
- How can research help us to understand the past?

**TIME FRAME:** 1-3 class periods. This activity has been designed to be customized based on your learning goals and your students' individual needs. Choose to do the complete lesson plan or select parts with your students based on your schedule and objectives.

**MATERIALS:**

- Object Photos (located in appendix)
- Object Guide (located in appendix)
- Photo of the Confino family's apartment (located in appendix)
- Portrait of the Confino family (located in appendix)
- Object Study Worksheet (located in appendix)
- Loose-leaf paper or notebooks
- Pens or pencils

**VOCABULARY:**

- History
- Historian
- Artifacts

## PROCEDURE:

### Pre-Lesson Prep (to be completed before the day of the lesson)

- Review the Object Guide to become familiar with the material and background of the objects used in this lesson.

### Part 1: Introduction

- Explain that in today’s lesson students will do the work of historians.
- Define the work of historians and explain that historians examine objects or artifacts to learn about people, places, and events from the past.
- Reinforce that when historians conduct research they are often presented with mysterious objects. Historians explore and examine those objects in order to figure out where they came from, when they were used, how they were used, and by whom. By answering those questions, historians can reconstruct parts of history.
- Display the image of the Confino family’s apartment (see: appendix).
- Invite students to make observations about what they notice in the picture.
- Tell students that their challenge will be to examine objects that were found in the space depicted in the image and try to do the work of historians and figure out who used the objects and how.
- Lead an object examination of the Victrola:
  - Display the image of the Victrola.
  - Collect observations from students about its appearance (color, shape, texture, etc.).
  - Challenge students to examine the object closely and list as many adjectives as they can to describe the object without repeating observations of their classmates.
  - Record students’ observations on the board.
- Have students use the observation list to begin to formulate inferences about the object. Record students’ inferences on the board next to their observations about the object’s appearance. It may be helpful to organize this information into a chart. Guiding questions might include:
  - What do you think this object is used for?
  - How might it be used?
  - What kind of person might need or want to use this object in this way?
- Lead an object examination of the record:
  - Display the image of the record.
  - Tell students that this object was found next to the Victrola.
  - Collect students’ observations about the second object, the record, following the method used with the Victrola.
- Facilitate a conversation about how students think the objects were used, knowing that they were found together. Guiding questions might include:
  - Are there any assumptions that we can make given that these objects were found together?
  - How can we use that information to figure out, or even confirm, how these objects were used?
  - Who might have used these objects in this way?
  - What questions do you have about these objects?

## Part 2: Activity

- Explain that in today’s lesson, students will do the work of historians.
- Display the image of the Confino family’s apartment (see: appendix) and explain that the class will work in groups to explore four of the objects found in this space. By examining objects or artifacts to learn about people, places, and events from the past, they will be doing the work of historians.
- Review the procedure. If Part 1 of the activity was conducted, reference the process used by the class as they explored the Victrola and record.
  - Create a list of words describing the physical appearance of the object.
  - Use the list of observations to make inferences about how, why, and where the object was used.
  - Use the inferences to hypothesize what kind of person would want or need to use the object in this way.
- Divide the class into four groups and distribute the image of one object (see: appendix) to each group.
- Distribute the Object Study Worksheets for students to records their findings.
- Give students time to explore their objects.
- Bring students back together and select one group to briefly share their findings with class. Record the group’s findings on the board or chart.
- Invite students to examine the data that they’ve compiled so far and make predictions based off of it. Then, select another group to present their findings and repeat the process. Continue until all of the groups have presented.
- Help the students to apply the information learned from each object to the next presentation.
- Facilitate a conversation about the experience. Guiding questions might include:
  - Why was it important to make detailed observations about the objects?
  - What was the difference between looking at certain objects on their own (like the roller skate) and then looking at them with other objects (like the shoe)?
- Consider what information students are able to derive about the Confino family based on their object explorations and what else they want to know.

## Part 3: Wrap-Up

- Display the Confino family portrait (see: appendix) and tell students that it was also found in the apartment.
- Ask students what they notice about it and how it might inform their understanding of the objects explored.
- Have student work individually or in groups to write a story about a member of the Confino family interacting with two of the objects explored.
- Bring students back together and invite some students to share their writing.
- Facilitate a wrap-up conversation. Guiding questions might include:
  - In what ways were the objects able to tell you about the Confino family?
  - What more do you want to know about their lives?
  - How were the objects similar to or different from what one would find in your home?
  - What do you think the objects in your home say about you and your family?

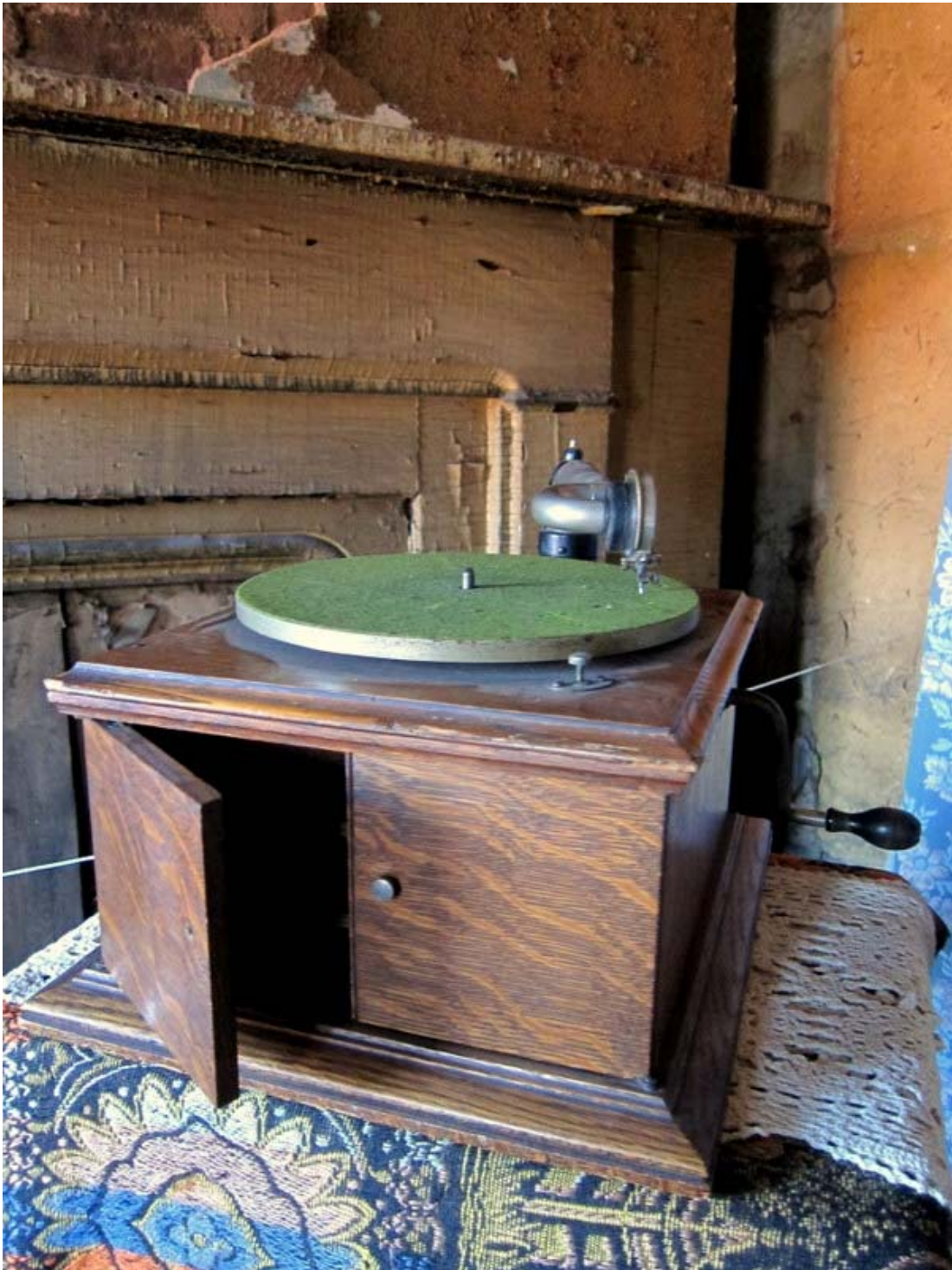
**ASSESSMENT:**

- Review the Object Study Worksheet.
- Notice how students use their observations as evidence for their inferences about the people and places that the objects represent.
- Note student participation in small-group and full-class conversations.

**EXTENSIONS:**

- Have students make a “time capsule” filled with objects that they feel represent the class. Have students work in groups to select five or six objects that they feel tell stories about the people and history of the class. Students should explain why they chose specific objects before the objects can be included in the time capsule.
- Have students select six objects that tell the story of their family. Students can also write a story about their family that incorporates the objects

**APPENDIX: OBJECT PHOTOS**



















**APPENDIX: CONFINO FAMILY APARTMENT**





### APPENDIX: CONFINO FAMILY PORTRAIT

This portrait was taken right after the Confino family moved to New York City in August of 1913. Counterclockwise from right: Abraham (44), Rachel (43), David (9), Victoria (11), Solomon (5), Jacob (3).



## APPENDIX: OBJECT GUIDE

**Victrola:** This home music player was distributed by the Victor Talking Machine Company in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To operate the machine:

1. Change the Victrola needle on the Sound Box by unscrewing the small knob that holds it and swapping it out for a new one.



2. Wind the Victrola using the Winding Key.



3. Start the motor by swinging the Break Lever toward the cabinet. This will make the table start turning. Wait a minute or two for the wheel to start spinning up to speed.



4. Once the table is turning up to speed, gently place the Taper Tub onto the record at whatever part in the song you want to begin listening.

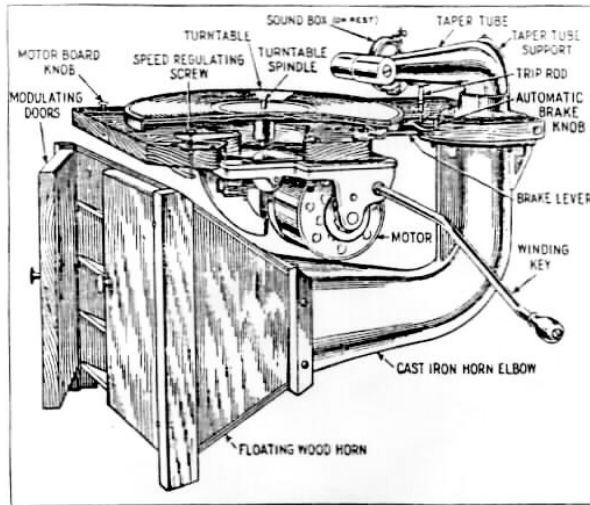


5. Raise the volume by opening the Modulating Doors. Closing the doors will lower the volume.





The diagram below illustrates the Victrola parts mentioned above:



**Record:** The record, (Insert title here), would have been played on the Victrola. This record features a Fox Trot, a popular American dance. Immigrants could take dance classes to learn the Fox Trot at a local settlement house, where they could also receive other social services such as English language classes.



**Stickball bat:** This bat would have been used to play "stickball," a version of baseball that could be played on city streets. Most stickball bats would have been made by obtaining a broomstick or mop and cutting it down to fit the player's needs.



**Baseball:** Baseballs could be purchased for 5 or 10 cents. Baseballs were generally purchased by one player and played with until it was lost or destroyed from use.



**Roller skate:** These are adjustable roller skates that children would strap on over their shoes. Roller skates were introduced into the US in 1865 by Englishman George Plimpton, and in 1905 John Jay Young patented an adjustable-length clamp-on version in New York City. The skates pull out to adjust the length, so one pair of skates could grow with a child or be shared by several members of a family. By 1916, adjustable skates were still luxury items, beyond the budget of most tenement dwellers. So, it's possible that the Confino kids found a mismatched pair out on the street somewhere, and would want to wear them or creatively reuse them to make scooters or other homemade toys.



**Shoe:** Roller skates were strapped on over shoes, like this one.



**Scooter:** Homemade scooters, like this one, were made from materials found around the area, such as roller skates and scraps of wood. A single roller skate provides the wheels necessary for mobility. This scooter is modeled off of the scooters that former Lower East Side resident Sam Mann used to play with as a child.



# **APPENDIX: OBJECT STUDY WORKSHEET**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your object. color, shape, materials, design etc.	How might this object be used? What would it be used for?	Who might use this object?

Does the object remind you of any objects you have used?  
In what ways is it similar or different?

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What else do you want to know about this object?

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