



Art or Artifact?

Art as artifact: analysis of art as primary source documents

Subject area: History/HIGH SCHOOL

Skills: Observation, deductive and analytical thinking, writing

Strategies: Accessing historically relevant works of art and analyzing them as one would a written document to garner culturally and historically important information.

SOLs

Skills

VUS.1	The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;b) evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources;c) formulate historical questions and defend findings based on inquiry and interpretation;d) communicate findings orally and in analytical essays and/or comprehensive papers;e) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;f) apply geographic skills and reference sources to understand how relationships between humans and their environment have changed over time

Writing

9.6	The student will develop narrative, expository, and informational writings to inform, explain, analyze, or entertain.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Generate, gather, and organize ideas for writing.b) Plan and organize writing to address a specific audience and purpose.c) Communicate clearly the purpose of the writing.d) Write clear, varied sentences.e) Use specific vocabulary and information.f) Arrange paragraphs into a logical progression.g) Revise writing for clarity.h) Proofread and prepare final product for intended audience and purpose.

9.7 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and paragraphing.

- a) Use and apply rules for the parts of a sentence, including subject/verb, direct/indirect object, and predicate nominative/predicate adjective.
- b) Use parallel structures across sentences and paragraphs.
- c) Use appositives, main clauses, and subordinate clauses.
- d) Use commas and semicolons to distinguish and divide main and subordinate clauses.

Background: John White's (ca.1540 - ca.1593) contribution to our understanding of early America rests on the magnificent watercolor paintings and sketches he made of native Virginians and their culture during the 1580s.

The illustrations gave sixteenth-century Europe its first extensive pictorial views of the physical characteristics of the New World. White was a member of the 1585 expedition to Virginia by his half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh. The expedition established on Roanoke Island the earliest Virginia colony, where White painted the native Algonquian Indians, flora, and fauna of the area. In 1587 White returned to Roanoke as governor of the colony and made several voyages back and forth to London to bolster the fledgling enterprise. It was on his August 1590 return voyage when he found the colony mysteriously deserted and the word "CROATOAN" carved in a tree on the island, the meaning of which has never been ascertained. This information can be accessed at:
http://www.gmu.edu/library/specialcollections/john_white.html

Primary sources extend beyond the written word and include visual images and art. Archaeologists and curators at Jamestown Rediscovery use visual images found in engravings, maps and paintings to add to their understanding of historical events and cultural practices. The objects in these sources help illustrate the material culture of the Native Americans of the mid-Atlantic just prior to the founding of James Fort.

Resources and materials needed: Good copies of John White illustrations that are included here. Supply them to each student or to teams if working collaboratively.

Procedure: Working in teams or individually, approach each document as you would as a reporter. Keep in mind the basic questions: **Who, What, When, Where, Why** and **How**. Answer some of the following questions first, making basic notations. Then expand your work to an essay on what you can learn with "art as artifact." Keep in mind that this is art that was produced by an English explorer. Which images or parts of images would you interpret as fact? Where might there be visual interpretations that might be deceptive to the viewer/analyst today? Can there be bias in visual record as there is in the written record? Explain. If you look closely at the art work you can see many ways to approach your interpretation. Do you want to concentrate on the artifacts or objects being used? How about the actions and activities being shown? Interpretation of the flora and fauna can illuminate our understanding of the natural world of that time. How would comparing this artist's work to others of the time help in the analysis?

For more on John White: <http://www.nps.gov/fora/jwhite.htm>

For more on Jamestown Rediscovery: www.apva.org

Resource: *First People: The Early Indians of Virginia*. Keith Eglhoff and Deborah Woodward, Univ. Press of Virginia, 1992.