

ENG 604 Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies: Material Culture
ORAL PRESENTATION ON SELECTED OBJECT ASSIGNMENT
SPRING 2009

This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to engage in an exploratory study of an artifact. You will present that object and your exploration of it to the class.

In the course of your presentation, you will describe the object (shape, materials, construction, manufactured or naturally occurring); its function and some possible uses for it; its cultural and historical context(s); people who design, make, and use the object. (If you have access to the object, bring it in; if not, provide a visual representation of it.)

The following questions¹ serve as guidelines for your exploration and presentation of the material object:

Focusing on the Object

1. What is the object made of? (glass, wood, metal, ceramic, natural fiber or some combination of materials)
2. What size is the object?
3. What is its weight? Is it light or heavy, and does its weight serve a purpose?
4. Does it stand independently or is it part of something else?
5. Is it handmade, machine-made, or naturally occurring?
6. Is it painted or varnished? Does it have a natural patina of age?
7. Is there a pattern or design on the object? Are the decorative designs naturalistic or geometric or some combination? How has the decoration been applied? What function does the decoration serve?
8. Does the artifact show signs of wear and tear and/or repair? Are there saw marks, pointel marks or finger marks?
9. Where might the object have been made? Are there any identifying names, labels or symbols? Are these carved, painted or impressed? Do these marks identify the maker, manufacturer, place of origin and/or place of sale?
10. What is the function and purpose of the artifact? Is/was it ornamental or utilitarian or some combination of functions?

Contextualizing the Object

1. When and how was the object made?
2. Who made the object? What was the creator's social and cultural background?
3. How does the object compare with other similar artifacts?
4. What function does it serve and has this function changed over time?

¹ The guidelines are adapted from <http://www.stfx.ca/people/Istanley/Material/Guidelines.htm>, which were themselves adapted from Dorothy Duncan (1990) *The Artifact: What Can it Tell Us about the Past?*

5. What did it cost when new? How did this cost relate to the prices of other items at the time?
6. Who owns/owned this artifact and why? What was the original owner's social and cultural background? Where is the artifact located now?
7. Is/Was the artifact a necessity or a luxury?
8. What is/was the meaning of the object and how do/did people react and relate to it?
9. What does the construction and form reveal about the level of craftsmanship? Is sophisticated or rustic in its execution and design?
10. What does the artifact reveal about the community that made it and uses/used it?
11. What does it reveal about the person who uses/used or collected it?

Limit your presentation to 15 minutes, including questions and answers. Decide how you want to divide the time up between your presentation and question/answer period. 15 minutes equals approximately 6 pages double-spaced; 10 minutes equals 4 pages, although you may want to speak from notes. Practice your presentation to make sure you keep it within the time limit.

Presentations will be scheduled each week beginning February 16th and ending March 23^h.