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## LESSON 2: RESEARCHING A FAMILY HEIRLOOM

Students access a family heirloom and research its background, tell how it came into their possession and what the item means to them.

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Level: Grade 5

Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts, Visual Arts, Computers

Estimated Duration: 2 to 3 40-minute periods

### MATERIALS

- class set of *Family Heirloom Cataloguing Data* worksheet (see page 3)
- family heirlooms

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- utilize primary sources and graphic organizers to gather information and record historical data
- use appropriate terminology such as archaeologist, artifact, site, date, features, excavation, plotting, shard, survey
- ask and answer interview questions
- summarize facts, data and information
- speak clearly when making oral presentations

### TEACHER BACKGROUND

- **Artifact:** Anything used by humans, such as pottery, arrowheads, stone tools, and animal (or human) bones with cutmarks.
- **Heirloom:** A piece of personal property passed down from generation to generation.

### HOOK: FIRST RULE OF ARCHAEOLOGY – MAKE NO UNQUALIFIED ASSUMPTIONS

Place several contemporary objects, some of which may be unusual (e.g.: a nutmeg grater) into a shoebox. Ask for volunteers to take turns selecting an item from the box, and analyzing the object by describing its attributes – or cataloguing data. Invite students to hypothesize the possible functions of the item and its importance to humans of today.

Ask the students to think about how we get information about people and cultures that existed before us? Make a list of objects that will provide evidence about previous cultures: photos, diaries, journals, surveys, correspondence, keepsakes, pottery, garments, tools, bones, household and personal items, toys.

Discuss what is done with objects that are no longer needed? Guide students to the idea that objects are often discarded. What objects were discarded? In the past, where did people discard these items? Explain that long ago, people disposed of items somewhere close to home, either just outside their home, in streams, and sometimes down abandoned wells.

What might happen to these discarded items? What condition might they be in if found by later generations? Introduce the term:

- **Primary source:** A record created by people who actually saw or participated in an event and recorded that event or their reactions to it immediately afterwards (e.g. newspapers, diaries, letters).

Ask students what we call a person who studies objects from the past? Lead students to the proper terminology:

- **Archaeologist:** A specialist in the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of physical remains.
- **Archaeology:** The study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of physical remains.

Definitions from online Land of the Spirits Glossary [www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Spirits/English/Resources/glossary.html](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Spirits/English/Resources/glossary.html)

## PROCEDURE

1. Students should do the initial research for this project as homework:
  - source a family heirloom or artifact
  - ask relatives about the object, its purpose/function, how it came to be in the family, why it was passed on through the generations, its significance.Then have each student bring their object (or large photograph of it) and research notes to class.
2. Distribute *Family Heirloom Cataloguing Data* worksheets (see page 3), and instruct the students to use this as a guide to the type of information they should research and gather for the item they have chosen to study. As an example of cataloguing data, point to the Land of the Spirits Collections pages online at <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Spirits/English/Museum/index.html>
3. Students should use various research tools including the Internet, interviews with relatives and experts where available, old catalogues, and family journals and photo albums. Write the following points on the board to help with their thinking:
  - What is it?
  - Define it's shape, size and colour.
  - Condition (rusty, broken, bent, decayed)?
  - Of what is it made?
  - When was it made?
  - Where was it made?
  - How was it made?
  - Who used it?
  - For what was it used?
  - What special attributes does it have?
  - Is there an oral or written history?
  - Other facts you know about this object.
  - Sources of information.
4. Once the class has completed the data sheets, ask each student to give a short presentation about his or her heirloom.

## EXTENSIONS

Students can compare their artifacts to see if any match.

Students can use audio/video to interview an elderly person to learn more about their artifact and times past.

