

Making Assumptions: Understanding Historical Context

Anticipatory Set
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OVERVIEW: This anticipatory set will help students see how the assumptions they make based on the context of the present day sometimes contradict historical context of the past. For example, most wedding dresses in the present day are white or a shade thereof, while the wedding dress in this collection is brown. Using the present context of today that wedding dresses are white will lead students to faulty analysis of the wedding dress in the collection. At the end of this anticipatory set, students will understand the importance of using *historical context* to understand people, events, and artifacts from history.

SUGGESTED COLLECTION PIECES: CPM.933.ABC (Wedding Dress)
CPM.984 (Bonnet-Wedding Bonnet)
CPM.979.ABC (Scarf, Necktie, and Rosette)
CPM.977 or CPM.978 (Undersleeves)

OBJECTIVES: Learners will...

- Describe a piece of clothing from the collection
- Discuss their observations
- Explain how their observations led them to a specific conclusion
- Identify their own assumptions
- Value historical context as a means for understanding an event, person, artifact, or moment in time

DESCRIPTION:

- 1.) **Write.** Ask students to write a description of the collection piece you have chosen to use. (You may choose multiple pieces.) In their description, students should:
 - a. Describe what they are looking at (Make sure to say what it is)
 - b. Explain what the item would have been used for
 - c. Tell who would've used the item
 - i. What was their socio-economic status?
 - ii. Were they male or female?
 - iii. How old were they?
 - iv. What race and/or ethnicity were they?
 - v. What was their profession?
 - vi. When would they have used this item?
 - d. Give some background information about the era from which the item came
- 2.) **Discuss.** After students have finished writing, have students share some of their thoughts. As they share, ask:
 - a. What details from the collection piece led them to their conclusions?
 - b. Of the conclusions they made, which ones are true, and which ones are assumptions or speculations?
 - c. What kinds of assumptions were made?
- 3.) **The Point.** *Historical Context* is what is happening all around an event, person, artifact, or moment in time. What other events are taking place? What is the political

climate? What are the predominant and subordinate ideas/opinions at the time? What other factors (global, local, regional, etc.) shape what is going on?

Understanding *historical context* is critical for accurately understanding history. Using the context of the present day will not always lead to correct conclusions about the past.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS:

Formative Assessment. Teachers should use the discussion and general observations as a formative assessment to gauge how long this anticipatory set should take.

Summative Assessment. Consider making a list of the assumptions students made throughout this activity and posting it in the classroom as a reminder to be cautious in assuming present day historical context for past events.

If you use journals in your class or if you want your students to practice writing, ask students to reflect on their overall experience throughout the anticipatory set. What did they experience personally? What did they learn? How has their thinking changed from what they learned?