

Prompts for Looking in the Classroom

While you've probably already seen your object in photographs, your visit to the Museum is a chance to see your object up close and in person. This is important because some qualities or details do not translate well, or at all, into photographs.

You'll also want to include a short description of your object in your final assignment, so use this opportunity to really look at your object. Feel free to take photos or freehand draw details you think are important.

General Observations

- What is the general size and shape of the object?
 - Does this information conform to what you would expect from this type of object? Or is it an outlier?
- Are there any details that you didn't notice from the online photos? (e.g., the pot has a rounded bottom and will not sit on a flat table)
 - Are there any physical qualities that are best experienced in person? Does it have a physical presence worth noting - whether that be that it is large and impressive or small and personal?
- Does seeing the object in person pique any new questions or lines of inquiry?

Background Check

- Does all of the information you have about your specific object check out?
 - e.g., do you see the repair that was mentioned in the record? is the inscription as clear as the transcription suggests or do you think there might be room for error? can you see all the details that the record states are there?
 - Remember that while scholarship does build upon the work of those who came before us, we need to not take anything for granted. Errors and misinterpretations will continue to be repeated until someone takes note!
- Are any parts of the object modern reconstructions? Do we know when they were done?
- Has the object been conserved or treated? What were the effects of those treatments?

Material Observations

- What materials were listed on the object's record? Can you identify all of them on the object?
 - Do any of them have any particular qualities worth noting? (e.g., the lapis lazuli glitters under the light or the ceramic surface is much rougher than anticipated)
- Is the object a single piece or are there parts to it, such a lid or other attachment?
 - Was it part of a pair or larger assemblage of items? (e.g., a pair of shoes or a set of cards)
 - Does it appear whole, or could parts be missing? Can you see any breaks or rips?
- Do you see any markings on the object?
 - Any marks from creation processes? (e.g., brush strokes, fingermarks)
 - Any marks from use (e.g., burning, scrapes) or reuse (repairs)?
 - Any marks from disuse or disposal? (e.g., mineral buildup from lying in the ground or metal deterioration)
 - Any marks from the Museum itself?

Decorative Observations:

- Does your object have any decoration?
 - How important was the decoration to your object? Was it the main focus or purpose of your object or is the decoration less essential? Why do you think so?
- What is the overall decorative design like? Is it busy with lots of detail or simplified with only a few things? Is it decorated all over or just on a few parts?
- What techniques were used to create the decoration?
 - e.g., painted, embroidered, glazed, engraving, dye, beading, carving, hammering, enamel, glaze, etc.
- Are colors an important part of the decoration? What, if any, colors can you distinguish? Is there a particular color palette used?
 - Are any colors potentially faded, discolored, or missing?
 - Is the color palette related to the technique of decoration? (e.g., red-figure pottery)
- Is the decoration figurative (depicting humans or objects) or does it focus on geometric and abstract designs? Does it include both?
 - Do the figural scenes depict particular people, stories, religious doctrines, or reflect the purpose of the object?
 - Are there any symbols or shapes that might have a particular meaning (even if you're unsure of what they might be)?
- Is there any writing (even if you don't recognize the script)?
 - Describe the script: is it stamped, handwritten, carved, etc.? Is it neatly or haphazardly done?
 - Is the writing central to the design or purpose of the object?