Resources for Incorporating Material Culture into the Undergraduate Classroom.


I found this book in the days right after the Asian Studies colloquium so I have not yet read it, nor have I been able to find any reviews. I’m waiting for my copy to arrive. This is the description from the publisher’s website. It sounds very good:

[Berger] takes the reader through half a dozen theoretical models that are commonly used to understand objects. He then describes and analyzes fifteen objects, showing how they demonstrate ideas like authenticity, globalization, and identity. Berger provides a series of exercises at the end to allow students to do their own analyses of objects in their environment. Brief and inexpensive enough to be included as a component in courses ranging from anthropology to art history, pop culture to psychology, Berger’s introductory guide to material culture will be of use to many instructors and their students.


This article, condensed and reprinted from the original which appeared in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 9, (1974), introduces Fleming’s model, which uses 5 “properties” that summarize the known facts about the object (history, material, construction, design and function), and 4 “operations” that relate the object to broader aesthetic and cultural questions (identification, evaluation, cultural analysis and interpretation). The *Winterthur Portfolio* version of the article, which includes an example of the model as applied to a piece of American furniture from 1680, is available through JSTOR.


This book explores, among other things, what’s actually going on inside students in constructivist learning situations involving art including emotional and cognitive responses, the interplay of social factors, and the integration of prior knowledge and skills. It also suggests a framework for integrating the use of visual culture into curriculum.

The model of material culture analysis that Prown puts forth in this essay is based on 4 steps: description, deduction, speculation and investigation. As an art historian, when he talks about material culture he is especially interested in the aesthetics of the object(s) being examined and how that reflects the social world in which they were created. That kind of connection may be difficult or impossible to make with more utilitarian objects where form directly follows function. This essay was originally printed in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 17, No, 1 (Spring 1982) and is available through JSTOR.


Still an excellent model in spite of it’s age, Schroeder starts by looking at the object at the most basic level – how does it feel, what does it look like – and gradually expands the material and cultural contexts in which the object exists. The piece was written for staff and volunteers with exhibit responsibilities working in small museums. It is available as a .pdf download from AASLH. At the AASLH website, use the “programs” link at the top, then choose “Products/Publications” then “bookstore,” and click on the link to technical leaflets.


Short Participant reports from faculty who participated in a 1977-1981 NEH funded program to incorporate the University of Kansas museums’ collections into their undergraduate courses. Disciplines represented are classics, English, literature, theatre, fine arts, foreign language, history and the social sciences. The essays describe how faculty incorporated the museums into their courses and what they felt worked well or could be improved upon in the future.


This is the source for the model I presented at the workshop. While it was developed specifically to apply constructivist, inquiry-based methods in art museum and gallery teaching it can easily be stretched to cover other learning situations, which I hope I demonstrated at the colloquium. Compared to other models, I think it’s easier to grasp both how it works and how it can be applied in the classroom.

Finally, the standard texts exploring learning with exhibits and objects in the museum setting are:


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