
The Secret Life of Objects



Contents

03	Introduction
06	How to... engage with an object in the museum
08	How to... engage with an object in the classroom
10	Word Bank
11	Draw and Annotate template
12	Mystery Object Recording sheet
13	Object Investigation Framework
16	Object Investigation Framework — exemplar
19	Mind Map
21	Object Character Profile template
23	Creative responses

Introduction

What does the pack aim to do?

This pack aims to provide teachers with the following:

- Stimulus to use and incorporate objects regularly into teaching and learning practice
- A framework for the analysis of objects in museum and classroom contexts that does not rely on extensive subject knowledge
- Creative techniques for critically looking and investigating objects including opportunities for sensory engagement
- Bridging techniques to draw out the creative character of objects, either through mind mapping or character profiling
- A range of potential creative outputs inspired by objects
- A range of strategies/techniques for getting the most out of a museum visit or using objects in the classroom

Who is writing this resource?

This resource has been put together by professional museum educators as a way to encourage the use of museum and non-museum objects by teachers during visits and in the classroom. Our aim is to impart the benefits of object-orientated discovery as a starting point for exploration and the generation of creative responses, and to provide practical guidance on how this can be achieved.

History and beyond

Are museums only subject specific or can they be used in other ways? It can be a perception not simply amongst teachers but also the general public that museums are just about history; when in reality it is far from the case. Museum collections are diverse, with objects ranging from paintings to ceramics, to designed objects and taxidermy (depending on where you find yourself) making them truly the perfect place for cross-curricular and creative learning. If you are tempted to think of museums only as a great place for your history trip, we hope to change minds with this resource.

Objects as stimulus for creative learning/creative thinking

Objects help us make sense of the world around us, provide opportunities to make connections and learn about different cultures and periods in time. Past people's creativity and ingenuity, technological changes, causation and continuity can all be seen in what an object is, how it is made, what it looks like and how it was used. Using museum objects provides a rare opportunity to use past creativity to explore and inspire future creativity.

Value of object based learning

Object-based learning provides opportunities for developing HOT's:

- **Knowledge** – remembering, reciting, listing
- **Comprehension** – summarising, explaining
- **Application** – transferring knowledge from one situation to another
- **Analysis** – categorising, comparing and contrasting
- **Synthesis** – hypothesising, predicting, inventing and composing
- **Evaluation** – judging, concluding, substantiating, defending

Creative learning using objects also allows pupils to:

- question and challenge
- making connections and see relationships
- envisage what might be/have been
- explore new ideas, keeping options open
- reflect critically on ideas, actions and outcomes

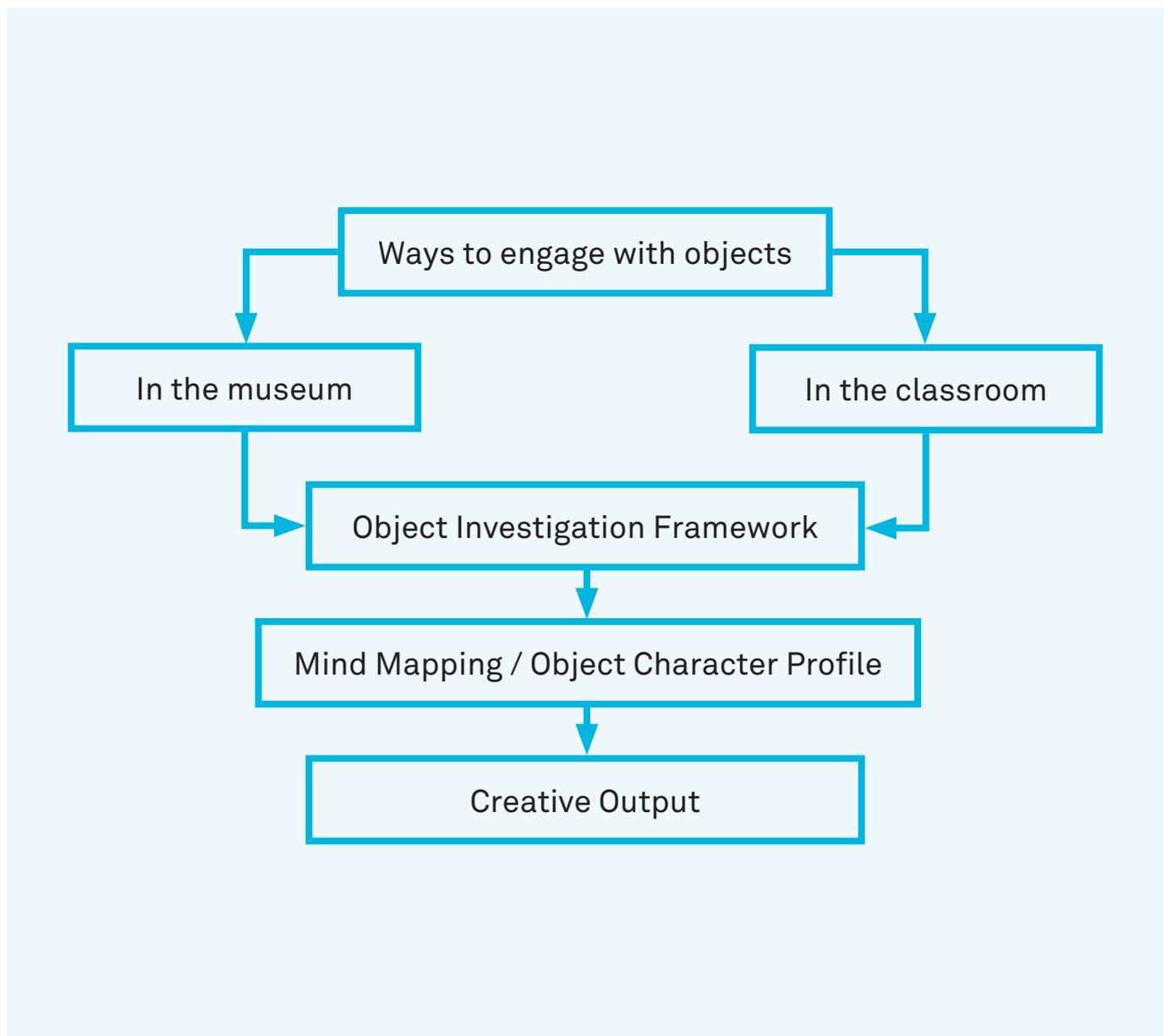
Activities in this pack will also allow pupils and teachers to explore objects using the following techniques:

- Sensory exploration
- Observation skills
- Storytelling and discussion
- Enquiry
- Questioning
- Drawing and photography
- Annotating
- Creative writing

A guide to using the resource

The Secret Life of Objects resource pack contains activity ideas for engaging with objects, an Object Investigation Framework (OIF), exemplars and ideas for creative outputs.

The resource uses a simple step-by-step process that will lead you and your pupils from initial object engagement to creative activity.



Step One

How to... engage with an object in the museum

Step one will involve the engagement of the class with an object or objects. You might want the objects to be pre-chosen by you on a visit to your local museum, particularly if you are focusing on a particular topic, or you might want to allow the children freedom of choice. In this section you will be provided with starter and introductory techniques for engaging pupils and developing their understanding of what working with an object means.

The following activities are designed to promote initial questioning, observation, describing and critical thinking.

Starter

Provide children/young people with the following statements and ask them to select objects that they think fit the criteria:

- Something a superhero would use
- Something designed by aliens
- Something that holds a secret
- Something you could give to a king or queen
- Something you would take to the future
- Something smelly
- Something noisy

Ask the children/young people to feedback their ideas and justify their answers.

Back to Back

In pairs ask children/young people to:

- stand back to back in front of a display case of objects
- Ask the person facing the display case to silently choose one object
- Ask the person facing away from the object to ask no more than 10 questions about the object
- The person facing the object can only answer yes or no
- When all the questions have been asked and answered, the person facing away from the object turns around and guesses which object the other person chose

Swap roles and undertake the activity again.

Step One

How to... engage with an object in the museum

It's all in the detail

Provide children/young people with paper and a pencil. Ask them to select an object and draw a detail (a small part of the object).

Ask the children/young people to swap their drawings with a partner and see if they can find the object from which the detail was taken.

Alternatively, ask the children/young people to write a detailed description of their selected object then swap the written description with a partner and ask them to find the object described.

Word bank exercise

Provide children/young people with the My Object is... word bank. Ask them to select an object and highlight all the words that are applicable. Young people might like to create their own word bank before the museum visit.

Draw and Annotate

Provide children/young people with the 'Draw and Annotate' sheet. Ask them to select an object, draw it in as much detail as possible and annotate the drawing using information that can only be gathered from observation.

Step One

How to... engage with an object in the classroom

Exploring objects in the classroom affords the opportunity for children and young people to physically interact with objects. While the activities suggested for exploring objects in the museum can also be applied in the classroom, the following activities build on that experience and encourage a deeper sensory exploration of an object.

Mystery Object Game A

Divide the class into 4 groups.

Provide each group with a feely bag containing an object.

Ask each member of the group to put their hand inside the bag and feel the object.

Ask each member of the group to suggest one word that describes the object and write the word down on the 'Mystery Object' sheet.

After each member of the group has had a turn, the group can take the object out of the bag and have a closer look – this must be done in secret, away from the other groups.

Discuss what the object is with each group and ask them to produce three clues about their object.

Ask one group to read out their clues, one at a time. The other groups have two guesses per clue.

After 6 guesses (or when the other children/young people have guessed correctly) the object is revealed and discussed.

Mystery Object Game B

Divide the class into 4 groups.

Provide each group with a feely bag containing an object.

Ask each member of the group to put their hand inside the bag and feel the object.

Provide each member of the group with a pencil and paper and ask them to draw what they think the object looks like.

When each member of the group has finished, ask them to take the object out of the feely bag and compare it to their drawing.

Step One

How to.... engage with an object in the classroom

Back to Front

In pairs, provide children/young people with a feely bag containing an object and ask them to stand back to back.

One person puts their hand into the feely bag and explores the object through touch. With their spare hand they draw the object on the back of the person facing away from them.

The person facing away draws on paper what they feel being drawn on their back.

The drawing on paper is then compared with the object in the feely bag.

The pairs swap roles and undertake the activity again.

What's in the box?

Hire an object loan box from your local museum or gather together a range of objects.

Place the objects in a container that stimulates curiosity i.e. a picnic basket, a treasure chest, a suitcase etc.

Place the container in a corner of the classroom with a sign saying 'do not look inside'. Leave the container in place for a week.

The day before you are going to use the objects, move the container to the front of the classroom.

On the day of opening, discuss with the pupils whose box they think it is and what might be inside.

Open the box and explore the contents.

The children/young people could undertake the activities described above or move directly to using the Object Enquiry Framework.

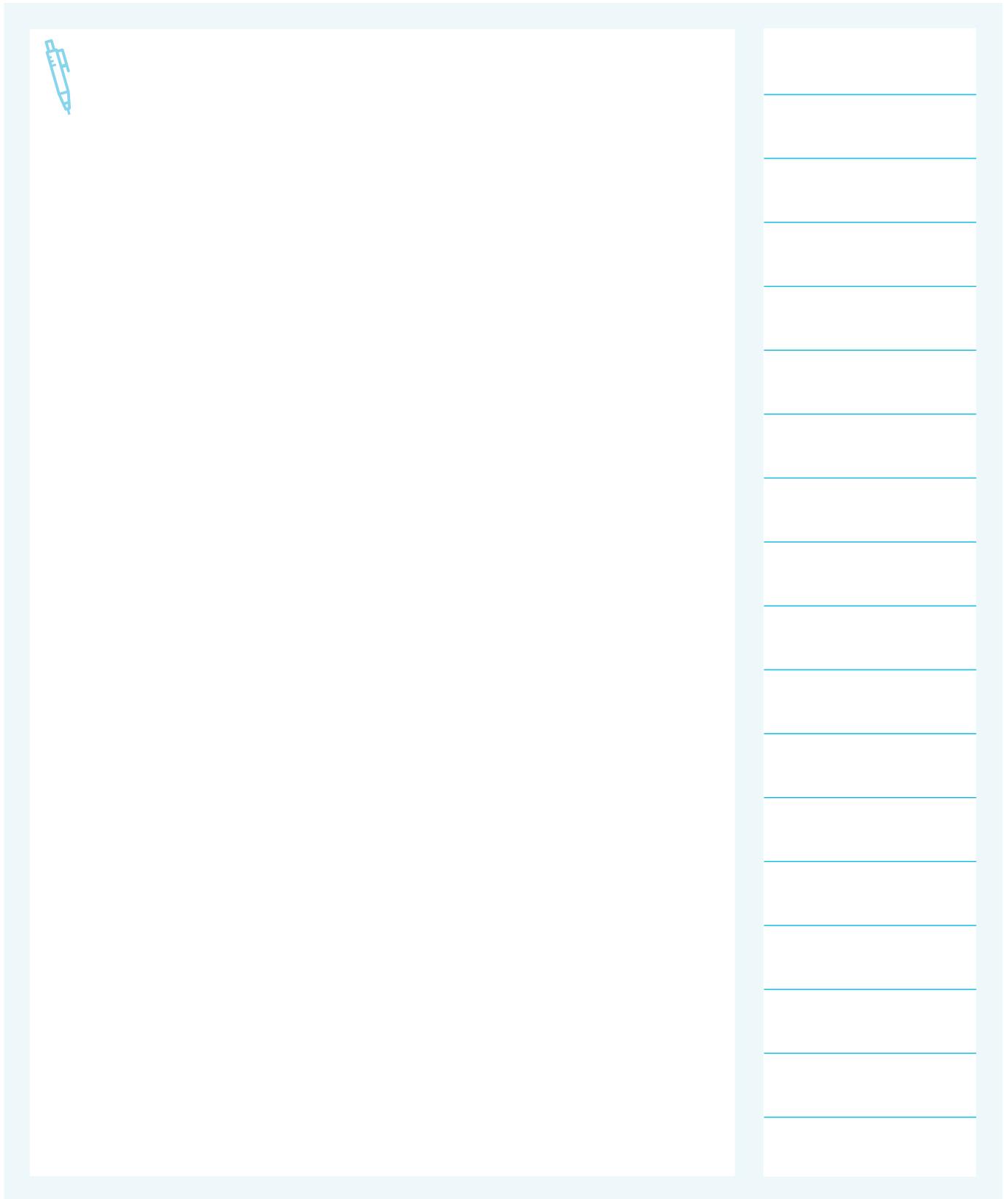
Word bank

My object is...

(highlight or circle all that apply)

Shiny	Decorated	Rough	Ridged
Smooth	Circular	Prickly	Moulded
Silky	Natural	Round	Metal
Man-made	Cornered	Wood	Fuzzy
Cool	Pottery	Scented	Precious
Small	Heavy	Common	Light
Smelly	Big	Designed	Stuffed
Mechanical	Crafted	Ginormous	Tiny
Dangerous	Lost	Old	Surprising
Odd	Secret	Plain	Safe
New	Personal	Local	Beautiful
Familiar	Foreign	Ugly	Useful

Draw and Annotate



The page features a large, light blue rectangular frame. In the top-left corner of this frame is a small icon of a pencil. On the right side of the frame, there is a vertical column of 15 horizontal lines, creating a space for writing or notes.

Mystery Object Recording Sheet

Write as many words as you can to describe your object:



Write 3 clues about your object:

Clue 1

Clue 2

Clue 3

Step Two

Object Investigation Framework

Now that the pupils have become familiar with the key skills of object observation, provide them with the Object Investigation Framework and allow them to choose/provide them with a single object. Completing the framework will give the children an idea of what factual information can be gained from the object itself, or (if in a museum) from the object label. Encourage pupils to think about what else they might like to know about the object, and to write this in the appropriate box.

This Object Investigation Framework can be used for the exploration of objects in both an historical and a creative context.

Step Two

Object Investigation Framework

Name of object:

Theme	Questions to ask	What information can I find out from the object?
What?	What is the object?	
	What colour is it?	
	What is it made from?	
	What does it do?	
	What does it feel like?	
	What does it sound like?	
	What does it smell like?	
This made me think.....		
How?	How was the object used?	
	How was the object made?	
	How is the object decorated?	
	How has the object changed over time?	
	How has the way the object has been used changed over time?	
This made me think...		
When?	When was the object made?	
	When was it given to the museum/ the person who owned it?	
	When was it used?	
	When did it stop being used?	
This made me think...		

Step Two

Object Investigation Framework

Name of object:

Theme	Questions to ask	What information can I find out from the object?
Where?	Where is the object from?	
	Where was it made?	
	Where was it kept?	
	Where was it found?	
	Where was it used?	
This made me think.....		
Why?	Why was the object made?	
	Why does it look the way it does?	
	Why was it left behind/given to the museum?	
This made me think...		
Who?	Who made the object?	
	Who found it?	
	Who owned it?	
	Who used it?	
	Who gave it to the museum?	
This made me think...		
Write any other questions or information you have here:		

Step Two

Object Investigation Framework – exemplar

Object Investigation Framework exemplar using a Roman ring from the collection of the Winding House Museum, New Tredegar.



Step Two

Object Investigation Framework – exemplar

Name of object: *Roman ring*

Theme	Questions to ask	What information can I find out from the object?
What?	What is the object?	<i>A ring</i>
	What colour is it?	<i>Dull grey</i>
	What is it made from?	<i>Silver</i>
	What does it do?	<i>It is a symbol or a decoration</i>
	What does it feel like?	<i>Smooth and cold</i>
	What does it sound like?	<i>A light metal noise</i>
	What does it smell like?	<i>Old metal</i>
<p>This made me think...</p> <p><i>That the owner could have touched lots of different things while wearing the ring – what were they?</i></p>		
How?	How was the object used?	<i>To decorate the body</i>
	How was the object made?	<i>By hand</i>
	How is the object decorated?	<i>With circles/scales/feathers and a missing gemstone or some other stone</i>
	How has the object changed over time?	<i>The silver is dulled and the centre stone is missing</i>
	How has the way the object has been used changed over time?	<i>It would have been worn but now it is in a museum to be looked at</i>
<p>This made me think...</p> <p><i>Maybe the ring was used as protection and the missing centre stone was a sort of charm to keep the owner safe. Maybe it was a picture of a Roman God or Goddess</i></p>		
When?	When was the object made?	<i>1800 – 1900 years ago</i>
	When was it given to the museum/ the person who owned it?	<i>Don't know</i>
	When was it used?	<i>1800 – 1900 years ago</i>
	When did it stop being used?	<i>When it was lost or the wearer died?</i>
<p>This made me think...</p> <p><i>What happened to the ring after its owner had died or it was lost? Where was it lost? Why did the owner die? Old age, illness, in a battle?</i></p>		

Step Two

Object Investigation Framework – exemplar

Name of object:

Theme	Questions to ask	What information can I find out from the object?
Where?	Where is the object from?	<i>Wales</i>
	Where was it made?	<i>Don't know</i>
	Where was it kept?	<i>In the owners house</i>
	Where was it found?	<i>In the ground</i>
	Where was it used?	<i>Wherever the owner went</i>
This made me think... <i>What journeys/adventures the ring went on with its owner</i>		
Why?	Why was the object made?	<i>To celebrate something, for protection, fashion</i>
	Why does it look the way it does?	<i>It was buried in the ground and is very old</i>
	Why was it left behind/given to the museum?	<i>It is precious</i>
This made me think... <i>What things that the owner would celebrate or need protecting from</i>		
Who?	Who made the object?	<i>A jeweller</i>
	Who found it?	<i>Don't know</i>
	Who owned it?	<i>A Roman</i>
	Who used it?	<i>A Roman</i>
	Who gave it to the museum?	<i>Don't know</i>
This made me think... <i>How are rings made?</i>		
Write any other questions or information you have here: <i>What was everyday life like for the owner?</i> <i>Where did the silver come from?</i> <i>Does it look like other Roman rings?</i> <i>Where did the centre stone go?</i> <i>What design was on the centre stone?</i>		

Step Three

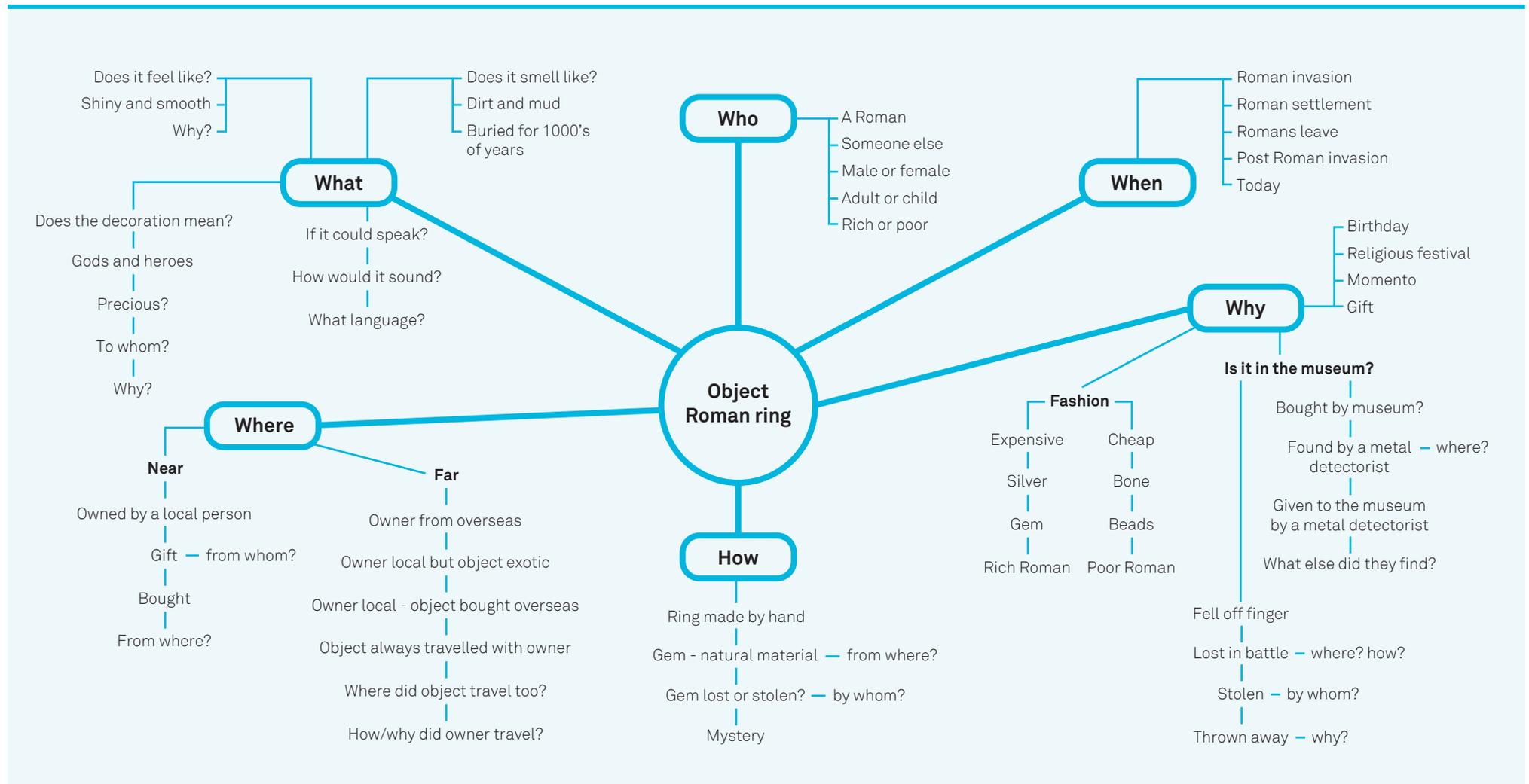
Mind Map

From the factual to the fantastical, step three is a bridging activity which allows pupils to move from thinking about an object factually to thinking about it creatively. After completing the OIF, you can use a mind map or the Object Character Profile provided to extend pupils' creative thinking about the object.

Step Three

Mind Map

Mind mapping of Roman Ring consolidating and extending information taken from the Object Investigation Framework — exemplar



Step Three

Object Character Profile

Imagine you are the object and answer the following questions **AS IF YOU ARE THE OBJECT**:

Use the answers from your framework to help you.

For answers you do not have, make up your own. Be as imaginative as possible!

Who?	
Am I?	
Made me?	
Bought me?	
Sold me?	
Lost me?	
Forgot me?	
Misses me?	
Took me?	
Would be my best friend?	

What?	
Am I?	
Made me?	
Am I for?	
Do I look like?	
Do I smell like?	
Do I sound like?	
Is special about me?	
Would I say if I could speak?	
Happened the day I was lost?	
What is my favourite memory?	

Where?	
Am I from?	
Was I found?	
Is my owner?	
Would I like to be?	
Have I been?	
Would I like to stay?	
Have I been kept?	
Would I go if I ran away?	

Step Three

Object Character Profile

How?	
Was I made?	
Was I found?	
Was I used?	
Have I changed over time?	
Many people wanted me?	
Many people owned me?	
Did I get here?	
Old am I?	
Clever am I?	
Useful am I?	

Why?	
Was I made?	
Was I given away?	
Am I this size?	
Am I this shape?	
Am I made this way?	
Am I decorated this way?	
Was I used?	
Am I broken?	

When?	
Was I made?	
Would I have been used?	
Was I owned?	
Was I lost/given away?	
Did people stop using me?	
Was I found?	

Step Four

Creative responses

The final step in our journey is to create a response to the information and ideas gathered through the OIF, mind maps or object character profiles.

Creating a response to one object or a collection of objects, whether thematic or random, offers exciting opportunities for creativity in the classroom.

Below, we have used the example of the Roman ring to demonstrate just a few of the creative responses* that could be undertaken.

- Consider how the ring was lost and create a shadow puppet show to recount the tale
- Create a dance, costume and music to re-enact the giving of the ring to the wearer
- Hot seat, storyboard and animate the tale of the ring from the ring's perspective
- Produce creative writing recounting the wearer's key life moments
- Create poetry lamenting the owner's loss of the ring
- Write a song in which the ring describes its owner

* These responses could be set in the Roman period, but could equally be based in pure imagination.

- Imagine the ring as a time travel token with the lost gem as a button to the past or the future. Create a piece of drama that tells the tale of traveller stuck in time when the gem is lost as the traveller hurtles through space
- Use the detail and decoration of the gemstone mount to design a new centrepiece using air-drying clay and paint

Structure vs free choice

There are many ways that you could implement the creative response stage. You may wish to give pupils free reign, allowing small groups to come up with their own responses which may form a collective performance at the end. Alternatively you might want to set a structured task that draws on pupils' ideas and imagination about the object they have studied. Over the page are two structured options you may wish to try.

Step Four

Creative responses

What happens next?

In small groups ask the children/young people to compare the information about their objects detailed on their OIF and object character profiles.

Ask the children/young people to create a story that continues the following opening:

The museum keeper turned off the lights and locked the door to the gallery. It had been a busy day with lots of visitors asking lots of questions. He loved this time of night when the objects were all safely in their cases, but little did he know what happened in the gallery after dark...

Or 'I belong to...'

Ask the children to create a piece of drama based on:

the story of a fictional character who owned or was connected to all the objects investigated. This activity follows on naturally from the What's in the Box activity.

The Secret Life of Objects was produced by:

Lucy-Ann Pickering

Education and Learning Manager

The Royal Mint Museum

Llantrisant

Pontyclun

CF72 8YT

01443 623337

lucyann.pickering@royalmintmuseum.org.uk

Mark Batchelder

Lifelong Learning Officer

The Winding House Museum

Cross St

Elliot's Town

New Tredegar

NP24 6EG

01443 822666

batchm@caerphilly.gov.uk

Karin Molson

Learning Manager

Monmouthshire Museums Service

Monmouth Museum

Priory Street

Monmouth

NP25 3XA

01600 710630

karinmolson@monmouthshire.gov

www.artsandeducationnetworksewales.org

www.rhywdwaithcelfyddydauacaddysgcymru.org



@ArtEdNetSEWales | @CelfAddysgCymru

Arts & Education Network Rhwydwaith Celf & Addysg



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru
Arts Council of Wales

**ARIENNIR GAN
Y LOTERI
LOTTERY FUNDED**

