

My Personal Artifact

Overview

Students share a personal object that holds meaning for them and represents their life with classmates. This allows students to explore meaningful moments, events, and/or people in their own life, as well as learn about other group members' lives. The process of sharing personal artifacts in a respectful, specific format also develops a safe, classroom community and furthers the process of team building and group cohesion. This activity should be conducted once classroom expectations have been established and there is a foundation of trust among students.

Grades

Any

Activity Type

Whole class

Materials

Students must bring in a personal item

Duration

Depends on number of group participants; allow for 3-5 minutes per participant

Procedure

Preparation the day before:

1. Ask students to brainstorm what an **artifact** is. List their responses, and ensure their understanding that artifacts are any object made, used, or belonging to human beings. Explain to students that **archeologists**, or people who study human beings and their cultures who lived in the past, often use artifacts to tell them something about that past person's life and community.
2. Ask students: If I had never met you and walked into your bedroom, what would I know about you from the things you have there? How might particular items that we own represent who we are? What else might such items say about you and your life?
3. Tell students to think of an item that is special to them and that has significance to who they are today. This item probably involves a personal story, and may bring up happy or sad memories. Tell students the item they choose may be anything from a blanket they had when young, to a trophy won, to a picture of a loved one. The only stipulation is that this item, their own personal artifact, must be significant to them and who they are in some way. Instruct students to go home tonight, consider items that fit this criterion, and choose one to bring in to share with classmates. Highlight that since they will be sharing the artifact and its significance with the class, they should choose an item that they are comfortable speaking about. Remind students that it is normal to be

nervous when speaking in front of a group, but they can rely on the fact that they will be respectfully listened to and supported.

4. Tell students after selecting their personal artifact they should be prepared to share the following information with class:
 - What the artifact is (describe it)
 - How/when they received it, made it, bought it, etc.
 - Why the artifact is special to them
 - How the artifact represents them

Sharing “My Personal Artifacts” the following day:

5. At the beginning of class, go over expectations for participating in the sharing process of “My Personal Artifacts.” Ask students, “When we are sharing something personal, or speaking to others, how do we want to be treated? What will make you feel respected and heard?” Allow students to brainstorm a list of positive behaviors and expectations for the sharing session that you list where the group can see them (i.e. look at the person speaking, smile at them, don’t giggle or gossip, make positive comments afterwards, etc.) If there are important areas students do not bring up, facilitate discussion by asking, “No one has mentioned _____. Is that an important expectation for sharing?”
6. Explain the format for sharing to students. It is recommended the class sit in a circle and take turns volunteering to share. While students share, they should answer the questions listed in number 4, adding any additional information they choose. Let students know up front that their share time must be limited to 3-5 minutes each, and thus you may need to cut them off if they go over. Explain to them that you will do this not out of disrespect or a lack of interest, but only because you want everyone to be able to share. Tell students that once each of them finishes, the rest of the class will clap loudly as a show of support and will then be allowed to ask questions and offer positive comments. You can prompt students by asking questions such as, “What did you like about _____’s sharing? What did you learn about _____ based on his/her artifact?”
7. To begin the sharing of “My Personal Artifacts,” the teacher should go first, sharing his/her own personal artifact in the format you expect students to use. Afterwards, allow students to ask you questions and make comments, then call for a student volunteer to share. It is important to encourage students to share, and if they feel safe, most will want to. However, if a student is adamant about not sharing, do not force them. Rather, ask them to complete a writing assignment telling you about their artifact.
8. End the sharing by debriefing:
 - By sharing our personal artifacts, what types of things did we learn about each other?
 - Do you feel you have things in common with each other based on the sharing today? Explain.
 - Why is it important to learn about one another and the things that are important to us?

Culminating Activities

- Ask students to complete a creative writing assignment in which they imagine their artifact has been found 100 years from now. Tell students to consider what someone coming across it in the

future, not knowing the artifacts story, might infer about them and their lifetime based on the artifact.

- Explore the concept of artifacts and personal history further. Have students complete an oral history project with members of their local community. See the Consortium's lesson "*Living History: Local Voices of the Civil Rights Movement*" for an example of oral history.