Artifacts of Us

A tool for exploring Interconnectedness

Pick an object that you have with you or on you.

Consider each of these questions and discuss with a partner:
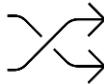
What personal stories does this object tell? What might this object say about you as a **distinct individual**?

What group stories does this object tell? What might this object say about groups you are a part of, such as

the family you grew up in? the neighborhood you grew up in? the country you grew up in? the time we are living in now?

What's something that someone might **misinterpret** about you or the communities you belong to based on this object? What do you notice that is the same or different among the stories you and your partner tell?

Tips for Use

Before launching this activity, introduce students to the idea that artifacts are objects we use to try and understand different people and groups in different times and places. Over time, "objects" become "artifacts." You might ask them if they have visited a museum and seen such objects, or if they have ever discovered an unfamiliar object belonging an older relative or friend from another place.

Name for students that while historians observe carefully and research in many ways, sometimes they get it wrong; objects can never tell the whole story and they can hold more mysteries than answers. Also, sometimes museums create stories that connect an object to their own time and place in ways that might not have mattered or made sense to the person who owned the object.

Depending on the object and the person, students will find some stories more easily than others. For instance, if a student selects a keychain to a grandparent's house, the student may connect easily with stories the object might tell about her family. It may be less evident that the object also tells stories about the time and place we are living in. Encourage students to seek stories connected to multiple group identities, while acknowledging that some will be easier to spot than others.

It is challenging to find stories about the group identities we take for granted. For instance, the question "What does this object say about the country you grew up in?" will likely be more challenging for students who still live in the country they grew up in. Similarly, because none of us has ever lived through a different era, it can be challenging to ask how an object reflects the times we a living in. However, it is important that we practice expanding and shifting our frames on ourselves in the world.

Extensions & Variations

- Reflect with prompts like:
    - What's one connection or similarity you heard from someone else? What's something surprising you heard from someone else?
    - What's a new idea you had or a shift you made in your thinking about yourself? About a group you are a part of?
    - How did it feel to consider possible misinterpretations about yourself?
- Try prefacing this activity by picking objects from your home, the thrift store, or reproductions of objects in museums and ask students to consider the same questions. Toys, clothing, and everyday objects work well, particularly if you can find a range of objects from different times and places.
- Try as a getting-to-know-you activity. If your group is very engaged in this way, you might revisit the objects and activity later to build more critical examination of the group stories stage.

How does this tool Cultivate Creative & Civic Capacities (C4)?

C4 Interconnectedness refers to understanding people as both unique individuals and members of complex groups. Building this understanding involves, among other things, beginning to notice aspects of our own identities – including those we don't often pay attention to because of our own limited perspectives.

Inspection Specs
A creativity challenge for building civic and creative ways of looking

Brainstorm Pt. I: What do we think is the problem?: What do you think gets in the way of people understanding one another? Understanding their friends and family? Understanding people who have different opinions, tastes, experiences? People who are very far away in place or in time?

Brainstorm Pt. II: Consider key aspects of understanding: Generate possible answers to one or more of these questions:

- What might help people **slow down?**
- What might help people work through **complex** situations?
- What might help people think beyond their own **experiences and beliefs?**
- What might help people find, consider, and use information that is **trustworthy and represents a range of perspectives?**

Identify Opportunities & Create: Review your responses to each of the Brainstorm sections. Identify one or more ideas you think could help people look at the world in ways that build understanding. Design a pair of glasses to help someone see in those ways.

As you play with materials and ideas, consider:
- How do you think specific features will help with opportunities you identified?
- Who do you think, or hope, might wear these glasses?
- How might these glasses influence how the user is perceived by others?
- What features could you add to help users better understand *themselves*?

Test it Out: Use your glasses to view a scene, situation or object. Trade with a partner. Take turns introducing each other to your glasses and viewing your original scene with your partner's glasses. What do you notice looking through your partner's glasses?

Tips for Use

It's recommended that students create 3D glasses so that they can literally put them on. Use simple, open-ended materials such as aluminum foil, pipe cleaners, rubber bands, and recyclables.

This activity can be a quick warm up (e.g. 5 minutes to create their prototype glasses) or a longer experience in which they have more creating time, then share, reflect, and refine their designs.

Brainstorm Pt. II is intended to help students deepen their thinking about aspects of, and barriers to, understanding across difference. If your group is new to creativity challenges, or generally inhibited, consider omitting this step to invite more free-flowing play.

Extensions & Variations

- Reflect with prompts like:
    - What do you notice with the glasses on that you didn't notice before? How did the scene look different? What surprised you when you tried on your partner's glasses, or heard your partner talk about yours? What is an idea from someone else's glasses that you'd like to incorporate into yours?
    - What might get in the way of your glasses working? Who might the glasses not work for? What is something they could add, subtract, or modify to address that.
    - How would you know when or where to 'put on' your glasses? How could you remember to look in these ways without needing the glasses?
- Invite the group to imagine someone wearing all the inventions at once. How do all the different features interact? How do they interact and help or hinder each other?
- Perspective taking and understanding the different ways we look at the world are powerful concepts. Consider riffing on the general prompt of creating glasses to see in different ways, for instance, *Create a device that helps the user see others in the way you hope to be seen* or *What are some important ways of looking at things/the world? Create a device that doesn't yet exist that would help people see the world in that way*.

How does this tool Cultivate Creative and Civic Capacities (C4)?

The way we look at the world around us is complex and has many consequences; looking in fresh, civically-relevant ways requires imagination and critical thinking. This activity surfaces barriers to understanding that students already know about, and then pushes them to think about (mis)understanding in relation to some key aspects of C4 Investigation: slowing down, probing complexity, stepping out of our limited perspectives, and using reliable information from diverse sources.

Reimagining Recess

A creativity challenge for collectively imagining a better civic space

Brainstorm: What do you think of when you think of recess? What makes a great recess? What's something you wish was a part of recess? What makes recess different from other times of the day?

Create a prototype, schematic drawing, or written description of an element of your ideal recess. This could be a piece of equipment, a game, a type of interaction, or a rule.

Mid-way check in: Review your work-in-progress and ask these questions

- What is one part of recess that I *don't* enjoy? What would need to change to make that better?
- What could I add, subtract, or modify to make this more *accessible and welcoming to more different types of people*, while maintaining what I value and enjoy about it?

Make at least one adaptation to your idea based on your thinking about these questions

Combine: Group up with one or more classmates. Share your works-in-progress and combine them together into a playground/recess experience. What do you notice about how they connect or relate?

Tips for Use

Prepare for the possibility that students might have very strong opinions and want them heard, and acted on, by adults. Consider in advance any points of contention that might come up (e.g. if there is playground bullying within the group, if there is anger at administration due to a shortened recess time). These can be reasons in favor of using this challenge as an entry point into a topic of authentic civic relevance. However, if you think it would be counterproductive, try designing a playground, library, or other civic space.

If students call out specific other students as either positive or negative to recess, ask "what is the specific behavior that (bothers you, makes recess great)?"

If "accessible" is a new or challenging concept, you could encourage students to think about people they know who have different abilities or needs. Ex: "how could you make your idea more welcoming to your baby sister? Or to your great uncle who uses a walker?" Help students consider the wants and needs of other users by keeping visual track of the brainstormed ideas and asking students to include at least one element that is for a user other than themselves.

Extensions & Variations

- Reflect with prompts like:
    - What was difficult about this?
    - What's one piece of your original idea that you had to let go of or adapt when you combined your idea with a classmate's?
    - What's an idea that ended up in your group's final creation that you hadn't thought of and that you like?
- Encourage out-of-the-box thinking by requiring students to include at least one thing they've never seen in a recess before.
- Engage different modalities by using inexpensive 3D materials, or by allowing students to choose to represent their ideas in drawing, written description, or a combination.
- Consider asking students to examine their designs or a group of designs in relation to the environment. Invite students to think about if their idea would help or hurt the natural world and how they would know. If developmentally appropriate, you can also invite them to think about if and how their idea would affect the natural world in month, a year, or 100 years from today.
- Adapt the challenge for different types of civic spaces you think your students are familiar with, such as a library or a lunchroom.
- Listen for ideas that might be actionable for their actual (indoor or outdoor) recess experience.

How does this tool Cultivate Creative & Civic Capacities (C4)?

C4 Imagination involves co-creating ideas for how a civic space or experience could be better for everyone. Recess is a space that raises issues of fairness, accessibility, tradeoffs and competing wants, belonging, and use of the natural world. It is a social microcosm that students already have many opinions about.

Creating a PPPSA*

*(*pet peeve public service announcement)*

A creativity challenge for exerting influence

Surface the Problem What is a 'small problem' you see in your life? Something which, if fixed, would make your life just a tiny bit more comfortable, convenient or efficient? Maybe there's a personal pet-peeve you have that seems minor to others but which really gets under your skin? Choose one to write down.

Craft the Campaign With a partner or in a small group: choose one of the pet-peeves and spend no more than 5 minutes to brainstorm and create a 30 second public service announcement (PSA) to address the issue.

A PSA is like a commercial, but instead of selling something it is spreading a message to raise public awareness about an issue of public concern, in the hopes of changing people's behavior. Like commercials, PSAs get viewers' attention by tapping into emotions, using humor, or featuring surprising visuals and catchy music.

While you work, ask yourself and each other:

- Why might this pet peeve exist? What might inspire people who do this to change? Alternately, what support could a PSA offer to someone "suffering" from the pet peeve?
- Who could help to change the frustrating behavior or the situation that has led to its existence? How could we catch their attention?
- What elements make for a successful PSA and how could you incorporate these elements into your PSA?

Convince After 5 minutes, perform your 30 second PPPSA for someone outside of your pair or small group. What do you notice about the PPPSAs of the group?

Tips for Use

Preface the challenge by sharing some examples of different styles of public service announcement and/or ads. Ask students what they think makes an effective PSA/ad.

Have each group select a different pet peeve OR choose one at random for everyone to use.

The primary intent of the challenge is to practice turning ideas into a persuasive performance. However, there are other civically- and creatively-relevant aspects that you might emphasize in reflection, depending on your students. Here are some examples:

- Sensitivity to different wants and needs in a community: "What surprised you in hearing different people's pet peeves? Which did you share? Were there any pet peeves were things that you do?"
- Recognizing unique skills brought by group members: "What talents and interests did each of you bring to this challenge? Who felt most comfortable planning, and who felt most comfortable performing? How did you each initially approach this?"

Extensions & Variations

- Reflect with questions like:
    - If your PSA were successful in the 'real world,' who would be affected positively? How?
    - Consider one of the other groups' PSAs – how did watching the PSA differ from simply listening to someone telling you about the pet peeve?
- After practicing with pet peeves (which are low-stakes and often humorous), consider revisiting this activity with a genuine civic challenge of interest to your students (which can be heavy).
- Have students rate PSAs by how entertaining they find them and how likely they think the PSA would be in inspiring change. Discuss whether and how the two ratings are related.
- Revisit the PSAs created during this challenge and do a 'second draft' with music, lighting, additional images, etc. Reflect on how these elements affect the effectiveness of the PSA.
- Re-do the challenge, only this time instead of coming up with the best idea for change, ask groups to create a PSA around the *worst* way to approach the problem.
- Consider the relationship and the distinction between persuasion, awareness, and changes in behavior. For instance, ask students what's something they (or "people") know and care about, but have trouble acting differently in response to. Consider together reasons why someone might have information but not act on it. Brainstorm manageable ways to address those barriers to action. Challenge students to make one commitment based on your lists.

How does this tool Cultivate Creative & Civic Capacities (C4)?

C4 Influence refers to translating ideas developed through Investigation and Imagination into a concrete product or action intended to impact others. Persuasion is one method of Influence that students will be familiar with, and which also invites play and creativity. Applying this process to students' pet peeves also opens up conversation about the (sometimes conflicting) wants and needs of members of a community, which is an important aspect of civic life.

Civic Remix

A creativity challenge for fresh approaches to problems

Begin with a civic problem and an invention not clearly related to that problem.

What do we think we know? Jot down individually and then share:

What do we think we know about this challenge? What are some manifestations of the challenge? Some potential causes? Some complexities? Who is impacted?

What do we think we know about this invention? What are some parts and characteristics of the invention? How does it work? Who uses it and what do they get out of it?

What might we imagine together? Brainstorm in a group:
How might we apply this invention to some aspect of this challenge?

While you work, keep in mind:

- Practice "Yes, and..." Don't dismiss any idea (yours or other people's) but instead see how you might build upon it.
- Don't be afraid to get fantastical with your ideas: Innovation often comes about as a result of play and silliness. Sometimes "useful" is hiding right below "absurd."
- Your goal is not to solve a complex problem, but to think in different ways about how to address some aspect of one.

Let's give it a try! Select one of the ideas generated by the group and:

Create a prototype, schematic drawing, or written description of how you would apply the invention to the problem. What do you notice about the civic challenge that you hadn't noticed or considered before?

Tips for Use

Before starting, select one or some civic problems and one or some inventions that have no direct connection to the problems. You may wish to choose the issue and invention in advance for each group, let groups choose from a bank, or draw one randomly from a hat.

> *Hint: Search the web for lists of civic issues, select ones you know your students are interested in, or brainstorm and visually capture as a group using prompts such as "what are some problems in our school (ex: bullying)? Our neighborhood (ex: homelessness)? The world (ex: climate change)?" and "What are some inventions that you use often (ex: backpacks)? That you think made a big impact (ex: camera)? That you think are interesting (ex: yoyo)?"*

Use your judgement in forming groups for the activity and in balancing what is done independently and what is done collaboratively (and how). It is useful for students to hear the features of the problem and invention that other students identify, as this presents additional avenues for their thinking while also demonstrating the variety of associations each student brings to the table. It is also helpful for students to brainstorm together, as they can build and riff on each other's ideas.

The prototyping step take as little as 3-5 minutes or be expanded as homework or a follow-up activity. Some media/formats you might choose from include a 3D mock-up made of recyclables, a blueprint or schematic, an advertisement or sales pitch, or a stick-figure comic of the idea in action.

Extensions & Variations

- This activity can be a quick warm up OR extended over multiple class periods to allow for deeper thinking. Teachers may even try both—moving through all the steps quickly, then asking students to do the same steps again over the course of several days or class periods. Invite students to reflect on the differences they notice in each approach.
- After doing this activity once, have groups switch either their issue *or* invention (not both) and repeat the activity. Reflect on how the same invention can be used in different ways to address different issues and vice versa.
- Get creative about how students share their ideas; try a "Shark Tank"-style pitch or a "Museum of Innovation" display.
- Reflect with prompts like,
  - Who do I imagine using this? Benefitting from it? Who is left out? Is anyone harmed?
  - How does this idea contribute to a more fair, sustainable and beautiful world? Does it support one of these but not another? Is there a way I could tweak the idea to do more toward one of these goals?
- What pieces of this could you take and do right now, right where you are?
- If you could fund one idea other than your own, which would you choose and why?

How does this tool Cultivate Creative & Civic Capacities (C4)?

C4 Influence refers to translating an idea into meaningful action toward more fairness, beauty, and sustainability. This activity helps students build comfort and skill in divergent, playful thinking about civic opportunities and supports them to develop and prototype original ideas.