

How to do a History Mystery

Introduction

History Mystery is designed to challenge children to use their skills of deduction and critical thinking to identify the multiple artifacts included in this activity. All objects are from the State Historical Museum of Iowa's collection, providing children with a unique opportunity to tour museum artifacts from their own classrooms.

By participating in History Mystery, Goldie detectives will:

- Use problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Analyze clues to deduce the name and use of objects
- Explore and use background information provided for each object to determine historical significance
- Make real-world connections between the use of the objects and Iowa History

What's Included

This History Mystery Activity Features

- Photographs of Objects
- Videos of Select Objects
- Background Information for Each Object
- History Mystery Worksheet
- Guided Questions and Object Instructions for Adults

Objects

Each object has photos specifically taken for children to analyze. Most objects include multiple photos at different angles, close-ups, etc. to provide different perspectives to help in their detective work. Objects photos and videos are available to view on the [Goldie's At Home webpage](#).

Object Instructions for Adults & History Mystery Worksheet

Each individual object has an instructions page that provides background information about the object, its historical significance and questions to encourage children as they attempt this activity. This worksheet and questions help children identify the object and its significance in history. The worksheet can also be applied to any activity similar to History Mystery, such as having children use family artifacts around the home.

History Mystery Set Up

1. History Mystery can be done in small groups or independently. Either print or display the object photos and videos for children to use. Print off the worksheet to guide them in their detective work.
2. To provide more context about the objects before starting, it is encouraged to read aloud the background essay. Sometimes, it can be extra fun to cover each object photo before revealing it to the child to explore.
3. History Mystery detectives will go from object to object, filling out their worksheet and discovering what the object is and how it would be used. Spend about five minutes on each object.
4. If IDing the artifact is difficult, use the adult instructions for the object to help guide the child to answers.
5. After working through all of the objects, go through the answers with your detective(s). Use the object instructions to help them understand the historical significance of the artifact.

Background Information about Buxton, Iowa

Utilize this background essay to provide further context and understanding of the community of Buxton.

Most early Iowa settlers lived on farms. Some, however, were merchants, lawyers, doctors, newspaper publishers, ministers or craftsmen who lived in the new towns springing up across the prairie. Not all the towns survived. Some never attracted many people and others lost population when conditions changed. The result was Iowa "ghost towns" that exist across the state.

Most early towns came into existence to serve the surrounding farm population. When a trip to town could take several hours, farmers wanted services and supplies close at hand, and towns sprang up every five to six miles apart. The coming of the railroads in the 1870s and 1880s both helped and hindered Iowa. Towns along the rail lines became trading centers where merchants could receive goods from the East and farmers could sell their cattle and hogs for shipment to eastern cities. Towns that had no railroad connection lost customers and usually became ghost towns. Sometimes the railroads even created towns due to the fact that steam engines needed coal and water. This impacted western Iowa especially as rail lines arrived before major waves of population.

Some towns were created with a special purpose. This is especially true of those based upon coal mining, a big industry in Iowa in the late 19th and early 20th C. The railroads again were a big factor because trains were the major buyers for Iowa coal. Many small coal mines sprang up southeastern and central Iowa. Miners and their families occupied cheap housing near-by, and the rail company sometimes operated general stores and other services for their workers. When the coal ran out in the mine, the mine closed and the miners moved away, creating another Iowa ghost town. Sometimes the houses and other buildings were loaded onto trains and moved to a nearby location where a new mine was opening up.

The town of Buxton in southeastern Iowa was unique in that a majority of its residents were African-American. The Consolidation Coal Company worked for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. Having a hard time recruiting white miners, Consolidation Coal sent agents to southern states to hire black workers. In 1873, it founded the town of Buxton and opened nearby mines. It grew quickly and, according to one source, became the largest coal town west of the Mississippi. In the 1905 census, the town boasted 2,700 blacks and 1,991 whites. The town supported black doctors, lawyers and other professionals, and an African-American YMCA with a gymnasium, an indoor swimming pool and many programs for Buxton residents. The town was proud of its baseball team, the Buxton Wonders. White residents included immigrants from Sweden and elsewhere, and they existed peacefully with the African-Americans throughout the community's history.

Buxton coal production peaked during WWI but afterward, mechanization and conversion of train engines to diesel fuel decreased the demand for coal. Several severe fires ravaged the community and the mines. By 1919, Buxton's population had declined to only 400. The last mine closed in 1927. Residents moved away but fondly remembered their Buxton days. Many blacks moved to Des Moines or Waterloo. Very little physical evidence of the town remains today.

There have been many articles and several books written about this unique African-American experience in rural Iowa. While it is only one of Iowa's many ghost towns, it is probably the most famous.

Medical Bag of Dr. Edward Carter



Description

The object is the medical bag of Dr. Edward Carter, who was an African-American doctor in Buxton. The bag contains compounds and pills stored in 28 glass vials. The dimensions of the bag are 6 inches by 3.75 inches by 11.5 inches. Carter was one of the primary physicians and a prominent resident of Buxton. Even after he left Buxton in 1919, he continued his medical practice in Detroit, Michigan.

Object Significance

After graduating from Oskaloosa High School, Edward Carter became the first African-American man to graduate with a medical degree from the University of Iowa. His medical bag is a symbol of the many barriers he surpassed in his pursuit of an education and as a practicing physician. After moving to Buxton, Carter was known to treat both white and African-American patients, which at the time, was very rare. He also played a direct role in the development of Buxton as a thriving community, such as his support for a YMCA and other community programs. Carter's influence, among others, kept Jim Crow laws from infiltrating Buxton and helped create a community that supported racial equality.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 In the early 1900s many doctors traveled to visit patients at their homes. Look at the postcard of Center Street in Buxton, describe the travel issues that Dr. Carter would have experienced. Why would a bag like this be an important tool for doctors?
- 3 What kind of illnesses and injuries would Dr. Carter have to treat in this unique mining community?
- 4 Dr. Carter was the first African American to graduate with a medical degree from the University of Iowa. He treated both African American and white patients in Buxton. Discuss this unique situation.
- 5 Dr. Carter would have disbursed some types of medication to patients. How is this different than getting a prescription today?

Wedding Shoes of Rose Carter



Description

These women's shoes belonged to Buxton resident Rose Carter (then-Warren), the wife of prominent African-American physician, Edward Carter. Rose Carter wore the shoes on her wedding day in June 1908 to the doctor. The shoes, along with Edward Carter's medical bag and other family possessions, were donated to the State Archives by their daughter, Marion Carter, in 1963.

Object Significance

The Carter family were prominent members of the Buxton community. Her husband, Edward Carter, became the first African-American man to graduate with a medical degree from the University of Iowa. They both played a direct role in the development of Buxton as a thriving community, such as supporting for YMCA committee focusing on education and opportunities for children in their community. Edward Carter, a physician in town, treated both white and African-American patients - which was very rare at the time. Carter's influence, among others, kept Jim Crow laws from infiltrating Buxton and helped create a community that supported racial equality.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 Where would Rose get shoes like this in 1908? What role would the mercantile play in Rose's day to day life?
- 3 Rose was married to a prominent (important) person in Buxton, Dr. Carter, how would this impact her role in town?
- 4 Based on the photo of Center Street, how practical are these shoes for a woman in day to day life? Think about your school day, would you like to wear these shoes? Why or why not?

Miner ID Tags from Buxton



Description

These objects are corroded miner ID tags from Buxton, Iowa. These tags were used to identify the miners as the loads of coal were brought up out of the mine, to identify miners on the job and to identify miners so they could receive their paycheck or credit. One tag is stamped with "K.I.C. Co., 157." This was found by a metal detector near the area Buxton used to exist in 2007. The other tag is thicker and has raised letters that read, "C. O. & G. 173." Three small notches are cut into the bottom of the tag.

Object Significance

These objects give children a sense of what mining life in Buxton would have been like for those who worked in the mines. The profession required ID tags just to identify and keep track of miners. The town, which was founded by the Consolidation Coal Company, became the largest coal town west of the Mississippi. In the 1905 census, the town boasted 2,700 African American and 1,991 whites. Buxton coal production peaked during World War I but afterward, mechanization and conversion of train engines to diesel fuel decreased the demand for coal. Several severe fires ravaged the community and the mines. By 1919, Buxton's population had declined to only 400. The last mine closed in 1927.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 Notice the houses in the photo, coal miners would live in these houses. Describe the living conditions for the miners based on the photo.
- 3 Mining is a dangerous profession. Each miner was assigned an ID tag which they left above ground when they started work for the day. Why would it be important to know if someone was down in the mine?
- 4 Each miner was assigned a number which was stamped onto the tag. Use your imagination and describe the person who would use the 173 or 157 tags.

Buxton Wonders Baseball Flyer



Description

The document is a promotional flyer recounting “The Good Old Days” of the Buxton Wonders, the town’s local baseball team. The Buxton Wonders team was organized around 1900 and their baseball success became the talk of the town. The flyer, which was created in 1949, reads that only six members of the original Wonders team could be found alive at the time, five of the names of the surviving members were Charles Rhodes, French Brown, George Bowman, Jackson Brookings and Skinny Wilson.

Object Significance

The Buxton Wonders highlight a social component of the once-thriving community of Buxton that gave residents a sense of pride and entertainment. Admission to the Buxton home games was \$0.50, and often the city band held concerts after the games. The integrated community found widespread support for this baseball team, and it was directly tied to a main business in town. The team was partially sponsored by the Consolidation Coal Company through the donation of land to play on, building bleachers and even paying for uniforms for this traveling team. This team traveled to such places as Chicago, Illinois, Kansas City, Missouri and Birmingham, Alabama, though they were not always well received in other towns because of racial discrimination.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 Why would recreational activities, like sports, be important to people in Buxton?
- 3 Why would the Consolidation Coal Company sponsor the Buxton Wonders?
- 4 The Buxton Wonders, a team of all African American men, played outside of Iowa where African Americans and white people didn’t often interact. Discuss how the players would have felt experiencing segregation.

Miner's Cap from Buxton



Description

This is a miner's cap and is made of cotton, oil cloth, metal and rubber. This cap was used sometime between 1900 and 1930. The tan, cotton canvas cap has a black oil cloth bill and a pink and white striped cotton lining. Attached to the front is a metal bracket with a brass carbide lamp. A miner's light was essential to their labor. But open flames could be lethal. The flame from a typical miner's lamp could ignite the inflammable gas, which was especially prevalent in coal mines. Miner caps protected the miner's eyes from smoke or soot and their head from small bumps, but their main purpose was as a mount for their lamps.

Object Significance

This object was significant to the day-to-day procedure and safety measures within the mines, as you would find in Buxton. This miner's cap allows children to think about what would be the purpose of an object like this in a coal town, or how an object like this can serve multiple purposes. The donor's family of this object actually also used the cap to hunt raccoons at night, so the gear was used outside the mines, too. Connections can also be made to the miner ID tags (pg. 44), and how both of these objects would be important to the running of the Buxton mines.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 Why would a miner need a hat with a light to work in a coal mine?
- 3 This is an item that could have been purchased in the mercantile. Why would the mercantile carry items such as this cap?
- 4 Imagine working in a coal mine, why would equipment such as this be important for miners safety?

Miner's Pick



Description

This is a mining pick head with no handle. It is made of metal and is 11.5 inches long. A mining pick was used by miners to chop out the coal and then this was shoveled into waiting carts. This was the traditional technique for extracting coal for many years.

Object Significance

This object is a great example of items used by miners to extract a natural resource from the land. While there are other objects in this kit that were used for safety purposes in the mines, this object allows children to explore the technique required by Buxton miners to do their jobs in the mine. The mining pick head is significant because it challenges children to identify how people use natural resources to produce goods and services, specifically in the Iowa town of Buxton.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 A pick is like an axe. Why would a handle be needed to make this pick work?
- 3 Working in a coal mine was dirty and physically demanding as each miner had to break apart and move the coal. Explain how you would feel at the end of a work day.
- 4 Boys as young as 12 would work inside coal mines. How does this impact their education?
- 5 Imagine working in a coal mine, why would equipment such as this be important for miners safety?

Lunch Pail from Miner Carl Coghlan in Marion County



Description

This object is a typical lunch pail that was used by miners to carry their food and drink. The aluminum bucket can be broken down to multiple insets and extra lids for the miner to eat off of and separate their items. This pail was used by miner Carl Coghlan, who worked in the Pershing Coal Mine in Marion County. Many miners had extra food packed away in their buckets just in case an accident happened while they were on the job and they became trapped in the mine.

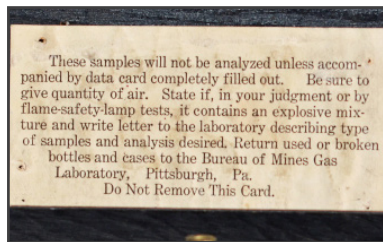
Object Significance

Coal mining became a big industry in Iowa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The railroads were a major factor because trains were the main buyers for Iowa coal. Many small coal mines sprang up in southeastern and central Iowa. Miners and their families occupied cheap housing nearby, and the rail company sometimes operated general stores and other services for their workers. This object holds significant relevance to this time in Iowa history when coal mining was booming. It was an everyday object used in an Iowa mine that was in the neighboring county to Buxton (Monroe County). This object gives children insight as to objects used by coal miners and draws some connections to items children also might use, such as a lunch box.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 Knowing that miners were underground for more than eight hours per day, what types of food might they have packed in lunch pails?
- 3 The lunch pail breaks down into smaller sections. Why would that be important?
- 4 Miners often packed more food than they needed in case the mine caved in. Why would miners do this?

Gas Analyzer (Air Test) Kit from Iowa



Description

When Iowa coal mines were active, miners were able to test underground air quality with mail-order test kits like this. The card of top of the box reads, "Gas Laboratory, U.S. Bureau of Mines, Experiment Station, Pittsburgh 13, PA." Inside the shipping box are two glass bottles. To test the air, a person would break off the tip of a bottle, fill with air from the mine and place a wax cap (also in the kit) on the end to keep the air from escaping. They would then mark the bottle accordingly, put it back in the kit and mail it to be tested. There is also another card inside the case that reads, "These samples will not be analyzed unless accompanied by data card completely filled out. Be sure to give quantity of air. State if, in your judgment or by flame-safety-lamp tests, it contains an explosive mixture and write letter to the laboratory describing type of samples and analysis desired. Return used or broken bottles and cases to the Bureau of Mines Gas Laboratory, Pittsburgh, Pa. Do Not Remove This Card."

Object Significance

Like the miner ID tags and the miner cap, this gas analyzer was an important piece of safety equipment to assist coal miners in Iowa and around the country. Without it, miners in Buxton would be under threat from noxious gas and possible explosions. This object was important to mining life, and highlights for children the risks associated with this profession.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice? What meaning might those items have with regard to this object?
- 2 Sometimes mines would fill with carbon dioxide and miners would get sick. Why would mining companies use a product like the gas analyzers?
- 3 In order for the air in the mine to be tested, this gas analyzer kit had to be mailed, which would take a few weeks. If testing determined that the air was dangerous, what would that mean for the men working in the mine (think about health, salary and production)?
- 4 Imagine working in a coal mine, why would equipment such as this be important for miners safety?

History Mystery - Analyze an Object



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| 1 | 1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color. | 4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used. |
| | 2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined? | 5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year? |
| | 3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year? | 6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner. |
| 2 | 1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color. | 4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used. |
| | 2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined? | 5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year? |
| | 3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year? | 6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner. |

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| 3 | <p>1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.</p> | <p>4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.</p> |
| | <p>2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined?</p> | <p>5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year?</p> |
| | <p>3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year?</p> | <p>6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner.</p> |
| 4 | <p>1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.</p> | <p>4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.</p> |
| | <p>2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined?</p> | <p>5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year?</p> |
| | <p>3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year?</p> | <p>6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner.</p> |
| 5 | <p>1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.</p> | <p>4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.</p> |
| | <p>2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined?</p> | <p>5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year?</p> |
| | <p>3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year?</p> | <p>6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner.</p> |