

Historian tip # 7: Historians examine artifacts as clues to understanding ancient beliefs.

Today's investigation: **Oracle Bones**

Outcome of the investigation: Our historians will be able to

1. develop a hypothesis about the ways in which oracle bones may have been used.
2. provide evidence to support their hypotheses.
3. debate these hypotheses within a community of "historians."
4. conduct further research to confirm or reject their hypotheses.

Vocabulary: oracle bones
divination
ancestor worship

Materials: handmade oracle bones (should have cracks from the "fire" and Chinese writing; the bones can be actual bones obtained from a butcher, or made from paper)
reading on oracle bones

Activity: Students will enter the classroom to find oracle bones deposited in various locations. They may investigate these bones in pairs or in small groups, according to their choice. While looking at the artifacts, students will confer with partners or groups to develop a hypothesis about what these bones were used for. The hypothesis/es will be jotted down in their historian's notebook, along with the reasons they believe support the idea.

Mini lesson: Well we certainly have a mystery on our hands today. One thing that good historians do is try to grow ideas by speaking with other historians, so let's try to do that today. Who has something to say about these bones? (Allow a debate to ensue for about 4-5 minutes. Students should have REASONS to support any beliefs that they state). Well now that we've grown some important ideas together, let's try to confirm or reject our hypotheses. Good historians will always look for information that other historians might have written on the topic they are interested in. On your desk is an article that another historian has written. I want you to sort through the information in the article and see if you can find out more about how these bones were used. Be ready to confirm or reject your hypothesis. Let's gather back here in about five minutes.

Group share: Discuss findings on oracle bones, including how bones from animals were placed over a fire, and fortunes were read according to how the bone cracked. These fortunes were then often inscribed on the bones themselves.

Connecting past to present: In their Historian's notebooks, students should

attempt to collect information about all the different types of fortune telling that is done today (pal-reading, tarot cards, crystal balls, psychics...) They should interview people who have had their fortune read, asking primarily WHY they decided to do so.