



# Peabody Museum

of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University

## Collections Exercise – Sketching and Storytelling

*This exercise encourages students to slow down, to spend more time observing an item, and so to give it more focused attention. It aims to help students notice elements they may otherwise overlook, to move beyond surface appearances, and to reflect on themselves as observers.*

*The impact of this exercise does not depend on the quality of students' drawings, nor their accuracy.*

### Observation

Take a few moments to observe the item you are considering. Let your eye lead you, taking in whatever catches your attention.

### Drawing

When your attention begins to diminish, draw an outline of the item overall. You may also want to distinguish in your sketch the space around the item (i.e. the “negative space”).

Within your outline, sketch in the feature or part of the item that strikes you as the most essential, that you would not want to forget. Think about what captures your attention: color, shape, texture, medium, etc. Don't worry about the accuracy of your representation; draw it in whatever way suits you best.

Label this #1.

Next, sketch what you consider the 2<sup>nd</sup> most significant feature. Label this #2.

Repeat however many rounds you have time for, or as directed by your instructor.

### Reflection

Once you are done drawing, notice where the features you have sketched are located on the item, and where they are placed relative to each other.

- How do you “see” the item when focusing on the features?
- Are the spaces between the features that you have highlighted important?
- Does your sketch seem to suggest a narrative? Are there any “themes” to the features you've drawn?
- Do the features help you in understanding the item as a whole? How/why?

### Class discussion

*Share what information you have on the item from the Museum catalogue, along with any other further information you may have to share. This information does not need to be extensive. You may choose here to tie the item, and/or this exercise, to the themes of the class or a recent class lecture. You may also choose this as an opportunity for further student reflection by drawing student narratives into conversation with the information you have just provided and seeing how they compare, what new insights emerge, or new inquiries.*

### Suggested discussion questions

- *What attracted students to the elements they drew? Were they physical? Emotive? Could they be captured as effectively verbally? In writing?*
- *How do students' sketches and narratives compare to one another? Is there much overlap in chosen features? Narrative themes? Are the commonalities or variations striking; to be expected; easily explained; other?*
- *Do students' individual narratives speak to one another? What sort of relationships exist between them? Do they reflect similar perspectives?*
- *What emerges if you combine everyone's narratives? Allowing for modification or omission of individual details? Without modification or omission?*