

Tips for Using Props

Why use props?

Touching the materials used to make the object, seeing the technique used to create it, or looking at a photograph in which it is used in context enhances understanding of the object. The use of props helps engage visitors who prefer hands-on experiences and reinforces learning. (Tips for using an iPad or tablet are on a separate handout.)

What are challenges in using props?

Props will do little but distract your group without careful planning. Consider the following points to prevent group management challenges from undermining the benefits of props:

- 1. Decide what information about the object the prop best illustrates.**
Present the prop in conjunction with information about the object or to help answer a question about the object.
- 2. Provide structure for the group's interactions with the prop.**
There are a number of ways to use a prop. Among the variations:
 - For a material prop, pass the prop around the group, allowing students to touch it. If you do this, give the group a question to consider while they are waiting their turn to hold the prop and one to consider after they have held the prop. (“How do you think it is going to feel?” “How did the feel of it surprise you?”) Encourage the group to be ready for discussion when the prop finishes circulating.
 - Ask a single visitor to come forward and describe how it feels to the whole group.
 - Hold the prop yourself and walk it around for the group to touch or look at closely.
 - Ask one of your chaperones to display the prop to the group while you facilitate the discussion.
 - Hold the prop to illustrate relevant parts of the discussion. Then give everyone a chance to examine it more closely at the end of your presentation or tour.
- 3. Clearly communicate your expectations to keep students focused on the activity.**
Consider these questions: Will they all get to touch the prop? How should they take turns? What should they do when it's not their turn? How should they treat the prop? At the end of discussion, don't forget to ask for the props back!
- 4. Link the experience with the prop to the rest of the discussion.**
After the group has explored the prop in some fashion, refer to the experience as you continue the discussion.

Where can I find props?

IPE staff maintains a series of “prop bins” in the Tour Office under the left bookshelves. Photo props for each of the AAG sets are located in the top file drawer under the left bookshelves. Props may be borrowed (on your honor) for tours. **Props cannot leave the museum.** We recommend that guides do not bring in props from home.