

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

CLEANING A COLLECTION



Recommended for

KSI and KS2 (History, Science)

Learning objectives

- Understand why cleaning is so important in looking after English Heritage's collections and buildings
- Know some of the methods used to clean our collections and have a go at using these to clean some objects

Time to complete

Approx. 40 minutes



A curator cleaning the face pot that is now on display in the museum at Corbridge Roman Town. Notice the soft brushes she uses to gently clean away any dirt.

SUMMARY

Our collections need to be carefully cared for. Objects need to be monitored for decay or damage and cleaned very gently to maintain them. Even dust can cause damage. Conservators often use low suction vacuum cleaners to get rid of dust and wear gloves to prevent any oils from their skin going on the objects. But in this activity students use more readily available tools of the trade to try their hand at collections conservation. You can find out more about dust by searching for 'Keep it Clean' on the Science and Industry Museum blog.

YOU WILL NEED

Provide each student with an appropriate object, which you could make dirty beforehand or simply leave out to get dusty. Print off the instructions on page 102 and photocopy enough for your group. To clean their objects students will also need soft brushes, cotton swabs, warm water and microfibre cloths. You could also give them magnifying glasses so that they can examine their objects closely.

MAIN ACTIVITY

Conservators carry out condition reports, so in the first part of the activity students examine their objects for dirt or damage. Then they use the information on page 103 to identify the best cleaning technique for their object. After cleaning it they will need to re-examine their object for any new damage and put their object away. Encourage students to be methodical and careful at every stage and to record each stage of the process, just like conservators do.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Explore more about materials. Search stem.org.uk for 'Properties and Changes of Materials'. Use the 'Assessment Material Properties' resource as a starting point. Get students to think about why conservators need to understand materials' properties and how this might affect storage conditions for the objects in their care.



CLEANING A COLLECTION

DISCOVER THE TECHNIQUES CONSERVATORS USE TO LOOK AFTER COLLECTIONS

See if you can care for an object just like a conservator. Complete all the activities in the boxes below.

1 EXAMINE FOR DIRT AND DAMAGE

Examine your object carefully. **Draw** your object in the box below, showing any dirt or damage you can see.

2 IDENTIFY MATERIALS

Write down which materials your object is made from.

3 CLEANING TECHNIQUE

Write down which cleaning technique from page 103 you will use for your object and why.

Because -----

4 CLEAN UP

Gently **clean** your object. **Draw** a diagram to show how you did this.

5 RE-EXAMINE

Re-examine your object to check for damage. **Describe** how your object looks and feels now.

6 TIDY UP

Identify where your object needs to be put away.

Ensure you have a clear path. Carefully **carry** your object in two hands.

Don't forget to **tidy** up your tools too.



The organic matter in dust, such as skin and hair, can attract pests. They eat the organic matter, and may also start nibbling on objects. Dust can also contain pollen, pollutants or sea salt. Plus, if objects get damp, it can encourage rust or mould. This is why it is so important to keep everything clean. Use the information below to decide on the best cleaning technique for your object.

GLASS

Use a cloth or soft brush. If it is undamaged and very dirty use plain warm water.



Cleaning stained glass at 1066 Battle of Hastings Abbey and Battlefield.

CERAMICS

Use a cloth or soft brush. If it is undamaged and very dirty use plain warm water.



A curator cleaning the face pot that is now on display in the museum at Corbridge Roman Town. Notice the soft brushes she uses to gently clean away any dirt.

METAL

Use a dry cloth to gently wipe. Be careful of any rust or unstable areas.



Visitors getting hands-on with the cleaning at Osborne House.

BOOKS

Use a soft brush. Be careful of leather bindings to avoid scratches.



Handling one of Charles Darwin's notebooks at Down House, the home of Charles Darwin.

WOOD

Use a soft cloth or brush to gently dust the surface. Be careful of any damage.



A student conservator uses a soft brush and vacuum to dust a piece of furniture at Marble Hill.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND PAINTINGS

Only use a very soft brush and press very lightly on photographs. Paintings must also be cleaned very gently.



A senior collections conservator cleans a painting using a special kind of cotton swab and magnifying glasses to get a closer look.