

Making Your Own Time Capsule: Developing Your Message to the Future

Concept:

Since different collections of objects have different meanings, making a time capsule encourages personal reflection about the world in which one lives and its relationship to those that have preceded and will follow.

Let's Review . . .

What is a Time Capsule?

Strictly speaking, a time capsule is a collection of objects set aside on purpose in the present to be discovered at a specific time in the future.

Although there is no absolute definition of a "time capsule," two traits stand out:

- 1) Time capsules usually contain objects.
- 2) They are assembled on purpose by people who have something they want to say to the future.

Time capsules are especially interesting to historians because they show the points of view of the people who decide what to include and exclude in them. The capsules suggest people's priorities, values, and fears.

Activity # 1: Time Capsule Brainstorming

Procedure:

1. Have each student individually write down responses to the following questions:
 - What do you like most about America? Wisconsin? Your town? Your school? The year 2007?
 - What do you like least?
 - What do you think will change the most in your lifetime? In your children's lifetimes?
 - When people look back, what do you guess they will think it special about America? Wisconsin? Your town? Your school? 2007 as opposed to other years?

After the students answer the questions, have them write down the name of an object next to each answer that they think will get their idea across without words.

2. Give students copies of the "What do I want my time capsule to be about?" worksheet.
 - Have them read through the information and fill in the bottom section.
 - As a class, go over the "What objects will best get my ideas across?" information sheet. You may want to brainstorm about objects that are suitable and objects that might not be. (See Appendix A)

- Have each student brainstorm possible objects for their themes using the form on the second page.

What do I want my time capsule to be about?

Time capsules can be about anything that captures your imagination. They are simply collections of objects that people set aside for the future. In fact you may already have a variety of time capsules in your home. Did your parents put together a baby book or save some of your toys and clothes from when you were little? Do they or you have scrapbooks of special pictures, letters, report cards and the like? As Steven Caney says in the book *Kids America*, "All of these things can now give you a glimpse of what you were like sometime in the past and how much you have changed since then. If you enjoy remembering and rediscovering your own special history, you might want to make your own time capsule about your life right now . . . You may want to pick a special day – maybe a holiday or your birthday – on which to make your time capsule."

Usually time capsules have a theme or topic. The objects in them describe a particular event, place, or time. Think about what theme you want to document for the future. Anything goes! Below you'll find some ideas. There is also a space for you to start listing themes you might want to use for your time capsule.

As you decide your time capsule theme, you should also decide how long you want it buried or hidden away and who you want to open it. Is your time capsule only for you to look at in 1 or 5 years, or is it for someone who might live in your house 50 years from now? Making these decisions may help you choose your theme and the objects you want to include.

Suggested time capsule themes:

- Your class
- Your state
- Favorite holidays
- Your school
- The United States
- Birth of a new brother or sister
- School graduation
- Best friends
- Scouts and clubs
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Anniversary
- Election
- Hobby collection
- Your city or town
- The world
- Birthday
- Trips and travel
- Moving
- Sports championship
- Summer vacation
- Summer camp
- Family
- Confirmation
- Reunion
- Commemoration of an event

(Suggestions courtesy of Steven Caney, *Make Your Own Time Capsule*)

Themes I might like to make a time capsule about:

My time capsule will be opened in _____ years by _____.

What objects will best get my ideas across?

Once you decide the theme for your time capsule you have to decide what objects will best carry that message to people who open it in the future. This sheet helps you brainstorm about what things to include and gives you some examples. It also offers some ideas about what kinds of items are good to include, what kinds of objects to avoid, and how to prepare the objects to put into the time capsule.

In the *My Backyard History Book* by David Weitzman, the author suggests putting together a birthday time capsule. “Make a time capsule and put lots of things in it, some important, some unimportant, which together make a record of the year.” Some items he suggests that might be included are:

- Snapshots of family, friends, and pets taken during the year
- School pictures of you
- A video of you and your friends together, talking and kidding around
- A weekly menu from the school cafeteria
- All the stuff that’s in your pockets right now
- Ticket stubs from rock concerts, plays, or other event you’ve attended during the year
- A *TV Guide*
- Movie listings from the newspaper
- Some mail, including junk mail
- A road map showing the route of a trip you took recently, traced with a highlighter
- Labels from boxes, bottles, and cans of your favorite foods
- Birthday, get well, and holiday cards from the past year
- Your favorite magazines and comics (or parts of them)
- New recipes discovered during the year
- Letters to people of the future

Local students decided to include the following items in their time capsule about America in 1995:

- Pair of Nike Air athletic shoes
- *TV Guide*
- Spork (plastic spoon/fork combo)
- Hershey’s candy bar wrapper
- Mountain Dew bottle (empty)
- Words and music to “The Star Spangled Banner”
- Bottle of contact lens solution (empty)
- Dictionary
- Miniature American flag
- Baseball cards
- Toys R Us catalog

Before you start making your list of items to include, let’s review some guidelines about what materials store well over time and what don’t. Remember, you might have to make some compromises.

Size: Remember to consider how much space you will have available to store objects in your time capsule. For example, to save space, you might include a computer disc instead of a whole

