

50 Ways to look at a Big Mac box

From: Durbin, G., Morris, S & Wilkinson, S. (1990) *A Teachers Guide to Learning from Objects*, English Heritage, pp 24-25.

The following activity was developed when McDonalds used polystyrene boxes to serve their hamburgers. Today they use greaseproof paper. To study a BigMac box today you would have to visit a museum to see one!

The 50 ways to look can be applied to any object you are studying -simply substitute your object for the Big Mac box; in some questions you will have to be creative to adapt them to your object.

1. Smell it.
2. Taste it.
3. Feel it all over.
4. Does it make a noise?
5. What are its measurements? Height? Weight, diameter?
6. Describe its shape, colour and any decoration.
7. Can you write a description of it that would give a clear picture to someone who has never seen a Big Mac box? (A sketch would help)
8. Why is it the size it is?
9. Are all McDonald's boxes the same size?
10. Have the sized of McDonald's boxes changed over the years; why have they discontinued their use?
11. How much has the box's shape been determined; by the material used the methods of construction and the box's function?
12. Why isn't the box plain white (or black or purple)?
13. What is the function of the decoration?
14. What does the lettering tell you?
15. Why are symbols, logos and trademarks so important in our society?
16. How much is the name 'Big Mac' a reflection of the fashions of our time?
17. What does the circled R (®) signify?
18. What material was used to make the box?
19. What raw material was used to produce this material?
20. Is this a renewable resources?
21. What does this say about attitudes towards conservation in our society?
22. Why was this particular material chosen?
23. What are its advantages, its disadvantages?
24. How might the box have been different if a different material had been used, for example, wood, or ceramics, or metal, or paper?
25. What can you learn form looking at the box and the lettering about how the box was made?
26. At what stage of manufacture do you think the lettering was applied?
27. Have you ever seen anything like this being made? What does that suggest to you about our society?
28. Is the box well designed?
29. Does it work well for the purpose for which it was designed?
30. How might the design be improved?
31. If someone twenty, fifty or one hundred years ago had set about designing a container for a hamburger, how might they have done it differently?
32. Did people eat hamburgers then?
33. What might the hamburger container of the future be like?
34. What does the number on the inside bottom of the box signify?
35. Is this a clue as to what the box was made?
36. Where was the box made?
37. What did these boxes replace?
38. Why not just serve a hamburger on a plate?
39. What does a Big Mac box tell us about the people who use it, the people who pass it out and our society in general?
40. Show the Big Mac box to as many people as you can within a ten-minute period. How many people failed to recognise the box? What does this tell you?
41. Would you get this response in Beijing, Moscow Auckland, Perth or Alice Springs? What does this tell you?
42. Where is the headquarters of McDonald's? What does this tell you?
43. Do you deserve a break today?
44. How many of these boxes are used across Australia every day?
45. For how long is each box actually used?
46. What is done with them after they have been used?
47. Why do you find Big Mac boxes on pavements, in parks and on beaches?
48. Is there anything that could be done to recycle these boxes?
49. Is there anything that could replace them?
50. What do you think is the single most significant thing about a Big Mac box? Why?