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# Thinking through things

Object based learning as an  
interdisciplinary framework for learning  
and  
teaching

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# Outline

- The material turn in the humanities and social sciences
- Object based learning and teaching
- Case Study 1: Humans and Objects
- Case Study 2: Childhood Objects
- Concluding Reflections



# The material turn in the humanities and social sciences

Things are back. After the turn to discourse and signs in the late twentieth century, there is a new fascination with the material stuff of life.

F. Trentmann, 'Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices and Politics', *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009), pp. 283-284.

For archaeology objects have, of course, always been central to its endeavours, but [...] interest has concentrated on function, dating and, to a lesser extent, style. [...] Over the last two decades this situation has changed and material culture has come to take the burden of much broader forms of social analysis. People have realized that objects do not just provide a stage setting to human action; they are integral to it.

C. Gosden & Y. Marshall, 'The Cultural Biography of Objects', *World Archaeology* 31 (1999), p. 169.



# Evocative Objects

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or a provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.

S. Turkle, 'Introduction: the Things That Matter', in *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* ed. S. Turkle (Boston: MIT Press, 2007), p. 5.



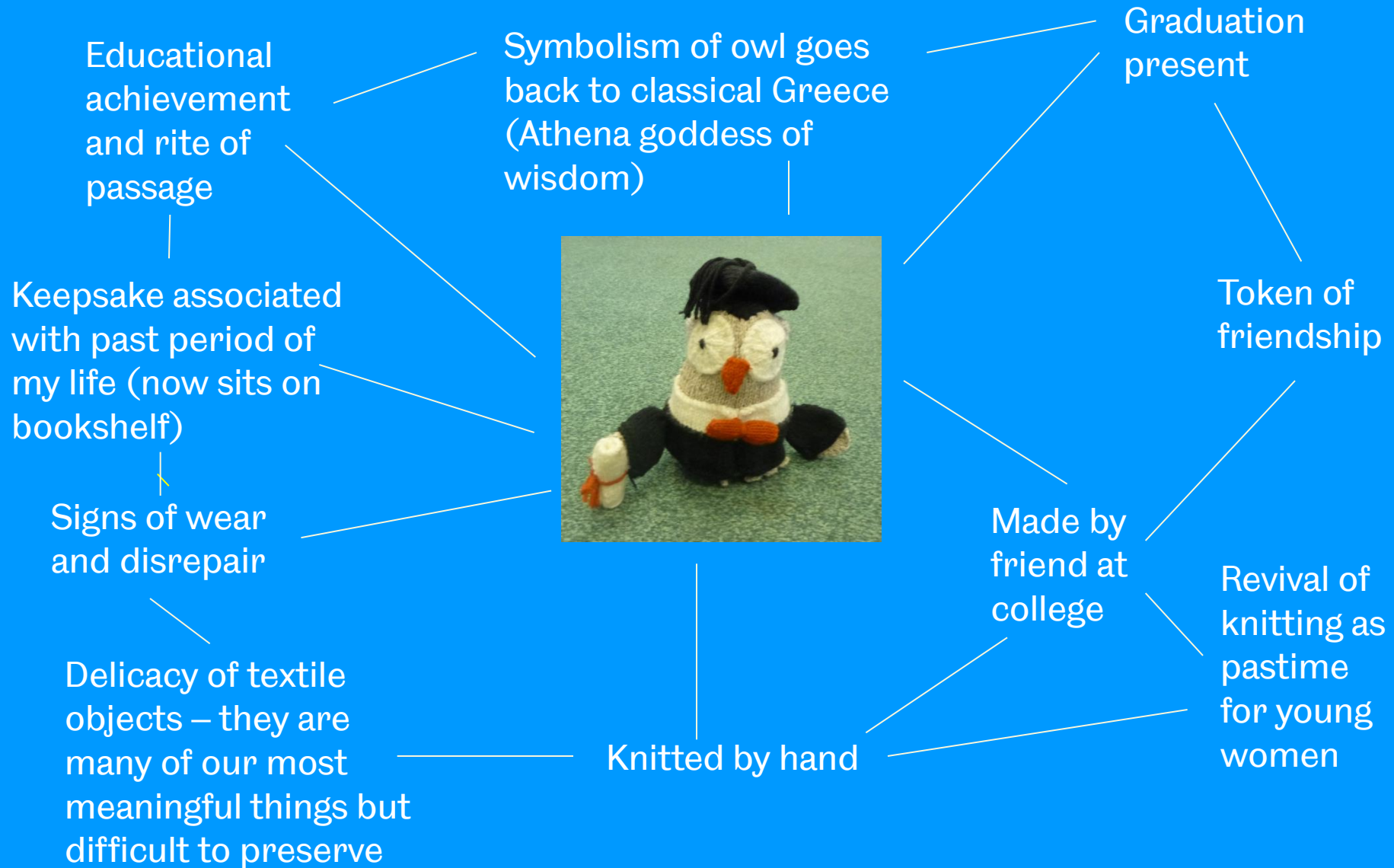
# Object based learning and teaching

[O]bjects, although concrete, actually represent a vast continuum of abstract ideas and inter-related realities.

S.G. Paris, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Object-Centred Learning in Museums* ed. S. G. Paris (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. x.

[O]bject-handling has a long-lasting effect and relationship with memory, more so than text based handling often has.

D. Romanek & B. Lynch, 'Touch and the Value of Object Handling: Final Conclusions for a New Sensory Museology', in *In Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling* ed. H.J. Chatterjee (Oxford & New York, Berg, 2008), p. 284.







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# Humans and objects

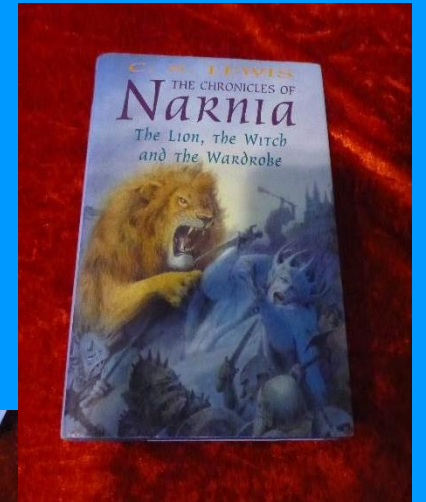






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# Childhood objects







# Concluding reflections

- Object based learning facilitates an interdisciplinary approach to learning and teaching because material culture studies uses tools and methods drawn from different disciplines.
- Object based learning allows students to extend their learning beyond the classroom because it connects intellectual inquiry to lived, felt experience.
- Object based learning promotes diversity in the classroom by creating opportunities for students to develop new and different learning styles.