SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
Activity: Approaching the Book as an Artifact

DESCRIBE

SUBSTANCE. What is it made of, inside and out?
CONTENT. Can you read the text? Are there illustrations? What do they represent? Are there any markings that intrigue you?
FORM. What does it look like? Are there signs of use? How is it put together? How are the pages laid out? What types of fonts are used?

INTERPRET

SENSE. How big is it? Is it heavy or light? What does it feel like? Record any other information your senses give you.
THINK. Think about what you already know about this topic or period. How does this book relate to your prior knowledge? Who would have used or produced it, where, and how?
FEEL. What would it be like to read this? What would it be like to create it? Does this book trigger any sort of subjective response in you? What are your own biases?

QUESTION

SUM UP. Think about your inferences and observations. What do they mean? What does this book tell you about the period or topic you are studying?
Formulate a research question. What does this book NOT tell you? What questions does it raise? What do you want to know more about? Why?

RESEARCH

Your method of research will depend on your particular discipline, but the first few steps are often the same:

Break your research question down into smaller ones. What bits of information do you need to piece together?
Identify potential sources. What sources would be likely to have this information? Do you need other primary sources? Secondary sources such as books or articles? Where will you look?

From: Kelli Hansen's Approaching the Book as an Artifact in Using Primary Sources - Hands-On Instructional Exercises by Anne Bahde, Heather Smedberg, and Mattie Taormina (Editors), 2014