

Materials Needed:

- Internet access for research
- Notebook or paper
- Pen or pencil
- Optional: Colored pencils or markers for drawing

Introduction: More Than Just a Place to Sit!

Have you ever thought about the chair you're sitting in? Or chairs you see in movies, museums, or old photographs? Chairs are everywhere, but they're far more than just functional objects. They are silent witnesses to history, reflecting the societies that created them. From the grand thrones of kings to the simple stools of workers, chairs tell us stories about power, status, technology, artistry, and everyday life across different times and cultures. Today, we're going on a historical journey, using chairs as our guide!

Activity 1: A Timeline of Sitting

Let's explore how chairs have changed throughout history. Research the following chair types or periods. For each one, note the typical materials used, who might have used it, its general design features, and what it tells us about the society of that time.

1. **Ancient Egypt:** Stools and ceremonial chairs (Think Tutankhamun's throne)
2. **Ancient Greece:** The Klismos chair
3. **Ancient Rome:** The Curule seat (Sella Curulis)
4. **Medieval Europe:** Thrones and basic wooden stools/benches
5. **Renaissance Italy:** The Sgabello and Savonarola chairs
6. **Baroque Period (17th Century France):** Lavishly decorated armchairs (Think Louis XIV)
7. **Rococo Period (18th Century France):** Lighter, more ornate chairs (Fauteuil)
8. **Neoclassical Period (Late 18th/Early 19th Century):** Chairs inspired by Greek/Roman designs
9. **19th Century Industrial Revolution:** Mass-produced chairs, Bentwood chairs (Thonet)
10. **Early 20th Century Modernism:** Bauhaus, De Stijl chairs (Function over form?)
11. **Mid-20th Century Modernism:** Eames Lounge Chair, Wegner's Wishbone Chair

Discussion Point: What major changes do you notice in materials, construction, and style over time? How do these changes relate to historical events (e.g., new technologies, changing social structures, trade routes)?

Activity 2: Chair Case Study - The Story of One Seat

Choose ONE specific, iconic chair from history (examples: the Windsor chair, the Shaker rocking chair, the Thonet Model 14, the Wassily Chair, the Eames Lounge Chair, the Egg Chair, or even a type like 'the office chair'). Conduct in-depth research focusing on:

- **Designer (if known) & Origin:** Who designed it (if applicable)? When and where was it first made?
- **Historical Context:** What was happening in the world/society when this chair was created?
- **Materials & Technology:** What is it made of? What manufacturing techniques were used? Were

these new or traditional?

- **Purpose & User:** Who was it designed for? What was its intended use?
- **Symbolism & Status:** Did this chair convey a particular message or status?
- **Legacy & Impact:** How did this chair influence later designs? Is it still produced or popular today?

Write a short report or prepare a brief presentation summarizing your findings about your chosen chair.

Activity 3: Design Your Own Historically-Inspired Chair

Imagine you are a furniture designer in a specific historical period we've discussed (e.g., Ancient Rome, 17th Century France, 19th Century America). You've been commissioned to design a chair for a particular person or purpose (e.g., a Roman senator, a French noblewoman, a factory owner).

Sketch your chair design or describe it in detail. Most importantly, explain your design choices based on your historical understanding:

- Why did you choose this shape and style?
- What materials would be used and why are they appropriate for the period and the intended user?
- How does the design reflect the social status or intended function?
- What technologies of the era would be used to create it?

Be creative, but root your design in historical context!

Conclusion: Reading History in Furniture

As we've seen, chairs are fascinating historical documents. By looking closely at how people have designed, made, and used chairs throughout history, we gain valuable insights into their lives, values, and the worlds they inhabited. The next time you sit down, take a moment to think about the history that might be embedded in the design of your own chair!