

IAMLA
ITALIAN AMERICAN MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES

USING OBJECTS TO TELL STORIES

Made Possible in Part by a Grant from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department

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USING OBJECTS TO TELL STORIES

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OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Recognize that museums act as custodians, or “keepers,” of history, that museum exhibitions help us learn about life in the past, and that artifacts tell stories.

- Explain how artifacts in museums are displayed and organized to illustrate life and people’s experiences in different times.
- Identify objects in their homes and museums and explain how the objects and artifacts can teach us about history, life in the past, and people’s experiences.
- Describe the ways in which life was different during the past.
- Practice observation skills by examining historic objects.
- Analyze objects to make inferences about the people who made and used them.
- Learn that they are part of history.
- Define the word heirloom and provide examples.
- Explain how historical figures and ordinary people in their communities and families shaped history and why their experiences are important.
- Connect past events, people, and ideas to the present, use different perspectives to draw conclusions, and suggest current implications.



The Egyptian Museum, located in Cairo, Egypt, houses a collection of artifacts, ranging from the Predynastic Period to the Greco-Roman Era.

VOCABULARY

Museum

Exhibition

Artifact

Curator

Heirloom

Archaeologist



The West Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.

CONCEPTS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

What is a museum?

A museum is a building or institution that cares for and displays artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance.

Why are museums important?



The Small Italian Skylight Room of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, Russia.

- Museums document and preserve history so that it can enlighten future generations.
- By conserving, protecting, and displaying artifacts from the past, museums help preserve our rich heritage.
- Without museums, artifacts that link us to history may otherwise be lost or owned by private collectors, and the public would not be able to enjoy them.
- Museums help people recognize the achievements of those who came before them.
- Museums educate people; they help us understand the history of humankind and the natural world. They raise awareness about people, places, and subjects outside of our daily experiences.
- Museums illustrate the stories of people and places far away in place, time, or experience.



Located in Beijing, the National Museum of China preserves Chinese culture through collections, research, and exhibitions.

- Museums foster dialogue, curiosity, and self-reflection.
- Museums, especially local and community history museums, present the unique history of a particular place or group, stories that are often omitted from larger museums.
- Museums encourage us to experience empathy as opposed to solely an intellectual understanding of a topic.
- Museums can offer immersive educational experiences that trigger both emotional and cognitive responses.
- Museums provide experiential learning opportunities through which visitors gain new knowledge by doing—engaging in concrete experiences and hands-on activities.
- Museums act as an extension of the classroom, reinforcing and expanding learning.

What are heirlooms and why are they important?

- An heirloom is something handed down in a family from one generation to another.
- Heirlooms help connect present generations with past generations. While a young person may never know their great-grandmother or other family members who have passed on, heirlooms reveal information about these departed loved ones.
- While heirlooms sometimes have significant monetary value, oftentimes their value is more sentimental.
- Heirlooms help keep the memory of a family member or a loved one alive.
- Can students provide examples of family heirlooms?



This wedding dress dates to 1895 and has remained in the same family for 120 years. It has been worn by five generations of brides, including most recently by Abigail Kingston (left), the great-great-granddaughter of the original owner of the dress.



Pictured here are traditional Pajeb (anklets), which were passed down to Samriddhi Roy from her great-great-grandmother. This pajeb was not only worth a heavy monetary sum for her great-great-grandmother, but was also a souvenir of her wedding day and the transition to a new phase in her life as a young adult woman.

Why are family and community members' histories important?

- Learning about our ancestors and understanding where we came from shapes our identity.
- Family and community histories reveal our unique stories and strengthen our sense of self-worth.
- Learning about family and community members' histories makes us more resilient. Life was often harder for our ancestors and people who lived in earlier times. They faced tragedies, adversity, and heartache—things that seemed almost impossible to overcome—but they persevered. Learning about their stories can inspire courage and resilience.
- Understanding family and community stories contributes to our breadth of knowledge.
- Learning about the stories of people who came before us can make us more grateful, happy, empathetic, and compassionate.



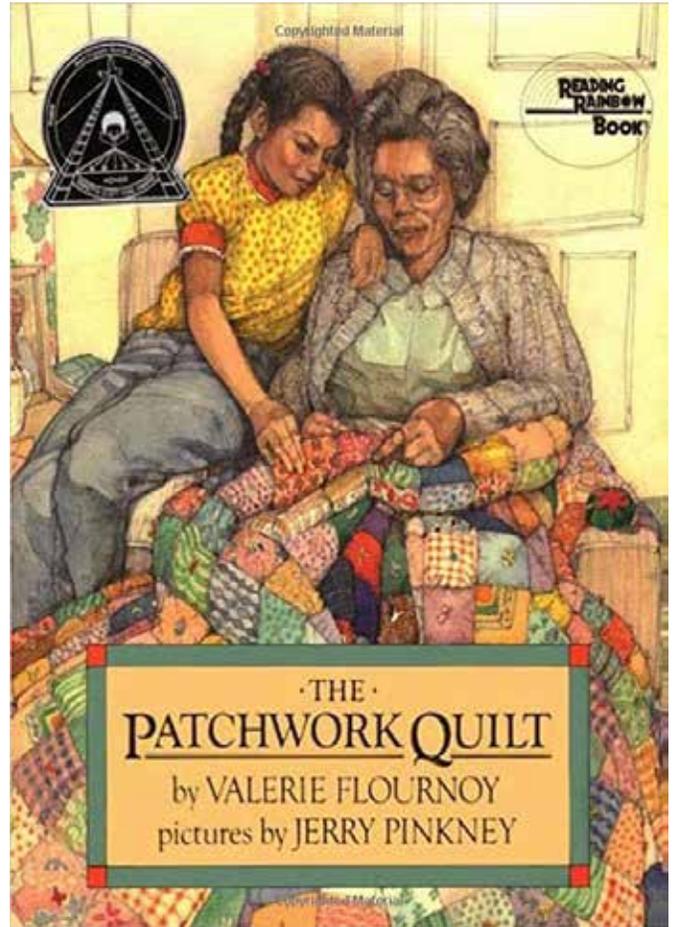
A family tree, otherwise known as a pedigree chart or genealogy, depicts familial relationships through the structure of a tree.

ACTIVITIES

Grades 1-3 Stories Are Heirlooms

Discuss with students the meaning of the word heirloom. Assign students a book to read on the subject (or read together as a class). Some possibilities include *The Patchwork Quilt* by Valerie Flournoy; *The Broken Ornament* by Tony DiTerlizzi; *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)* by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard; and *The Granddaughter Necklace* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth. Then ask students to interview a family or community member about a special memory. Have them summarize the story in written format as appropriate to their level. Then students design a "quilt square." This can simply be a piece of paper with a large square drawn on it. Underneath the square, students should write a caption that describes their story. Display quilt squares in the classroom. This activity can also be done with a family heirloom. Students can describe the item and its history and take a photo of the item to paste on the quilt square.

Grades 4-8 Students' Stories Matter



The Patchwork Quilt, written by Valerie Flournoy, centers a young girl named Tanya, and her grandmother, who together unveil the significance of their quilt through the complex stories and narratives behind each of the pieces of fabric.



History is not something in the distant past. History is happening now, and we are all part of it. Ask students to imagine that an archaeologist or an ordinary person visits their bedroom many years in the future. What would they find? What would their discoveries teach them about the students?

Ask students to think about objects that reveal information

about their lives. Have students create a list of five objects that are important to them. They can be things that they use regularly as well as items that tell their history — an item from their early years; an item that represents their family, home, and loved ones, including pets; an item that reflects their interests and hobbies.

In oral or written format, students explain what these objects “tell” or represent about themselves and their lives. For example, if the student included a set of colored pencils, we could infer that one of the student’s interests or hobbies is art. If the student selected a medal that he or she won in soccer we can infer that the student is interested in sports. Ask students to add two or three more objects to the list that further illustrate their life and reveal what is important to them, including their future hopes and dreams. For each item, students should explain:

- Where did the object come from?
- How do/did they use the object and where?
- Why did they select the object?
- How does the object represent them?
- What story does it tell?
- Older students can be asked to include additional information about the object’s historical significance, if applicable.



Students then arrange the objects on a board or in an electronic presentation to create an “exhibition” about their lives. (Encourage students to take pictures of the items unless the items are appropriate and can be safely brought to school.)

Have students share their results within groups first and select a few students who will present to the entire class, explaining why they selected each of the items. Teachers can also select a few particularly interesting items and ask students to help interpret their meaning as a class. Possible discussion questions can include:

- What do the items tell us about the students and their lifestyles?
- Can objects tell a story that words or images aren’t able to convey as effectively?

Students can also create a classroom gallery display that includes one item from each student. Students can arrange the physical items (e.g., mounted on poster board or easels) or create an electronic display. Students should write brief descriptions about their object, similar to an object label at a museum.

Grades 8-12 Objects Tell Stories

As a pre-visit activity for the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles, refer to the museum's permanent exhibition [using this link](#). Have students select or assign students an exhibition to read and familiarize themselves with the contents. When students visit the museum, have them locate the exhibition case that corresponds with the exhibition they read online. (Please note, there is no artifact case for the exhibition Italy's Imprint.) Students then select an artifact from that case and briefly explain its historical significance, e.g., in their notebooks. (The Museum prefers that students use pencils rather than ink pens for recording, so please remind students of this before they arrive. Having a semi-rigid writing surface, such as a pocket folder, will be helpful to students.)

As a post-visit activity, students learn about their family's past with the help of an artifact or family heirloom. Students interview a family member who can tell the artifact's or heirloom's story. Then students write a brief description of the item and the story it tells.



Italy's Imprint



Pioneers



Settlement Part I



Settlement Part II



Italian Hall



Dago!



Italians in Hollywood



Culture Part I



Culture Part II

[The online version of the IAMLA's permanent exhibition.](#)

Grades 8-12

Bringing History to Life with Museum Collections

Objects can tell many stories. They hold memories and meanings and create connections between the present and the past. Museums collect these objects, care for them, showcase them, and use them to help people understand the world around them and the people and times that came before them. Objects can help bring history to life. By examining them closely, we can discover information about the people who made and used them.

1. Students peruse the IAMLA collection [using this link](#) to find objects that are unfamiliar to them.
2. Then students make lists of what the items were used for and why the items were important. It is helpful to follow these steps: Ask students to look at the object closely and then write a physical description of the object, paying close attention to details. They might consider the material(s) it is made of, size, weight, number of parts, design, and embellishments. How was the object made—by hand or mass-produced? Who made the object? How do humans (or animals) interact with the object? What is the object's purpose? What emotions, thoughts, or ideas come to mind when you see the object? Who owned or used the object? What is special or unique about this object? How would you explain this object to others?
3. Have students brainstorm questions they have about the object. Students, working with partners or small groups, write a “story” to explain what we can learn about people during this period of history using these artifacts. Some things students should consider when writing these stories include: How has life changed since this item was created/invented? How has technology influenced such changes? Has technology or other innovations made these items obsolete?



The Museum of Rescued Art in Rome, Italy, preserves stolen art. Currently, there are about 100 pieces on display in the museum, including Greek and Roman artifacts.

Below is a list of several items from the IAMLA collection to help students get started.

[Sickle](#)

[Sausage stuffer](#)

[Garter](#)

[Jaw harp](#)

[Snuffbox](#)

[Ice tongs](#)

[Pasta press](#)

[Tape recorder](#)



Short Answer Prompts:

1. **Grades 1-12** Why are family and community histories important?
2. **Grades 9-12** Reflect on this statement and have students explain in their own words what they think it means: "Museums have become the cultural conscience of nations."



The permanent wing of the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles.

A Social Science/ELA Standards

Social Science:

Kindergarten K.6 (#3): Students understand that history relates to events, people, and places of other times.

- Understand how people lived in earlier times and how their lives would be different today (e.g., getting water from a well, growing food, making clothing, having fun, forming organizations, living by rules and laws).

1st Grade 1.4 (#3): Students compare and contrast everyday life in different times and places around the world and recognize that some aspects of people, places, and things change over time while others stay the same.

- Recognize similarities and differences of earlier generations in such areas as work (inside and outside the home), dress, manners, stories, games, and festivals, drawing from biographies, oral histories, and folklore.

2nd Grade 2.1 (#1 and #2): Students differentiate between things that happened long ago and things that happened yesterday.

- Trace the history of a family through the use of primary and secondary sources, including artifacts, photographs, interviews, and documents.
- Compare and contrast their daily lives with those of their parents, grandparents, and/or guardians.

K-5 Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills:

- 3 of Chronological and Spatial Thinking: Students explain how the present is connected to the past, identifying both similarities and differences between the two, and how some things change over time and some things stay the same.
- 2 of Research, Evidence, and POV: Students pose relevant questions about events they encounter in historical documents, eyewitness accounts, oral histories, letters, diaries, artifacts, photographs, maps, artworks, and architecture.
- 1, 2 of Historical Interpretation: Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events; Students identify the human and physical characteristics of the places they are studying and explain how those features form the unique character of those places.

6-8 Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills:

- 1, 2 of Chronological and Spatial Thinking: Students explain how major events are related to one another in time; Students construct various time lines of key events, people, and periods of the historical era they are studying.
- 2, 3, 4 of Research, Evidence, and POV: Students distinguish fact from opinion in historical narratives and stories; Students distinguish relevant

from irrelevant information, essential from incidental information, and verifiable from unverifiable information in historical narratives and stories; Students assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources and draw sound conclusions from them.

- 1, 5 of Historical Interpretation: Students explain the central issues and problems from the past, placing people and events in a matrix of time and place; Students recognize that interpretations of history are subject to change as new information is uncovered.

9-12 Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills:

- 1, 2 of Chronological and Spatial Thinking: Students compare the present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons that were learned; Students analyze how change happens at different rates at different times; understand that some aspects can change while others remain the same; and understand that change is complicated and affects not only technology and politics but also values and beliefs.
- 3, 4 of Historical Interpretation: Students interpret past events and issues within the context in which an event unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values; Students understand the meaning, implication, and impact of historical events and recognize that events could have taken other directions.

ELA (K-5):

- Reading (Literature): 2 (Key Ideas and Details), 7 (Integration of Ideas and Knowledge)
- 2. Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
- 7. Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story.
- Writing: 3 (Text Types and Purposes), 6 (Production and Distribution of Writing), 8 (Research to Build and Present Knowledge)
- 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
- 6. With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.
- 8. Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

- Speaking and Listening: 3 (Comprehension and Collaboration), 4 and 5 (Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas)
- 3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.
- 4. Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
- 5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.
- Language: 1 and 2 (Conventions of Standard English), 6 (Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)
- 1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- 2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- 6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.

ELA (6-12):

- Reading (Informational Text): 7 (Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for Informational Text): Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- Writing: 3 (Text Types and Purposes); 4,6 (Production and Distribution of Writing); 8 (Research to Build and Present Knowledge).
- 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting
- 8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

- Speaking and Listening: 2 (Comprehension and Collaboration), 5 (Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas)
- 2. Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
- 5. Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.
- Language: 1,2 (Conventions of Standard English),3 (Knowledge of Language), 6 (Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)
- 1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- 2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- 3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- 6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.