



Object Biography

Classroom Visit
Introduction to Objects Series

Great for: courses in subjects that closely align with the Museum's collections, such as art, anthropology, archaeology, area studies, gender studies, history, and religious studies.

Many objects arrived at the Museum after living a full "life" out in the world – pots were eaten from, clothes were worn, and musical instruments played – and their current status as museum artifact is only the latest stage in their existence. A single object may have even held several different statuses, meanings, and purposes that changed over time depending on context: a good to be bought or sold at market, a valuable status symbol to be displayed, a family heirloom to be treasured, a sacred item used in worship, or a symbol of peace traded in diplomatic relations.

While some object's histories are longer or more unusual than others, every object has one and to best understand the object, we must consider its whole history, rather than seeing it only at a single moment in time. The history of an object can be written up as a sort of "biography" to document its existence, from its creation to the present, taking into consideration how its meaning, status, or purpose may have changed over time.

This visit is the first part of a longer project for students to research an object from the collection and write its object biography. In tandem with the visit to the classroom, we encourage instructors to schedule visits to the Museum Archives and Museum Library to help introduce students to Museum research resources.

Class Time	One visit of 1-1.5 hours
Class Level	Advanced Undergraduate or Graduate
Class Size	Maximum of 15 students
Objectives	Learn about object histories; practice museum and object-based research; practice critical thinking and analysis skills; utilize new knowledge to write short research paper
Prep	Instructors select objects from Museum storage collections for students to research. Schedule a class visit the Museum Archives to learn about researching objects from the collection or the Museum Library to learn about library resources for their research (optional).
Visit	Students spend their time at the Museum closely looking at their object, taking photographs, and taking notes about their object.

Post

Students can make research appointments at the Museum Archives to research their specific object's history at the Museum.

Students can research their object type from resources at the Museum Library.

Students summarize their findings to the object biography prompt in a research paper.