

## History 103: World Civilizations to 1500

2. Term Project (30 points), “Interrogating Silent Witnesses of History”: This project requires you to observe and interpret one or a set of cultural artifacts on display at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA). This project may result in a 2-3 page written report or a 5-minute presentation to the class. You may team up with another classmate for a proportionately longer report or presentation. Presentations are scheduled to take place in class on Thursday December 1. If you choose to write a paper, it is also due in class that day. Detailed instructions on the project will be posted on Sakai. I encourage you to *explore the MOA electronic database online to identify one or a set of objects for your term project early in the semester*. MOA homepage is: <http://www.wfu.edu/moa/>

### MOA Project Assignment

Please note that this project may result in a 2-3 page (double-space) written report or a 5-minute presentation to the class and is worth **30 points**. You may team up with another classmate for a proportionately longer report or presentation. Presentations are scheduled to take place in class on **Thursday December 1**. If you intend to give a presentation, please let me know by email by 5pm on Wednesday November 30, so I can have some idea how many of you will be presenting. If you need to do a PowerPoint presentation, please save your file on a jump drive and bring it to class on Thursday.

If you choose to write a paper, the paper is also due in class that day.

The point of the project is to train your ability to “read” and learn from visual images or three-dimensional artifacts. Consider this as a project entirely of your own design: you choose your own object(s) of study and ask your own set of questions. The following are the minimum requirements you need to keep in mind:

1. Objects: you need to pick *one or a small set* of artifacts (two-dimensional artifacts such as photos are fine). If you decide to look at more than one item, make sure that they can be connected by one theme. If you pick two or more objects from entirely different categories or world regions, your paper /presentation should employ an organizing principle that meaningfully connects these diverse objects.
2. You should develop a set of questions and find answers to them by investigating the object(s) **on site**. You may want to consult some background literature about the people who created the artifact(s). If you do so, please provide citations to your sources in your paper or presentation.

*To assist you in developing your list of questions, I am appending below two models for investigating museum objects, each coming with a different set of questions.*

3. In your paper/presentation, you should present your research findings. You should identify, describe and interpret the object(s) and highlight the ways in which your project

enriched your understanding of the history and culture of the people who created the artifact(s) and, *if applicable*, your knowledge about the MOA itself.

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(Note: the following is excerpted from Carin Jacobs' workshop, "Using Museums to Support Interdisciplinary Curriculum in Undergraduate Learning: A workshop," Offered on Feb. 21, 2009 at Wake Forest University)

### **McClung Fleming's model of artifact study**

#### 1. Identification

What is it? (factual description: history, material, construction, design, and function)

- What is it made of?
- Was it made by hand or by machine?
- What is its shape, size, color, weight?
- What is it used for?
- Who uses it?
- Where and when is it used?

#### 2. Evaluation

How does it compare with other objects? How is it alike? How is it different?

#### 3. Cultural Analysis

What is its relationship to its culture? (iconography-what symbols does it contain?)

- Does it have value, monetary or otherwise?
- Is it one of a kind?
- How has it changed over time?
- How does it impact people's lives?
- Does it have any symbols on it? What do they mean?

#### 4. Interpretation

What is the object's relationship to our contemporary culture?

*Objects are subject to multiple interpretations, not just one. Interpretations will vary as the knowledge, interests and experiences of the interpreter vary; in other words, depending on the unique lens through which the objects are viewed.*

### **Museum literacy questions**

The following sets of questions are designed to have value in relation to many kinds of exhibitions and multiple kinds of objects, and to be broad enough to be useful in diverse museum contexts without requiring extensive subject expertise or didacticism. In other words, they are designed to provide a *transferable skill set for museum literacy*.

**Layers of intention:**

- What can we glean about the maker's intentions? (creative process)
- Why has it been collected by *this* museum? (mission-driven)
- What questions are left unanswered? What more do I want to know? (ask the curator) What is left out and why?

**Museum motives: (these speak to mission, purpose and design of exhibitions)**

- What objects have been collected?
- How were they collected?
- Why were they collected?
- How are they being displayed?
- How are they being interpreted?

**Transparency: (letting the visitor in behind the scenes....a critical museum visitor might ask the following questions)**

- What do the words in the title of the exhibition suggest to me?
- What does the architecture of the museum say to me? Is it inviting or difficult to navigate?
- Does the gallery feel more like a collector's living room or like a sterile space?
- What am I expected to know to digest this exhibition?
- What is the key message of the exhibition and who is its intended audience?
- What can I say about the writing style of the labels and other wall panels?
- Does the text encourage me to formulate my own opinions or simply accept what is written?