

The Curator's Challenge: Life in a Post-September 11 World

Project Guide for Teachers

Objective:

Students will learn historical research skills and basic facts about September 11 and its aftermath by acting as curators for a small exhibition on life after September 11.

Grades: 9-12

National Standards (National Center for History in the Schools):

Historical Thinking Standards, Grades 5-12

4B. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.

4D. Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place.

United States History Standards, Grades 5-12

Era 10, Standard 2: Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States

World History Standards, Grades 5-12

World History Across the Eras, Standard 1: Long-term changes and recurring patterns in world history

Time: 2-3 sessions (approximately 45 minutes per session)

Background:

See the timelines and frequently asked questions at <http://smithsonianconference.org/september11/resources/>.

Motivation/Pre-assignment (may be assigned as homework):

1. Have students read the frequently asked questions provided by the September 11 memorial sites [<http://smithsonianconference.org/september11/resources/>].
2. Then, have students examine the artifacts collected by the National Museum of American History and included on the *September 11: Bearing Witness to History* website [<http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/>]. If applicable, listen to selected stories about individual artifacts: http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/curators_objects.asp.
3. Ask them to select one artifact that surprised them, moved them, or made them think and consider why it was chosen to represent September 11, based on the information gained from the background reading, using *The Curator's Challenge: Pre-Assignment* sheet.
4. Ask students to share their chosen artifacts and responses.



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Procedure:

1. Have students use the interviews with curators from the National Museum of American History, discussing collecting September 11 material in the tragedy's immediate aftermath [<http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/curators.asp>], to complete The Curator's Work: Collecting September 11 sheet. Depending on the level of student, this may be done in small groups or as a whole group with the teacher pausing between each interview to discuss with students what they heard and understood about the interviews.

For further information on how curators think about objects, see the essay [Looking at Objects, Thinking About History](#) [<http://www.objectofhistory.org/guide/>] or the electronic field trip [Creating Stories](#) [http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/learning/AOTM_education_2.wvx]

2. Divide students into groups of no more than four. Distribute the student version of the project guidelines and You Be the Curator: Research sheets. Allow for independent work and interviews.
3. Acting as Department Chair for the Office of Curatorial Affairs, you will hear from your teams (representatives of curatorial divisions) about their recommendations for new artifacts to be included in the national collection. Students may use the form You Be the Curator: Recommendation for Accession as a guide for their presentations, which may be a simple oral presentation or may be enhanced with a PowerPoint, video, flipchart, or any other presentation method that suits the group.

Ask the class as a whole to discuss each artifact according to the criteria outlined by curator David Shayt:

- What messages and stories does it tell?
- Does it have lasting value for the museum?
- Does it have research potential?
- Is it made well, so that it will endure over decades?

Artifact presentations may be judged according to the criteria listed on the Evaluation Grid.

4. Create your own classroom exhibition of the effects of September 11, using the teams' selected artifacts. As a group, the class should develop a longer introductory panel providing context for their artifacts, and should consider what common themes these artifacts represent, to determine ways to group the artifacts to more effectively highlight the stories they represent. Then, ask each team to use their data collection and presentation as the basis of a short (1 paragraph) exhibit label for their piece.

Extension:

With the permission of their interviewees, students may submit the stories they have collected to the [September 11: Bearing Witness to History](http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/tellyourstory/) website [<http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/tellyourstory/>].



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Evaluation Grid

| Criteria | Excellent (5 points) | Good (4) | Fair (3) | Poor (0-2) |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| <i>Presentation</i> | Includes all required elements | Missing one required element | Missing two required elements | Missing more than two required elements |
| <i>Interviews</i> | Completed by all team members | Missing one interview or one or more elements from interview form | Missing two interviews or two or more elements from interview form | Missing three or more interviews or majority of elements on interview form |
| <i>Final Summary</i> | Includes artifact's history, basic information about the artifact, argument for its inclusion in the national collection | Missing one element (background information, identifying information, argument) | Missing two or more elements (background information, identifying information, argument) | Includes only one element (background information, identifying information, argument) or is not turned in |
| <i>Artifact selection: narrative and theme</i> | Team has articulated a compelling historical theme for or narrative associated with the artifact | Team has articulated a historical theme for or narrative associated with the artifact | Team has a vague theme or narrative connected with the artifact | Team has failed to articulate a theme or narrative for their artifact |
| <i>Artifact selection: historical value</i> | Team has identified the research potential and lasting value of the artifact | Team has identified research potential or lasting value of the artifact | Team has made an unclear argument for the artifact's research potential or lasting value | Team has not articulated the research potential or lasting value of the artifact |



Name _____

Date _____

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Pre-Assignment

As you read the background information on September 11, jot down the following:

- Any new information you hadn't heard before, or that you may have forgotten:

- A few essential points about the story to remember:

- Examine the artifacts on the [September 11: Bearing Witness to History](http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/) website: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/>. Then choose an artifact that surprised you, moved you, or made you think and consider why they were chosen to represent September 11, based on the information you learned from the background reading. Record your chosen artifact and your reason for selecting it below:



Name _____

Date _____

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The Curator's Work: Collecting September 11

Listen to the following interviews with curators on the *Bearing Witness* website:
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/curators.asp> (On this menu page, you can find transcripts and audio for all of the interviews listed below.)

William Yeingst:

"...we're very interested in the kinds of everyday stuff that Americans have used..."

"...objects that were there...witnesses to this larger event in American history..."

"Now the challenge is to find the larger context this all fits into..."

"...we spent many hours networking with individuals in various agencies to complete our job."

"This was really a process of negotiation..."

David Shayt:

"What we are doing is building a collection for all time here"

"Preservation for posterity, whose uses we can't even, or ought to imagine"

Peter Liebhold:

"We sat down as a staff, almost like a family around the kitchen table..."

"I thought it was really important to understand normalcy before September 11..."

"...it will be years before all of the artifacts that are important to this collection will be in the museum."

"...we don't really know how people are going to react to these objects."

"...as they become history rather than current event, we will be able to let the collections grow..."**

"It was a very consultative process..."

Helena Wright:

"Objects are witness to the fact that something did exist in the past"

As you listen to these interviews, answer the questions on the following page.



Name _____

Date _____

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The Curator's Work: Collecting September 11

- What is the charge of the National Museum of American History? What kind of material does the museum collect?

- According to these curators, what is the value of collecting, preserving, and studying objects?

- How did the curators go about locating and securing artifacts for the September 11 collection? What are some of the considerations they had to weigh as they did?

- How did the National Museum of American History defined its collection strategy for September 11 in the immediate aftermath? What stories is the Museum trying to tell?



Name _____

Date _____

The Curator's Challenge: Life in a Post-September 11 World

You Be the Curator: Life in a Post-September 11 World Project Guidelines for Students

As curator Peter Liebhold noted in 2002, "...as [these events] become history rather than current event, we will be able to let the collections grow..." It is now up to you to consider how the National Museum of American History should expand its collections by recommending artifacts that represent life after September 11 and that you believe should become part of the national museum.

For your final project, you will imagine yourselves as curators in one of the curatorial divisions in the Museum. Your charge as a group is to choose a department and determine an artifact that should be part of your division's collection that represent life in the post-September 11 world.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Armed Forces History | <input type="checkbox"/> Culture and the Arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Medicine and Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Political History | <input type="checkbox"/> Work and Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Home and Community Life |

To do this, you will first need to conduct field research. Groups should divide into pairs; each pair should identify two people to interview about life before and after September 11, using your chosen curatorial division as a guide. These interviewees should have been at least 18 years old on September 11, 2001. Use the worksheets provided as guidance, but feel free to extend your questions beyond those listed and be sure to complete the object information section.

Once your field research is completed, come together as a group to discuss what you've learned and to share artifact ideas. According to the guidelines presented by David Shayt, choose one of your suggested artifacts to present to the class as your recommendation to be included in the national collection.

To prepare your presentation, complete the You Be the Curator: Recommendation for Accession worksheet.



Name _____

Date _____

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You Be the Curator: Research

Interviewee Information

- Name: _____
- Age/DOB: _____
- Occupation: _____
- Education: _____
- Date and location of interview: _____

Questions

- Where did you live and what was your occupation at the time of the September 11 attacks?

- What is your most salient memory from that day?

- What impact did the attacks have on your life in the immediate term?

- What effects have the attacks had on your life since then?

- What changes in American society do you think have come about as a result of the attacks?

- What physical evidence or artifacts have you seen (or do you have) that reflect these changes?

Note: If your subject has an artifact he or she would recommend, record the following information. If not, you may use the subject's interview for clues to a possible artifact.



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You Be the Curator: Research

Object Information

David Shayt asked the following questions of the materials he collected. Consider these questions of the objects you might recommend for the national collections:

- What messages and stories does it tell?

- Does it have lasting value for the museum?

- Does it have research potential?

- Is it made well, so that it will endure over decades?

Include the following

- Description of artifact:

- Name of owner: _____

- Known previous owners: _____

- Location of creation/location where obtained by curator: _____

- Summarize how the owner obtained it:

- Summarize your thoughts about how this artifact represents post-September 11 life:

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You Be the Curator: Recommendation for Accession

You will now recommend to your department head (your teacher) which artifact you would like to accession into the collection (meaning, which artifact you think belongs in the National Museum of American History). Your presentation should:

- identify your chosen artifact
- identify the curatorial division you represent
- include an image of your artifact
- and outline an argument in favor of your artifact by:
 - explaining the aspect of post-September 11 life it represents
 - responding to David Shayt's essential questions for collecting:
 - What messages and stories does it tell?
 - Does it have lasting value for the museum?
Does it have research potential?
 - Is it made well, so that it will endure over decades?

Your teacher will provide guidelines to the length of presentation, but your group should also produce a 1-2 page short summary of your artifact's history and your recommendations, including the basic information about the artifact included on your research sheet and your argument for its inclusion in the national collection.

