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| Object Lessons | | | | | |
|  | Common Core Standards Recommended for grades 9-12.  LITERACY.WHST.9-12.2, 4, 6  LITERACY.W.9-12.2, 3, 4 |  | WKU Colonnade Critical and logical thinking, writing, and speaking. |  | WKU Colonnade A historical perspective and an understanding of connections between past and present. |

*I’m on tour with Museum Hack at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It’s my second time on tour with them, and the first time that I’ll be presenting an object during the tour as one of their new guides. I’ve never done this. I’m nervous as hell and wondering why, in all my museum training, this was never asked of me.*

*But before I present, we stop in the musical objects’ gallery. We’re standing in front of a case filled with instruments, and it’s the first time I’ve seen any of this. Musical instruments aren’t really my thing. Then the guide starts talking. Turns out, the white walking-stick in the case is a flute/oboe made from the horn of a narwhal – which, back in 1750, would have been called “a unicorn of the sea.” I’m laughing because it seems so silly. The guide invites one of the girls on tour to engage with him, diving into a dialogue about how this walking-stick/flute/oboe could have been used to court a woman into marrying a noble. I mean, c’mon, what girl in the 18th century wouldn’t agree to marry a fabulously wealthy man who just showed off his killer flute/oboe skills with a “unicorn horn”?*

*I can imagine the entire story playing out as it’s been told. It’s funny, witty, and filled with ideas about how courtship could be conducted that never dawned on me before. And for the first time in my life, I want to hear what this flute/oboe sounds like. I don’t even like flutes and oboes. Without ever removing the artifact from behind its glass case, I learn how it was adjusted to become a flute, an oboe, or a walking stick. I watch the guide’s hands move as if he’s playing the instrument and as he takes the girl’s hand to court her. His words and movements hint at walking, playing, courting. I feel I could pick up this object and use it as was done nearly 300 years ago.*

*As I’m listening, I’m remembering how I’ve been courted during my life. Whether it was flowers, fun dates, or other displays of affection, my life isn’t so far off from this girl’s experiences. I identify with her – not at the end of the story, but throughout it, and that deepens my appreciation for the object and the people to whom it meant something.*

*Part of this object’s story is how it was acquired. It began with a brief glimpse of how sailors would hunt narwhals and claim them to be “unicorns of the sea” in order to sell them for major money to high-ranking nobles. I also learn that only two of these walking-stick/flute/oboes exist in the world today: and this is the only one on public display. It’s a brief part of the story, but a key part, because I understand the full journey of how this object came to be.*

*-- Summarized from “Unicorn Horns: How Storytelling Transforms Museum Experiences” on the Museum Hack blog, February 2018, authored by Tiffany Isselhardt.*

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What makes a story good…or even great? Could that story be about an artifact in a museum? In this activity, you will write an Object Lesson about one of the artifacts in the Kentucky Museum’s collection. Follow these steps and use the attached worksheet.

1. **Search KenCat** for an artifact relevant to your class or interests. Go to <https://westernkentuckyuniversity.pastperfectonline.com/> then click “Advanced Search.” On the form, make sure only the “Objects” box is checkmarked. Then enter your search term(s) in the “Search Terms” box. Click the “Search” button to view the results. Click the photo or title of the one you’d like to write about.
2. Once you’ve selected an object, **review the object’s record**. Does it tell you who made it or owned it? When was it created? Where? Does the record reveal an interesting fact about it?
3. **Do some research**. Using the WKU Library’s resources and Google searching, try to find similar objects at other museums or scholarly research on your object.
4. **Synthesize your research**. What have you learned? What is applicable to your object? For example, did you learn more about its maker or how it was used?
5. **Write your Object Lesson**. Use the worksheet on the next page to craft your story. This “hack” method helps museum tour guides create short, engaging stories about objects they show to their visitors. Fill in the blanks, then use the format to write a maximum 700-word story about your object that you would present while giving a tour of the Kentucky Museum.
   1. **For an extra challenge, avoid using these words**: Sumptuous (unless you want to eat it); Exquisite; Important; Expensive (unless you’re willing to talk $$); Fascinating (unless you say “I find it…”); Delicate (unless you can break it).

**4 Steps to a Great Story**

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| ***Step*** | ***Example*** | ***Your object story*** |
| **1. Get the Audience Involved**  Ask a question, get them to act something out, show them an odd detail. Immediately prompt your audience to view the story differently. | *The white walking-stick in the case is a flute/oboe made from the horn of a narwhal – which, back in 1750, would have been called “a unicorn of the sea.”* |  |
| **2. What’s the Story?**  Quickly tell the story of the object, expanding on the point you made in Step 1. This should go fast, and leave your audience wanting more. | *The guide invites one of the girls on tour to engage with him, diving into a dialogue about how this walking-stick/flute/oboe could have been used to court a woman into marrying a noble.*  *I learn how it was adjusted to become a flute, an oboe, or a walking stick. I watch the guide’s hands move as if he’s playing the instrument and as he takes the girl’s hand to court her. His words and movements hint at walking, playing, courting.* |  |
| **3. Mind = blown**  Why is this story awesome? What makes your respond to it? Make it personal, sharing your opinion and letting your humanity show. | *I’m remembering how I’ve been courted during my life. Whether it was flowers, fun dates, or other displays of affection, my life isn’t so far off from this girl’s experiences.* |  |
| **4. End with something fun.** A joke? Something silly? A provoking question or fact? Circle back to Step 1 and tie it all together. | *The guide reiterates how sailors would hunt narwhals and claim them to be “unicorns of the sea” in order to sell them for major money to high-ranking nobles. I also learn that only two of these walking-stick/flute/oboes exist in the world today: and this is the only one on public display.* |  |