

Wisconsin 101: Our History in Objects



Name(s): _____

About

Wisconsin 101: Our History in Objects is a collaborative public history project that includes both an interactive online exhibit and programming on Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR). Students, amateur historians, and other Wisconsin residents nominate objects of interest or importance to their communities, then research, write, and illustrate histories of those objects for publication on this website and segments of WPR's *Wisconsin Life*.

Visitors to our site can explore a growing catalog of objects from around the state, each telling a set of interconnected stories about Wisconsin's history, people, and places. For example, an old blues record produced in Port Washington leads us to the history of popular music in Wisconsin, which in turn teaches us about the lives and livelihoods of Mexican-American performers from one of the state's first Latino immigrant communities. Altogether, the objects and stories featured on Wisconsin 101 cut across the diverse regional, cultural, economic, and political differences of our state, providing a rich sense of our shared heritage.

What is an Object History?

An “**object history**” tells stories about the past by starting with a particular physical object.

Our lives are spent interacting with the physical world, building and using objects to shape our environments and everyday experiences. We may often overlook them, but even the most everyday things—a soda bottle, a serving dish, a vinyl record—have their own unique historical contexts.

Objects are thus windows into the past. They shape our occupations, habits, and traditions. They document past events and serve as physical reminders of the thoughts, values, and experiences of people long gone. The object histories of Wisconsin 101’s online exhibit bring to life important and unusual stories about our shared past. Whether everyday things or one-of-a-kind rarities, the *stuff* of Wisconsin sits at the center of this historical project.

Choosing an Object

Selecting the right artifact for a Wisconsin 101 object history is key.

The object should have some clear connection to Wisconsin's past, whether our diverse cultural traditions, our many inventions and discoveries, our beautiful natural environment, or our changing industries and shifting politics.

We should also know (or be able to easily discover) how, when, and where the object was created and who used it. It doesn't necessarily need to be unique to Wisconsin, but it must have been a part of some important aspect of daily life in the state, with a clear link to a particular place, whether an individual home or farm, a whole town, or maybe even an entire region.

The **stories** that an object tells should teach us something about Wisconsin, connecting a particular thing and its place with the broader history and geography of the state.

A soda bottle sold in Whitefish Bay in the early 1900s, for example, can lead us into the history of prohibition in Wisconsin, the development of Milwaukee's resort towns, and broader patterns of urbanization in the state.

Other stories an object might tell could include trends in immigration and the formation of ethnic communities across the state, the spread of different religious practices across a region, or the rise and fall of a particular industry or form of transportation.

Formative 1: Pitching the ideas

For this formative I need to come up with two ideas, a reason why you chose those topics to pitch to our Oconomowoc Museum Volunteers, and a question you hope to answer about the object. I can fill out the table below to organize my ideas.

1. Idea 1
2. Reason
3. Question
4. Idea 2
5. Reason
6. Question

10	8	6	4	0
I have proposed two ideas and I have provided a reasons why and a question about my object.	I have proposed one idea and provided a reason why and a question about the object.	N/A	I have attempted the assignment, but the quality of the work needs to be improved. I will meet with Schueller to discuss improvements.	I didn't attempt this assignment.

Formative 2: Outline an Object History

Now that you have a better understanding of object histories, and are ready to select an object from your pitch.

Your proposal must include:

1. An **object description**.
2. At least one idea for possible **related stories**.
3. An **object photograph**.

[Click here to see](#) an example of the very strong proposal we received for the Vulcan Bowling Pin.

1. Object Description

The object's appearance	
Who donated it to the museum?	
The time period the object is from?	
Where the object is from and who might have created it?	
What the object was used for and who might have used it?	
The object's connection to Oconomowoc/Wisconsin	
Any other unique facts about the object	

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2. Related Stories

Each idea for the **related story** should be no more than 100 words. Your stories might be about

- how the object was used or made
- about the people who made or used it
- about how it influenced some key event in Wisconsin history.

For each related story, please list at least three relevant primary or secondary sources.

Write your related story below

3. Object Photograph

Your **object photograph** should be a good quality that we can clearly see what the object is.

Put your picture in the box below

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10	8	6	4	0
I can write a complete object description, a complete proposal for a related story, and include a photograph.	I can write a mostly complete object description, a mostly complete proposal for a related story, and include a photograph.	I need to answer all of the object description questions, I need to find a related story, and I need to include a good picture.	I have attempted the assignment, but the quality of the work needs to be improved. I will meet with Schueller to discuss improvements.	I did not complete this assignment

Research Your Object

Now time to get into the real work of researching, writing, and revising your object history.

Asking Questions About Objects

As tangible records of the worlds we have lost, objects help us experience and explore the past in ways that more traditional historical documents—written text and images—often cannot. But compared with the words and images we find in historical documents like newspapers and diaries, objects can seem pretty tight-lipped about the past. Once you know how to ask the right questions, however, objects turn out to be full of fascinating stories.

Here are **six sets of questions** you can use while researching/taking notes on your object

1. Where is the object from? What might the object say about that place's role in Wisconsin history?
2. When is the object from? What surprising things can the object help us remember about that period in time?
3. Who made the object? How was it made? Who used the object? How did they use it?
4. What can we learn about economics, cultural values, politics, etc. from knowing how the object was made and used (and who made and used it)?
5. Was the object expensive or cheap? Has it become more valuable, or less? How and why?
6. Was the object made more for utility or beauty? Or somewhere in between? Did those intentions change over time? How? Why?

Formative 3: Researching your object

Sources Used

Keep a list of secondary and primary sources used below

Primary Sources	
Secondary Sources	

5	0
I can conduct research on my topic and compile a list of at least 3 sources.	I did not do enough research and/or I didn't have enough sources

Writing Up

Once you have most of your research in hand, you can start writing.

As you write, remember that most people will be looking at this website for fun. Our job as writers is to make the objects and their histories as appealing and interesting as possible. This is not academic writing. Nor is it just pure description either. Make sure your writing is clear, accessible, and lively. It should be engaging without being wordy or full of technical language.

Helpful hints:

- Revisit the section of this guide on “object histories.”
- Tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Try to answer the question “so what?” Why might someone from Ashland County be interested in a lifesaving medal awarded in Milwaukee?
- Use shorter sentences wherever possible.
- Avoid the passive voice.
- Avoid clichés.
- Avoid jargon and long words where simple language will do.
- “Omit needless words”—i.e., if it’s possible to cut a word, then cut it.
- Read your writing aloud to help you revise for clarity and flow.

Finally, as you write, take some time to peruse existing objects in the Wisconsin 101 exhibit. These published objects and their stories not only offer examples of great writing for you to follow, they might also have connections with your own work. If you notice any such connections, be sure to make a note of them and tell us in your final submission.

Formative 4: Rough Draft of Submission

5	0
I wrote a rough draft for my project that can be edited for a final draft	I didn't write a rough draft or it doesn't address enough of the requirements to be edits for a final.

Final Submission

When you've finished researching, writing, and revising it's time to get your submission in order for publication as part of the Wisconsin 101 online exhibit.

Your final submission will consist of:

1. An **object description** of 150-200 words
2. **Related stories** of 300-400 words
3. Accompanying images
4. A presentation of at least 2 minutes on your object and related stories. This should just you reading your submission. This can be presented in front of the Oconomowoc Museum Volunteers or filmed and uploaded to youtube.com.

Please make sure you've listed your **sources** at the end of each of your **related stories**. And don't forget your sources for each of the images you're submitting as well!

10	8	6	4	0
I can write a solid object description that is high quality and meets the word requirements.	I can write a object description that meets the word requirements.	I am missing some things from my object description and/or I didn't meet the word requirements.	I have attempted the assignment, but the quality of the work needs to be improved. I will meet with Schueller to discuss improvements.	I didn't attempt the assignment.
I can write a related story that is connected to the original object. The related story also tells a significant connection to history and meets the word requirements.			I have attempted the assignment, but the quality of the work needs to be improved. I will meet with Schueller to discuss improvements.	I didn't attempt the assignment.
I can provide multiple quality images of my object.	N/A	N/A	I have attempted the assignment, but the quality of the work needs to be improved. I will meet with Schueller to discuss improvements.	I didn't attempt the assignment.
I can present on my object and its related story. The presentation is more than just reading of my written story. I was able to answer questions about my object and story.	N/A	I presented on my object and its related story. I mainly just read my written story.	I have attempted the assignment, but the quality of the work needs to be improved. I will meet with Schueller to discuss improvements.	I didn't attempt the assignment.