

COURSE SYLLABUS & SCHEDULE

Thinking with Things: History and Material Culture (HIST 192)

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Pronouns in use: she/her/hers

*All are welcome to use and adapt this syllabus. Please contact Krista Grensavitch to notify of use and share reflections and modifications.

Course Description

This course is designed as an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Material Culture Studies; situated within the discipline of History, the course will also draw from scholarship from Anthropology, Archaeology, Women's and Gender Studies, and Art History. The primary goal of this course is to familiarize students with key issues, questions, and debates within practices of writing object-based histories as well as within Material Culture Studies. This semester, we will become acquainted with many of the critical questions and concepts scholars have developed as tools for thinking about material culture as a means to know, create, and learn history. Together with our course texts, we will analyze competing perspectives and integrate various bodies of knowledge across traditional academic boundaries. Through our course readings, students will trace how Material Culture Studies and the writing of object-based histories developed over time. We will also explore the variety of forms object-based histories can take. Students will be asked to engage in the creation of historical knowledge through their interaction with and study of material objects and will produce their own historical narratives that use material objects as an entry point to the production of that historical narrative. Throughout the term, students will research this object with the help of their instructor and other collaborators and produce several iterations of an object-based history: a [Tumblr post](#) as well as a submission to the [Wisconsin 101 Project](#).

Important note: this course includes several local site visits (e.g. Milwaukee Art Museum, Pabst Mansion) and we will most often travel by MCTS bus. As a group, we will make travel arrangements for each site visit. It is expected that you have a working MCTS pass (provided to you as a UWM student, and paid for through part of your UWM tuition).

Course Goals

- Discuss Material Culture Theory as a critical, scholarly practice.
- Investigate the object lesson and object histories as means of thinking, knowing, and learning history and explore the value of not only considering, but making material objects central in these pursuits.
- Explore the impact and value of academic collaboration.
- Through this course, students will develop the following **essential concepts** - students will understand: History, The Past, Historical Evidence, Complex Causality, and Significance.
- Through this course, students will develop the following **essential competencies** - students will be able to: Evaluate Historical Accounts, Interpret Primary Sources; Apply Chronological Reasoning, and Construct a Historical Argument Using Primary Sources.

Required Materials

1. *Tangible Things: Making History through Objects* (Ulrich, et al., 2015)
2. *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (MacGregor) – text or podcast
3. Any course readings posted on D2L [Learning Management System]
4. A dedicated notebook to use as a Commonplace Book
5. A MCTS (Milwaukee County Transit System) bus pass (included in your tuition)

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

1. Attendance & Participation – 20%

Engaging in and contributing to meaningful class discussion is essential for this course. It is vital for you to attend all class meetings. Participation need not require speaking in every class discussion, but does require being ready and able to participate in discussion. If you do not participate verbally the entire term, it will be noticed and considered in your final grade. If you are concerned about this portion of your grade, please speak to me personally. The reason I count participation and attendance as such a large percentage of your grade is, in part, because learning is very much a social process: we learn from our interactions with others, the questions we ask, the responses we hear, the conversations we have. For this reason, many discussions in the course will be student-generated. By that, I mean you will be responsible for a large part of determining where discussions will go and what you find important, and why. I will certainly be part of discussions, but I expect you to be prepared to take part in the meaning-making process. You are required to bring a hard copy of the day's assigned reading with you to class (articles posted online, etc.).

2. Commonplace Book – 40%

In a dedicated notebook, you will keep a [Commonplace Book](#) (CB) for the entirety of the semester. CBs have a long history as a way of keeping and organizing notes, reflections, information, sketches, observations, etc. – all means to direct your research and study of objects. You will make entries in your CB for a variety of reasons:

- Notes on assigned readings
- Responses to in-class writing prompts
- Site visit notes & reflections, including object sketches
- Independent research on your chosen object

You are welcome to organize your CB in any way you see fit – perhaps you want to section off pages for various categories: reading notes, sketches, site visits, etc. – or maybe you'd rather organize your CB by date. The choice is entirely yours! As a class, we will decide how to evaluate and grade your CBs. We'll create a collaborative rubric – the grade will be determined through my evaluation, CB owner evaluation, and peer evaluation.

This assignment comprises a large portion of your final grade because it is imperative that you keep up with the assigned readings. Our discussions and activities rely on an understanding and working vocabulary of key texts and terms that are presented in our course texts. **It is expected that you will come to the class meeting having read all the articles indicated for that week in the Course Schedule.** If it becomes obvious that students are coming to class with these readings not prepared, the instructor reserves the right to issue quizzes/other assignments to ensure that these important readings are completed.

3. Midterm Assignment: Tumblr Post – 10%

Based on your preliminary object research, you will create a Tumblr post to be shared on the UWM Special Collections Tumblr Page.

4. Final Assignment: Submission to the Wisconsin 101 Project – 25%

You will submit an object history to the Wisconsin 101 Project and co-create a short video based on your object history.

5. Course Reflection – 5%

The final portion of your grade is a written reflection in which you think back on your experiences in this course: the challenges you faced, the experiences that were rewarding, and the knowledge you created.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week & Topic	Assigned Readings [all articles are found on D2L]	Activities & Assignments Due
WEEK 1		Course Introduction
WEEK 2	Tangible Things (TT): "Introduction: Thinking with Things" History of the World in 100 Objects (HoW): Part 1 – "Making us Human" (Ch/Ep 1-5) Articles: Gerritsen & Riello ("Writing Material Culture History")	HoW Parsing Activity Final Project Introduction
WEEK 3	HoW: Part 2 – "After the Ice Age: Food and Sex" (6-10) Articles: Harvey ("Introduction: Practical Matters"); Riello ("Things that Shape History") Web: Explore the UWM Special Collections Tumblr	Reading Notes in Commonplace Book (CB)
WEEK 4	TT: Selection from "Things in Place:" pp. 21-51 HoW: Part 3 – "The First Cities and States" (11-15) Articles: Prown ("Mind in Matter"); Coltman ("Material Culture and this History of Art(e)facts")	
WEEK 5 Site Visit: UWM Archives & Special Collections	HoW: Part 4 – "The Beginnings of Science and Literature" (16-20) Articles: McVeigh ("Commodifying Affection...")	Choose WI101 Object (note in CB) Site Visit Reflection (in CB)
WEEK 6 Site Visit: Emile Mathis Art Gallery at UWM	TT: Selection from "Things in Place:" pp. 51-70 HoW: N/A Articles: Miller ("Why Clothing is not Superficial"); Naji ("Gender and Materiality in the Making")	Site Visit Reflection (in CB)
WEEK 7 Site Visit: Chipstone Foundation	TT: Selection from "Things Unplaced:" pp. 71-93 HoW: Part 5 – "Old World, New Powers" (21-25) Articles: Ulrich ("Furniture as Social History")	Site Visit Reflection (in CB)
WEEK 8	No assigned readings: In-class work day	
WEEK 9: NO CLASS	No assigned readings: SPRING BREAK	
WEEK 10 Site Visit: Milwaukee Art Museum	Articles: Carter ("Mrs. M's Cabinet: Imagining a Feminist Period Room")	Revised Proposal to WI101 Site Visit Reflection (in CB)
WEEK 11	TT: Selection from "Things out of Place:" pp. 115-152 HoW: Part 7 – "Empire Builders" (31-35)	
WEEK 12: NO CLASS	No assigned readings: work on your final project!	Individual Research & Writing Conferences
WEEK 13 Site Visit: Jewish Museum Milwaukee	Articles (Found on the WI 101 website: wi101.org): "Settlement Cookbook;" "Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Black Kander;" "The Settlement;" "Roots of the Settlement House;" "The Settlement House Movement"	Site Visit Reflection (in CB)
WEEK 14 Site Visit: Pabst Mansion	Articles: Grieg ("As Seen on the Screen: Material Culture, Historical Accuracy and the Costume Drama")	Site Visit Reflection (in CB)
WEEK 15	TT: "Things in Stories – Stories in Things:" pp. 159-192 HoW: Part 13 – "Status Symbols" (61-65)	
WEEK 16	Final Presentations & Course Wrap-Up – No Assigned Readings	