

The meaning of objects versus web location assignment

Type: Short assignment

Learning objectives

- Students learn to engage with the web in an academic way. This includes: contextualizing online objects, developing critical understanding of metadata formats, and engaging in digital source criticism.
- Learning to engage critically with digital heritage environments.

Assignment suggestion

The purpose of this exercise is to get you to think about the way that online environments frame digital objects. Watch the video on object contextualization by Alec Badenoch, and read carefully the Object of History guide. Find a tour on *Inventing Europe* that relates to the topic of your course and read it carefully. Then scroll down one of the story pages to the “What’s like this?” section and select an object. What stories or contexts are emphasized by *Inventing Europe*? Think about the relationships to other objects on the page, the keywords selected for it, etc. Next look at the object on Europeana – note the kinds of metadata and information available for the chosen object, and other connections suggested for it there. Finally, look at the object in its original web environment. What kinds of contexts and narratives are suggested by the metadata and narrative material there?

In a 1-2 page essay, compare and contrast the ways in which the metadata and website environment encourage or limit understanding the item in its various roles: as artefact, object, source, and representation. - Alec Badenoch, Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

Approach

This assignment takes place online at *Inventing Europe* by making use of the “What’s like this?” section that can be found below each of the stories in each of the tours.

1. When preparing for this assignment, please take into account the “Tips for use”. You can adjust the suggested approach to your own preferences.
2. Introduce to your students the assignment.

3. Let your students watch the video on object contextualization by Alec Badenoch, and let them read the Object of History guide (see “Reading suggestions”). This can be done in class, or as part of your students’ homework.
4. Let your students select and explore a tour of their interest, or one of the tours of your choice (see “Tips for use”, tip 2).
5. Let your students examine one object of their choice in the “What’s like this?” section below the stories in the selected tour (suggestions for questions are found in the above “Assignment suggestion”).
6. Let your students then explore their chosen object on Europeana (see “Tips for use”, tip 3 and 4).
7. Let your students explore and question the object in its original web environment (see “Tips for use”, tip 3).
8. Let your students write a 1-2 page essay or let them prepare a presentation in which they contrast the ways the objects’ metadata and website environment encourage or limit understanding of the item in its various roles - as artifact, object, source, and representation (see “Tips for use”, tip 5).

Tips for use

1. The assignment can be done in class, for instance during a two-hour working group provided an internet connection is available, or at home, as part of homework.
2. If your course deals with a specific topic, such as “food” or “history of informatics”, you have the option to preselect the tours from *Inventing Europe* that you want your students to work with during this assignment.
3. The “What’s like this?” section contains the option to view the objects on different locations on the web. How do you do this? By clicking on an object, a pop-up opens. The pop-up shows a large image and a considerable part of its metadata. When you explore the metadata you will find that you can “View item at” *Europeana* and “View item at” *[name of the original data provider]*. Click the link if available, and explore the object on these different web locations.
4. When you explore the object within the Europeana portal, and you scroll further down the page, you will find other related objects that are suggested by Europeana. In a way this resembles the functionality of *Inventing Europe*’s “What’s like this?”. On the Europeana website the object is contextualized according to principles defined by Europeana.
5. As a teacher you decide if, and if so, how you desire to evaluate the assignment. You can think of a 1-page essay, or a short presentation in class.

Reading suggestions

- Take a look at the video by Alexander Badenoch about “How to Contextualize Museum Collections in an European and Transnational Context”. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZKQwbKFOAE>)
- The Object of History Guide: <http://objectofhistory.org/guide> (you might have to click on “guide” to see the page correctly).

Are you planning on using this suggestion and teach with *Inventing Europe*? Then we invite you to join our teaching community. You then keep up-to-date on activities, have ample opportunity to share your materials and experiences, and can easily be in touch with other teachers.

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