**USW 30: Tangible Things: Harvard Collections in World History**

# TR at 10, and a weekly section to be arranged

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**What this course is about:**

Over four centuries, Harvard has amassed an astonishing array of tangible things—not just rare books and manuscripts, but Babylonian roof tiles, Japanese tea bowls, African velvet, and the molars of giant pandas. The university not only owns a Gutenberg Bible, it also cares for Turkish sundials, a Chinese crystal ball, a divination basket from Angola, and spirit writing chalked on a child-sized slate in the nineteenth-century United States. Tucked away in storage cabinets or hidden closets in its museums and libraries are George Washington’s pheasants, Henry David Thoreau’s pencil, Vladimir Nabokov’s butterflies, and chemicals captured from a Confederate ship. The University Art Museums not only care for masterpieces of Renaissance painting but also for a silver-encrusted cup made from a coconut and a twentieth-century sculpture that incorporates fresh potatoes. The Natural History museums not only preserve rare zoological and botanical specimens but an intact Mexican tortilla more than a century old.

This course explains how and why such things arrived in Cambridge and what happened to them when they got here. Harvard’s collections are not only a source of wonder, they are a powerful resource for understanding our own relationships to material things today. Human beings make history through the things they gather, create, collect, exhibit, exchange, employ, throw away, recycle, reflect upon, or ignore. We invite you to step across divisions between the arts, the humanities, and the sciences to engage with news ways of thinking about the world around you.

**What We Will Ask You To Do:**

Our main requirement is that you **actively engage with the course**, attending lectures, completing section assignments, and designing a final project that allows you to extend your own capacities in some way. Please understand that each element of the course is related to the others. The best way to prepare for section is to be fully present (mind and body) in lecture. The best assurance of success on papers is to do your best in section assignments. And so on.

We have kept the reading light so that you will have time to do the required museum visits. We will also build some of these visits into section and lecture time.

During the weeks of February 17 and March 24, for example, we will rearrange the schedule to allow you to choose from among a variety of hands-on explorations behind the scenes in collections’ storage.

Here’s what we expect and how much it will count:

**1. Overall Participation (including lecture)** (20% of final grade)

This course blurs the conventional division between “lectures” and “sections” by expecting student participation in both and by incorporating hands-on exploration with discussion. We have included a variety of short videos, some from our HarvardX version of the course to allow more time for active learning in class.

2. **Weekly Section Assignments** (20% of final grade**)**

These will give you a chance to practice techniques you will need for your papers and final projects. Usually they should be submitted 24-hours before your section meets.

**3. Two Short *(5-6 page)* Papers**. (30% of final grade)

These will give you an opportunity to apply concepts from the course to an interpretation of a specific object or display. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be on the course website well before they are due.

First Paper—due by 5 p.m. February 20

Second Paper—due by 5 p.m. March 27

**3. A Final Project** *interpreting an object or group of objects in Harvard’s collections* (30% of final grad)

The final format of the project will depend on the nature of object you have chosen and the questions you want to explore, but it must reflect techniques modeled in the course. We will post many examples of successful projects submitted in the past as well as devote some class time to specific instruction in methods and techniques.

Project proposal—due April 7

Final project—due by 5 p.m. May 6

**Schedule**

**Jan. 27, Jan. 29 Introduction and overview**

1. View “John Harvard’s Toe”

2. Get acquainted with the very different approaches of Steven Conn and Rachel Poliquin by reading and comparing *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, Chap. 1, pp. 1-31 and *The Breathless Zoo,* Introduction*,* pp. 1-10.

3. Read Ulrich, Preface and “Rewriting Harvard’s History,” in YG, pp. ix-x, 1-3 [8-28] and Kennedy, “Introduction: Blacks and the Race Question at Harvard,” in *Blacks at Harvard: A Documentary History*, pp. xvii-xxiv

4. Consider two poems about Harvard Yard: Seamus Heaney, “John Harvard Walks the Yard,” and Edward Smyth Jones, “Harvard Square”

No Section. See Instructions for Walkabout.

**Feb. 3, 5 Wonder and Order**

1. View “This is Not a Chair”

2. Read Poliquin, Chap. 1 and 4, pp. 11-42. 111-140.

3. Compare *The voyages and travels of Frances Goelet, 1746-1758*. Ed. Kenneth Scott. Flushing, N.Y.: Queens College Press, c. 1970 with “A Visit to Harvard College, 1798,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Dec., 1961), pp. 510-514

4. Explore “The Harvard Fire of 1764,” University Archives. Follow links to primary documents. <http://library.harvard.edu/university-archives/featured-item/11_HarvardHallFire>

5. Take a look at two of the many “curiosities” at Harvard: Christopher Reed, “Gilded Nut,” *Harvard Magazine*, May-June 2011 <http://harvardmag.com/pdf/2011/05-pdfs/0511-72.pdf> (now on exhibit at HUAM) and

Andrea Early, “The Little Mermaid,” *Harvard Gazette*, Oct. 17, 1996 <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/1996/10.17/TheLittleMermai.html>

Section 1

**Feb. 10, 12 History and Memory 1636-1836**

1. View “A Toga in the Archives”

2. Visit the “Tangible Things” exhibit in the Teaching Gallery, HUAM, Third Floor

3. To prepare this week’s section assignment, explore these sources:

a. *New England Begins*, ed. Jonathan Fairbanks, vol. 3, p. 512

b.“The President’s Chair,” 979.1933; Harvard Art Museums on-line description; <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/304477>

c. “The President’s Chair,” in Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1840) pp. 288, 544,

d. Marvin Hightower: “The President’s Chair,” *Harvard Gazette*, Sept. 24, 2007, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2007/09/the-presidents-chair/>

e. Eliza Quincy drawing on Hollis

f. Modern woodturning, “A Revolution in Wood: The Bresler Collection,” podcast

<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2010/bresler/>

Section 2

**Feb. 17, 19 Explorations**

1. Read three essays from *Yards and Gates*: Wright, “Creating a Fellowship of Educated Men”; Lord, “Harvard Once Removed”; Minardi, “The Poet and the Petitioner” YG pp. 17-64 [30-107], and Sara Schechner, “Boston Electric.” [linked via iSite].

2. Explore Katie Callam, “Eighteenth-century Balloon Expedition.”

3. Locate the following portraits in the HUAM

a. Robert Feke, *Isaac Royal Family*. Harvard Law School. On display in Harvard University Art Museums, but not listed on their website.

b. John Singleton Copley, *Nicholas Boylston,* 1767. Level 2, Room 2240, European and American Art, 17th–19th century http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/299949?position=1

c. John Singleton Copley, *Mrs. Thomas Boylston*, 1766 Level 2, Room 2240, European and American Art, 17th–19th century

http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/299944?position=50

d. John Singleton Copley, *Thomas Boylston, Jr*., 1767-1769 Level 2, Room 2240, European and American Art, 17th–19th century

<http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/299946?position=57>

e. John Singleton Copley, *John Adams*, 1783. Level 2, Room 2410, South Arcade <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/299877?position=3>

**Note: in lieu of lecture on Thursday and regular sections on Thursday and Friday, you will choose from among a variety of special workshops. Among these will be a special demonstration for the entire class in the Science Center at 1 p.m. on Friday. You won’t want to miss that.**

Special sections

FIRST PAPER DUE Feb. 23 (Monday) by 5 p.m.

**Feb. 24, 26 “Look at the Fish”**

1. View “Look at the Fish”

2. For a written version of the story of Agassiz and the fish, see Samuel H. Scudder, "In the Laboratory With Agassiz", *Every Saturday*, (April 4, 1974) 16, 369-370, reprinted in Jules Marcou, *Life, letters, and works of Louis Agassiz*. New York : Macmillan and Co., 1896, pp. 94-97

3. Read Conn, Chap. 2, pp. 32-74

4. Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 38-61.

5. Explore, Molly Rogers, “Mirror of Race” <http://mirrorofrace.org/fair-women/>

Section 4

**March 3, 5 New England Stories**

1. View “Hidden in Plain Sight” and “A Tool Out of Place”

2. Read Poliquin, Chap 3, pp. 71-109.

3. Read Henry David Thoreau, “Brute Neighbors” from *Walden*, and pp. 161-178 from “The Allegash and East Branch,” from *The Maine Woods* 15th Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884). Also take a look at the Appendix in *The Maine Woods*

4. Read Ulrich, “A Woodsplint Basket,” and “Turning History’s Page,” *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2002. <http://harvardmagazine.com/2002/03/a-woodsplint-basket.html>

5. Read Elliott West, “Reconstructing Race,” *Western Historical Quarterly,* 34 (2003): 6-164.

Section 5

**March 10, 12 Rethinking Categories**

1. View the three videos: “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral”

2. Read “Introduction: Thinking with Things,” in *Tangible Things*.

3. Read Essays from *Yards and Gates*, pp. 87-156 [140-257]; Schwager, “Taking Up the Challenge”; Hoganson, “Harvard Men”; Horowitz, “The Great Debate”; Gloria Bruce, “Radcliffe Women at Play”; Karen Lepri, “Clothes Make the Man”

4. David Wallace Adams, “More than a Game: The Carlisle Indians Take to the

Gridiron, 1893-1917,” *Western Historical* Quarterly. 32 (2001): 25-53

5. W.E.B. Dubois, “A Negro Student at Harvard at the End of the Nineteenth Century,“ *Massachusetts Review* 1 (Spring 1960): 439-458

Section 6

SPRING BREAK

**March 24, 26 World’s Columbian Exposition**

1. Read Conn, Chap. 3, pp. 75-114

2. Read *Tangible Things*, Chap. 1, “Things in Place,” including 4 of the 6 case studies.

3. Read “An Artist’s Palette,” in TT, Chapter 3

4. Read “A Nostalgic Painting,” in TT, Chap. 4

**Note: We will again organize behind-the scenes visits to museums and other sites on Thursday and Friday**

Section 7

Second Paper Due by 5 p.m. on Monday, March 30

**March 31, April 1 Imperialism and Commerce**

1. View: “A Museum in a Box”

2. Read Conn, Chap. 4, pp. 115-150.

3. Read *Tangible Things,* Chap. 2, “Things Unplaced,” including “A Carved Spoon,” “A Mexican Tortilla” and a “Beetle Ornament.”

Section 8

**April 7, 9 Trouble at Home**

1. Read *Tangible Things,* Chap. 3 and 4, including remaining case studies.

2. Read essays in *Yards and Gates,* pp. 159-207 [259-344], focusing on Brekke, “Fair Harvard?”and Synnott, “Changing Harvard Student”

3. Amit Paley, “The Secret Court of 1920,” Harvard Crimson , November 21, 2002 <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/11/21/the-secret-court-of-1920-at/?page=single>

4. “The Harvard Dormitory Crisis,” in *Blacks at Harvard*, pp. 189- 227.

Section 9 Final Project Proposal Due in Section

**April 14, 16 Manifestoes**

1. Essays in *Yards and* Gates, pp. 215-244 [346-446]; focus on Mandel, “Feminism and Femininity in Almost Equal Balance” and Stetzer, “From Sympathizers to Organizers,”

2. “The Bauhaus Manifesto,” <http://www.thelearninglab.nl/resources/Bauhaus-manifesto.pdf>

3. David Letterman interview with Grace Hopper

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-vcErOPofQ>

Section 10

**April 21, 23 The post-modern museum**

1. Read Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo,* Ch. 6-7, pp. 171-223

Section 11

**April 28.** Panel Discussion on new directions for Harvard Collections

Final Projects Due by 5 p.m. May 6