

Portable Collections Program

# New York 100 Years Ago



BROOKLYN  
**CHILDREN'S**  
MUSEUM  
*touch the world!*

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# What's in the Case?

## Objects



Shortening can



Milk bottle



Rolling pin



Toy stove



Oil lamp



Tin cup



Sewing machine



Washboard



Darning egg



Sad Iron



Marbles



Slate



McGuffey reader



Vintage photographs (3)



Sheet music (2)

## What's in the Case?

### Objects



Mechanical bank



Toy fire wagon



Shaving advertisement



Straight razor



Patent medicine tin



Tooth puller

### Tools & Resources

Sears, Roebuck Catalog 1902 (reprint)

...If You Lived 100 Years Ago by Ann McGovern

Immigrant Kids by Russell Freedman

New York Life at the Turn of the Century in Photographs by Joseph Byron

## How to Handle Museum Objects

Learning to handle objects from the Museum's permanent collection with respect can be part of your students' educational experience of the case. Please share these guidelines with your class, and make sure your students follow them in handling objects in the case:

- **Students may handle the objects, carefully, under your supervision.**
- **Hold objects with two hands.** Hold them by the solid part of the body or by the strongest area rather than by rims, edges or protruding parts.
- **Paint, feathers, fur and fibers are especially fragile** and should be touched as little as possible. Remember that rubbing and finger oils can be damaging.
- **Do not shake objects** or the plexiglass cases they may be housed in.
- **Temperature differences, direct sunlight, and water can be very harmful to certain objects.** Please keep the objects away from radiators and open windows, and keep them secure.



## Teaching Students How to Look at Museum Objects

Objects have the power to fascinate people with their mere physical presence. Holding an object in their hands forms a tangible link between your students and the person who made or it used. This sense of physical connection makes it easier for students to think concretely about the ideas and concepts you introduce to them in your lessons.

Objects also have the power to tell us about their origins and purpose, provided we are willing to look at them in detail and think about what those details mean. Encourage your students to examine an object carefully, looking at its design and decoration. Have them describe its shape, size, and color. Ask them questions about what they see, and what that might tell them. For example, start by asking your students some of the following questions:

- What do you see in the object?
- What makes you say that? (It is important that your students use visual clues based on their observations when giving their answers.)
- What else can you see?

As the conversation begins to grow, you can ask questions about how the object was made:

- How do you think this object was made?
- What tools do you think the maker used?
- What materials did the maker use? Where might he or she have gotten those materials?
- How is the object decorated? What might the decorations mean?
- What does the object tell you about the person or people who made it?

Encourage students to base their answers on details they can see in the objects. This process encourages your students to be critical thinkers, and to form personal connections to different cultures, time and places. It also empowers students to talk about something they might think they are not familiar with.

# New York 100 Years Ago Through Artifacts



## To the teacher

An **artifact** is an object that someone made and used in the past. Artifacts can tell us a great deal about the people who created them. By looking at artifacts closely and asking questions about them, we can find out more about how people lived in the past.

Giving children the opportunity to handle historic tools and playthings can teach them more about the past than they could learn in any book. It can make the past concrete and vivid, and help children draw parallels between their own lives and the lives of people from the past. Just like books or photographs, artifacts can also be **primary documents** of history, illuminating what life was like long ago.

The artifacts in this Portable Collections case date from the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, with most originating between 1890 and 1910. They speak to several aspects of everyday life around 1900, such as food preparation, personal grooming, laundry, and children’s play and schooling. The books in this case contain illustrations or period photographs of people using objects similar to the artifacts we have provided, placing them in a historic context.

With these resources at hand, you and your students can take the study of life in New York one hundred years ago in many directions. The activities in this guide focus on domestic life, but you may also wish to study what life was like outside the home. In particular, your students may be interested in focusing on children’s activities in 1900, such as games, schooling, or work. The artifacts in the case can also be linked to larger themes of that era, such as **immigration**. For example, the shortening can in the case has a label written in Yiddish and meant to appeal to the Jewish immigrant consumer. **Modernization** is also an important related subject. The oil lamp in the case speaks to the transition from candle and oil lighting to electricity, while the washboard reflects the change from outdoor to indoor plumbing. The toy fire wagon demonstrates the trend from horses to

electric or gas vehicles. Other relevant themes may emerge as you and your students explore the artifacts in the case.

## New York 100 years ago

When Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island joined together with New York and the Bronx to become one city in 1898, New York suddenly became the second largest city in the world (after London). It was a vibrant, **diverse**, dirty city with an active port, thriving industry and business, great extremes between rich and poor, ethnic and racial tension, and an exploding population composed largely of immigrants. New technology and old coexisted side by side in everyday life. **Newfangled** automobiles shared the streets with horse-drawn carriages. Electricity, indoor plumbing, and other inventions were reinventing domestic work. Phonographs and moving pictures provided new forms of entertainment. Many inventions that were brand-new one hundred years ago are still used today. In many ways New York “then” was not unlike New York “now.” You and your students will find both familiar and unfamiliar objects and aspects of everyday life represented among the artifacts and books in this case.

## Children at school and at work

In the nineteenth century, New York’s public schools were so overcrowded that many children were turned away. However, with the consolidation of the city in 1898 and the efforts of reformers to end **child labor**, schools began to increase in number and quality around 1900. Their students were primarily lower- and middle-class; wealthy children had private tutors or attended private academies. Black children went to separate schools (due to the Supreme Court’s 1896 ruling that “separate but equal” facilities were legal). The subjects taught in school included reading, spelling, history, arithmetic, geography, and penmanship. The favored instructional methods were memo-



## New York 100 Years Ago Through Artifacts (continued)

rization and recitation. Children read from books called primers or **readers** (such as McGuffey Readers), and wrote their lessons on slates like the one in the case.

But many New York City children did not attend school, or did so only part-time. They had to work to help support their families. For example, nearly 8,000 kids (many of them less than fifteen years old) worked in envelope factories for \$3 a week. More than 8,000 girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen worked in paper collar factories, where each girl was expected to count and box 18,000 collars every ten-hour workday. About 10,000 children worked in paper carton factories; they often took materials home to complete extra work in the evenings, which meant they could not even go to night school. The Brooklyn Children’s Museum (the first children’s museum in the world) opened in 1899, in part to serve the educational needs of the many local children who could not attend school.

### Family entertainment

Even in 1900, Coney Island and Central and Prospect Parks were big draws for New Yorkers young and old. But much more than today, people in that era (especially children) created their own entertainments. Popular outdoor games included patsy (hopscotch), marbles, jacks, and stickball. Boys played at boxing, which was a popular sport along with baseball. Indoors, children whose families could afford them might play board or card games, trade baseball cards, build with blocks, or play with dolls. The Sears, Roebuck Catalogue shows some ready-made children’s toys, but nothing like the selection children have today. Some children enjoyed mechanical banks like the one in the case.

Music and performance were big entertainments for both adults and children. The newly-invented phonograph was the only mechanical music player available, and played songs recorded on wax cylinders or metal discs. Phonographs were still uncommon, though, and most people had to make their own music on pianos or other instruments. Songs were written

down on sheet music (like the songs in the case) and sold to the public. Some popular songs of the period were “A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight” (1896), “Hiawatha” (1901), and “Meet Me in St. Louis” (1904).

The first story-telling movie was a ten-minute silent film called “The Great Train Robbery,” which was screened on 14th Street in 1903. Mostly, though, people went to **vaudeville** shows or productions specific to an ethnic group, like those of the thriving Yiddish theater.

### Food preparation

For rich and poor alike, there was no such thing as packaged or take-out food in 1900. There were restaurants and street vendors of foods and ice cream, but for the most part, almost everybody’s food was prepared at home on a coal stove (similar to the toy version in the case). There were shops like bakeries for certain prepared foods, but many people also baked their own biscuits, rolls, and cookies.

The millions of immigrants arriving in the United States in that period brought with them exotic new foods. Ethnic restaurants and food markets began to spring up in the city. People recreated recipes from their countries of origin, and some opened stores to sell special imported ingredients or products intended for specific immigrant communities (like the shortening can in the case).

### Clothing care

Cloth and clothing was harder to make and relatively more valuable at the turn of the century than in our own day, and taking good care of it was important. Well-to-do families had servants to do their laundry, but the poor and middle-class had to fend for themselves. Although the manual washing machine was invented in the nineteenth century, most people cleaned their clothes using a washboard and a pan. They would make or repair clothing by hand or using



**New York 100 Years Ago Through Artifacts (continued)**

a sewing machine (like the example in the case), and would mend socks using a darning egg. Since there were no easy-care synthetic fabrics, ironing was a constant chore; most families used a sad iron like the one we have provided.

**Personal care**

Personal care underwent a revolution during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries with the introduction of indoor plumbing and the invention of deodorants, cosmetics, and hair products. Only about 14% of American homes had a bathtub in 1904. It was a luxury and had to be filled by heating water on the stove and carrying it to the tub. Children bathed in the big sinks that doubled for laundry tubs. People generally did spot washing or bathed less frequently—some even questioned whether bathing more than once a week was healthy! Even so, deodorants were invented in the 1890s, and nice soaps and lotions (mostly made at home) were appreciated.



People in 1900 brushed their teeth with salt or soda powder, using brushes made of animal bristles. Shampoo hadn't been invented yet, so they washed their hair with plain soap or with homemade concoctions like eggs and lemon. The basic tool of hair grooming was a good hairbrush. Women used crimping or curling irons similar to those still manufactured today. Men shaved with straight razors (like the one in the case) or safety razors, which were introduced in the 1880s.

**Patent medicines** for all sorts of ailments proliferated in the late-nineteenth century, and a gullible public eagerly purchased miraculous cures for stomachaches, diphtheria, painless dental extractions, and baldness (even though these tonics and powders rarely did any good). People also relied on home remedies, such as cod liver oil (considered to be a cure-all). Some relieved their aches and pains with substances that are now illegal (like cocaine). Aspirin was only invented in 1899. Imagine life without aspirin! □

*Words in boldface have been included in the Vocabulary Words section on page 23.*

**Interesting facts about New York and the United States in 1904:**

- The American flag had 45 stars.
- There were 3,437,202 people living in New York.
- 70% of New Yorkers lived in tenements.
- Only 8% of all homes had a telephone.
- More than 95% of all births in the U.S. took place at home.
- The leading causes of death in the United States were pneumonia and influenza.
- The average life expectancy in the U.S. was 47.
- The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 miles per hour.
- The average wage in the US was \$0.22 per hour.
- The average U.S. worker made between \$200–\$400 per year.
- Sugar cost \$0.04 per pound. Eggs were \$0.14 per dozen. Coffee cost \$0.15 per pound.
- One in ten U.S. adults couldn't read or write.
- Only 6% of all Americans had graduated from high school.

## Information About the Objects in the Case

### SHORTENING CAN (Object No. 77.16ab)



This steel **shortening** can dates from the 1930s, but is similar to products from the early 1900s. The Yiddish writing on the label indicates that it was marketed to the large immigrant Jewish population of New York City. It promotes

Zimmer & Company shortening as maintaining the highest kosher standards, and being “Best for baking, frying, and cooking.” Shortening was developed in the late nineteenth century as a substitute for lard, and was a household staple.

### MILK BOTTLE (Object No. 2006.5.5)



Milk bottles came into use in the 1880s and 1890s. Many bottles had the name of the dairy they came from molded onto them so that they could be returned for reuse (although the one in the case does not). The bottles also had the price

on the side. Milk was about five to six cents a quart in 1900, so the price on this bottle was used to date it.

### ROLLING PIN (Object No. 64.11.2)



The rolling pin is one object that looks much the same today as it did a century ago. This kitchen tool is used for flattening and putting air into dough. Commercial bakeries did exist one hundred years ago, but many families still

made their own bread and pastries at home instead of buying them.

### TOY STOVE (Object No. 2006.5.10a-d)



Although this tiny cast-iron stove is children’s toy, it is also an accurate model of the full-size coal stoves used in New York homes around 1900. Landlords did not supply apartments with stoves; tenants had to buy their own.

Just like a real stove, this toy is made of black cast iron. Because stoves were so big and heavy, they came in pieces and had to be assembled in the apartment.

### OIL LAMP (Object No. 2006.5.4ab)



Electricity was invented in the late 19th century, but did not reach all New York City homes until around World War I, so candles, gas lamps, and oil lamps were used well into the 1900s. Some lamps were very elaborate, with beautifully

painted or stained-glass globes, while others (like this one) were very simple. To use this lamp, a person would fill the base about halfway with lamp oil, pull the cotton wick up about 1/4 inch out of its tube, and light it. Since the wick is saturated with oil, the flame is fueled by the oil and the wick itself burns very little.

### TIN CUP (Object No. 69.12.3)



Enamelled tin tableware was very popular of in the 19th and 20th centuries, mostly because it was inexpensive and durable. It could be found both in the tenement kitchens of the Lower East Side and Williamsburg, and in pioneer homes on the

western prairies. The 1902 [Sears, Roebuck Catalogue](#) offers several sets. The marbled “agate” pattern on this cup was very common. Similar versions are still sold today.



Information About the Objects in the Case (continued)

**SEWING MACHINE** (Object No. 2006.0.2 )



This Peerless Automatic Smith & Egge Sewing Machine looks like a child's toy, but when it was made back in 1901, it actually worked and could be used for small repairs or detail work at home. Mechanical sewing machines for industrial

and home use were developed in the second half of the 19th century. This little machine was powered using a hand crank, but the first electric sewing machines were introduced in 1905.

**WASHBOARD** (Object No. 77.51.1)



With its corrugated metal surface and sturdy wooden frame, the washboard was used to scrub the dirt out of clothing. Although this washboard dates to about 1900, similar models were invented in the late 18th century. Wash-

boards were widely used until the washing machine (invented in the late 19th century) became affordable for working people (well into the 20th century). The washboard is still in use in parts of the world, but in New York it is better known as a musical instrument!

**DARNING EGG** (Object No. 73.11.11)



Students today may be surprised to learn that there was a time when people actually mended the holes in their socks instead of just throwing them away! This process was called **darning**. Slipping a holey sock over a darning egg

stretched the sock out so the sewer could see the hole better, and repair it without accidentally sewing one side of the sock to the other. Darning was a constant domestic activity until the mid 20th century.

**SAD IRON** (Object No. 64.69.2ab)



Sad irons were one of the most commonly used irons in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were originally called "solid" irons, but over time this was shortened to "sad," giving them their unusual name. Sad irons were heated on the

hearth or the stove, and used to press the wrinkles out of clothing. Most sad irons were made of cast iron and were quite heavy, like this one!

**MARBLES** (Object No. 64.43.4)



Marbles was a popular children's pastime from the nineteenth century until well into the twentieth. Children have played similar games for thousands of years, often using small round pebbles or balls of natural clay. In the 19th

century people began to manufacture marbles made of ceramic, china, glass, or even genuine marble, and the modern game of marbles was born. The glass and ceramic marbles in the case date to about 1850.

**SLATE** (Object No. 58.15.1)



Until well into the 20th century, many schoolchildren wrote their lessons on slates, which provided a practical, reusable alternative to expensive writing paper. Slates were made from a thin piece of slate stone encased in a wooden frame.

Students used them to practice their penmanship and work out arithmetic problems. Once they finished an assignment, a teacher checked their work. Then they would wipe their slates clean and go on to the next assignment.



Information About the Objects in the Case (continued)

**MCGUFFEY’S FOURTH ECLECTIC READER**



(Object No. 2006.7)  
First published in 1836, McGuffey **readers** were the most common textbooks of the 19th century. Created by William McGuffey (a progressive educator who wanted to spread literacy), there were

six readers in the series, geared toward different ability levels. McGuffey readers did not just encourage children to read; the stories and poems the books contained were meant to improve their minds and morals, too. Each reader was updated periodically; the revised Fourth Reader in the case dates to 1901.

**VINTAGE PHOTOGRAPHS** (Object Nos. 2006.0.4, 2006.0.5, 2006.0.6 )



Photography was invented in the mid 19th century, and by 1900 portraits had become an affordable luxury for the middle and working classes. The three photos in the case represent two girls and a school class.

The girls in the individual portraits are dressed in their finest clothes and posed against a painted background in the photographer’s studio. The school class photo is undated, but based on the students’ clothing it appears to be from the 1890s or early 1900s (when puffed shoulders were fashionable for women).

**SHEET MUSIC** (Object No. 2006.8)



In an age before radio or compact disc players, when even phonographs were still rare, people who wanted to listen to music usually had to make their own. Sheet music helped people learn the popular songs of the day, so they could sing

them or play them on the piano. As you can see from the covers of “When the Band Goes Marching By” and “I’ll Be Your Rain-Beau,” music publishers often put the names and images of well-known singers on their sheet music to encourage more people to buy it.

**MECHANICAL BANK** (Object No. 53.3.35)



Mechanical banks were invented in the U.S. around 1867. Parents bought them hoping that their children’s curiosity to see the bank work would make them save their pennies. Many banks took their theme from the Bible, the Wild West,

or the circus, and were brightly painted (though this bank’s paint has worn away with age). This bank depicts an organ grinder (a man with a box organ that plays music) and his performing monkey. To make a deposit, put a coin in the monkey’s mouth and press down on the metal button on the side of the bank. A spring-loaded rod sends the monkey leaping towards the man, and the coin in its mouth drops into the organ box.

**TOY FIRE WAGON** (Object No. 2006.0.3)



This children’s toy depicts state-of-the-art fire-fighting equipment circa 1900, including a steam-powered water pumper, and a swift team of horses to draw the wagon. Firefighters drove the wagons, and manned hoses, buckets,

and ladders at the scene of the fire. Volunteer firefighters patrolled New York since its earliest days as a Dutch colony, but after the Civil War the city created a paid fire department.

**SHAVING ADVERTISEMENT** (Object No. 2006.12ab)



Dating to 1895, this advertisement extols the virtues of Williams Shaving Soaps. In the late 19th century, special soaps and after-shave lotions for men grew in popularity. Some were homemade, but manufactured products quickly found a

market. It is hard to imagine life before advertising, but in fact posters, magazines, and advertising flourished with the mid 19th-century invention of lithography, a cheap way to mass-produce printed images.



Information About the Objects in the Case (continued)

**STRAIGHT RAZOR** (Object No. 73.11.18ab)



Around the turn of the century, men either visited the barber for a shaving, or shaved at home using straight razors like this one. The blade has a safety guard with serrated edges, but the man who used it would still have to be careful not to

cut himself. This razor has a double-edged, disposable blade, which was invented the 1890s. Before disposable blades, razor blades had to be **stropped** (sharpened on a piece of leather) regularly to maintain sharp edges.

*You can learn more about these historical artifacts and other objects from around the world by visiting our Collections Central Online database at [www.brooklynkids.org/emuseum](http://www.brooklynkids.org/emuseum).*

**PATENT MEDICINE TIN** (Object No. 2006.11)



The late 19th century saw a boom in so-called “**patent**” **medicines**. With names like Rattlesnake Root and Snail Water, these remedies were advertised as cure-alls for a multitude of diseases.

However, many of them had little to no medicinal value at all, while others simply consisted of tried-and-true ingredients like cod liver oil. The success of patent medicines was due less to their effectiveness than to their slick advertising.

**TOOTH PULLER** (Object No. 64.11.3)



One hundred years ago, if your tooth hurt, you didn’t see a dentist—you just pulled it out! A tooth puller looks very much like a regular pair of pliers, except for the tips. Instead of being pointed, the tips of the tooth puller have

an upward-curving jaw with blunt ends and grooves for a better grip on the tooth. This particular tooth puller dates to around 1900, but tools like it have been used in Europe and America for centuries.

## ACTIVITY 1

# Introductory Activity: Now and Then

Grades 2–5

Related Objects: All

### Materials:

- [Sears, Roebuck Catalogue](#) (from the case)
- Blackboard OR chart paper
- Copies of “Now and Then” worksheet (see following page), one per student or group

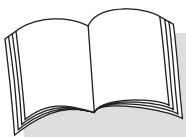
### What To Do:

- 1 Tell students that they will be studying the history of New York City by looking at artifacts of everyday life from 100 years ago. As a class, discuss what they think life was like back then, particularly by drawing parallels with the students’ lives today (see Discussion Questions below). Write students’ responses on the blackboard or chart paper.
- 2 Hand out the “Now and Then” worksheets. Explain that some (but not all) of the objects on the sheet would have been found in American homes around 1900, and that it will be their job to guess which objects are old and which are modern. Under the images on their worksheet, they should write “Then” to indicate which objects would have been around in 1900, and “Now” to indicate which objects are not that old.
- 3 Working individually or in small groups, have students complete the “Now and Then” worksheet.
- 4 Reconvene as a class. Go over students’ answers to the worksheet and discuss their responses (see Worksheet Answer Key below).

### Discussion Questions:

- Were you surprised at any of the answers on the worksheet? Did you think some inventions were older or newer?
- What sort of appliances do you have in your kitchen? How did people keep things cold before there were refrigerators? How did they cook before there were gas or electric stoves? What kinds of containers did food come in? What sort of tools did people use?
- How do you keep clean? What do you do to get ready for the day, or for going to sleep at night? What did people do in 1900? Did they have bathtubs and showers in their homes?
- How do you (or your family) do laundry? Do you do laundry at home or at the laundromat? How do you think people washed clothes in 1900? Did they have machines?
- What do you like to do for fun? How do you think children entertained themselves one hundred years ago? Did they play outdoors? What sort of games did they enjoy? Did they go to school?
- Around 1900, most New York City homes had only two rooms. Imagine you had only two rooms in your house. Which rooms would you pick? Why? How would you fit all of your family’s belongings and daily activities (such as cooking, playing, and sleeping) into two rooms?

See page 24 for details on how this activity meets New York State Learning Standards.



### LITERACY EXTENSIONS

- Show your students the books from the case, and tell them you will be leaving the books out for them to look at when they have time. You may also wish to show them the 1902 [Sears, Roebuck Catalogue](#) and explain how to look up some of the objects pictured on the worksheet or included in the case (such as kitchen supplies).
- Have students look up the “Then” items on the worksheet in the [Sears, Roebuck Catalogue](#), identify them, and write a few sentences describing how each object was used around 1900.

# Then and Now

Some of the things on this page would have been found in American homes around 1900, but not all of them! Can you guess which objects are old and which are modern?

Under each picture, write Then to indicate which objects would have been around in 1900, or Now to indicate which objects are not that old. Don't worry if you aren't sure how old each object is. This activity is just for fun, and some of the answers may surprise you!



Ice skates



Toy bear



Action figure



Baby carriage



Phonograph



Roller blades



Backpack



Lunchbox



Sad iron



iPod



Sewing machine



Calculator

## ACTIVITY 2

# What Can Artifacts Tell Me?

**Grades 3–5**

**Related Objects: All**

Authentic objects from a historic period are called **artifacts**. Along with images and written documents made at the time, artifacts serve as **primary documents** of a particular period. By observing the artifacts in the case carefully, students will learn more about the people who made or used them one hundred years ago. They will also begin to ask (and even answer) their own questions about life in the past.

### Materials:

- Artifacts from the case
- Copies of the “What Can Artifacts Tell Me?” worksheet, one per student or group
- Blackboard OR chart paper OR transparency of worksheet and overhead projector

### What To Do:

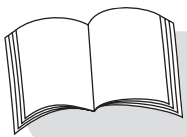
- 1 Depending on the age and interests of your students and the amount of time you would like to spend, you can do this activity using a handful of objects or every object in the case.
- 2 Create stations around the classroom and distribute the artifacts from the case among them. There may be more than one artifact at each station.
- 3 In a whole-class discussion, introduce the word “artifact” and work to define it as a class. Explain that the objects around the room are authentic pieces of history, and that by examining them closely we can learn a lot about the time period they came from.

- 4 Hand out the “What Can Artifacts Tell Me?” worksheet and explain that students will be filling it out by observing the objects. You may want to choose one artifact and model how to examine it and fill out the worksheet.
- 5 Remind students to handle the objects carefully and only in order to learn something about them.
- 6 Working individually or in small groups, have students rotate between observation stations while answering questions about each artifact.
- 7 Have students reconvene as a class to discuss their findings. Use the blackboard or chart paper to make notes about the students’ observations, including a list of any questions they come up with. You may also wish to respond by presenting some background information on the objects (see pages 7\_10).

### Discussion Questions:

- What do you notice about each object? What can you see? What does that tell you?
- Are there some artifacts whose purpose isn’t clear to you? What clues does the object itself give you about how it might be used? How could you find out what it is for?
- What do the objects tell you about the people who made or used them? How can you tell?

**See page 24 for details on how this activity meets New York State Learning Standards.**








### LITERACY EXTENSION

Have students pick one or two of the objects from the case, and write a story about turn-of-the-century life in which these objects are used.






# What can artifacts tell me?

Authentic objects from a historic period are called artifacts. The artifacts on this sheet are all about 100 years old, and would have been used by people living in New York City around 1900. By looking at the artifacts closely, you can learn things about them and the people who made or used them.

	What do you see? (Describe the artifact's color, shape, and size.)	What are some of its interesting details or decorations?	How do you think this artifact was used? Why?	What do you want to know about this artifact?
				
				
				
				
				



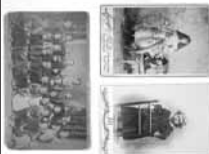


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# What can artifacts tell me?

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## ACTIVITY 3

# What Was It Like? Object Collage

### All Grades

### Related Objects: All

Students will use their imaginations and their experiences with the artifacts in the case to travel back in time to a New York City home circa 1900. This activity stimulates them to think about what everyday life was like back then, and to express their ideas through art and writing. Encourage students to talk amongst themselves about the topic while they are making their collages. This should be a fun session with lots of room for creativity!

### Materials:

- Copies of images of artifacts from this teacher guide, books in the case, the [Sears, Roebuck Catalogue](#), and the Internet
- A large sheet of sturdy construction paper or tag board for each student
- Art materials such as colored construction paper, wallpaper samples, paper doilies, fabric scraps, or corrugated cardboard
- Colored pencils, crayons, markers, or other drawing materials
- Scissors
- Glue

### What To Do:

- 1 Using the books in the case, in your school or local library, or the Internet, find and prepare multiple copies of images of things a turn-of-the-century home might have in it.
- 2 Discuss what students might need or want in their turn-of-the-century home. Have them think about food, clothing, furniture, lighting, decoration, entertainment, and other aspects of their own lives and homes that they imagine a child like them would have needed in 1900.
- 3 Hand out the copies of object images, and have students select some for making a collage.
- 4 Encourage students to think of a particular theme for their collages, which might be “kitchen,” “living room,” “tabletop,” “music,” “wardrobe,” or the like. Alternatively, show them a floor plan for a period house or apartment (see [www.pbs.org/1900house](http://www.pbs.org/1900house) or [www.tenement.org](http://www.tenement.org) for examples). Identify what kinds of things went into each room, and have students “furnish” a room accordingly.

- 5 Hand out the large pieces of construction paper and all other art materials. Ask students to create a collage using the object images they have chosen in a composition along with other materials they have cut out or drawn. Their compositions may be abstract (with object images and shapes cut out of collage materials floating decoratively on the page) or figurative (with object images assembled into a realistic picture).
- 6 Throughout the activity, encourage students to share ideas and talk with each other about what they are doing.
- 7 When the collages are finished, have students share their work with the rest of the class. They may give an oral presentation at the front of the class, or write a description of the turn-of-the-century “environment” they have created. Older students may also talk or write about what they imagine it would be like to eat, play, or work in that environment.

### Discussion Questions:

- Starting when you get up in the morning, what kinds of “objects” do you use as you go through the day? If you went back in time, which modern objects do you think you would really need?
- What things would you have to give up if you didn’t have electricity (including batteries)? Are there non-electrical substitutes for these objects?
- How would your life be different if your home didn’t have running water? What equipment would you need to have in order to get water and use it at home?
- What kinds of activities would families engage in if there were no television or radio? What did people do for entertainment one hundred years ago?

See page 24 for details on how this activity meets New York State Learning Standards.

## ACTIVITY 4

# Paid by the Piece: Flower Math

**Grades 3–5**

**Related Objects: Sewing machine**

Turn-of-the-century ladies' hats were very large and elaborately decorated, often with artificial flowers (check the books in the case for examples). In 1900, nearly 12,000 working-class children (all less than twelve years old, and many as young as five) made these artificial flowers in their homes. Instead of being paid by the hour, they were paid by the number of flowers they produced. This is known as **piecework**.

Children doing piecework usually made very little money (for example, around five cents per 100 paper flowers they produced). They and their parents could also work in factories or sweatshops, but the pay was not very high. In 1900, the average pay for a man was 22 cents an hour for a 59-hour workweek, or about \$13.00 a week. Women and children were paid much less for the same work, but often had to work anyway to support the family.

In this activity, students will learn about piecework by making paper flowers. They will gain a sense of what it was like to earn a living at piecework 100 years ago. Since this was a period of transition between handcrafted work and assembly-line work, they can also experience the difference in efficiency between the two methods.

### Materials:

- Copies of the paper flower template (see following page), one per student
- Tissue paper of several different colors
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Pipe cleaners

### What To Do:

- 1** Discuss piecework with the class. This type of work was done by poor and working class people, either to earn a living or to supplement earnings from another job. Children helped their parents roll cigars, string beads, make artificial flowers, sew small items like neckties, sort and label goods, or finish garments by attaching ribbons or buttons. They were paid by the number of pieces they produced, so they worked as quickly as possible.
- 2** Hand out the paper flower templates and have students each make a paper flower to learn the process. First they should draw the three flower petals on a

piece of tissue paper and cut them out. Show them how to layer the flower petals (with the smallest on top) and poke two holes through the layers for the pipe cleaners with the scissors (careful not to tear the paper!). Have them thread a pipe cleaner up through one hole and back down through the other, lining up the ends and twisting them together to form the stem (see illustration).

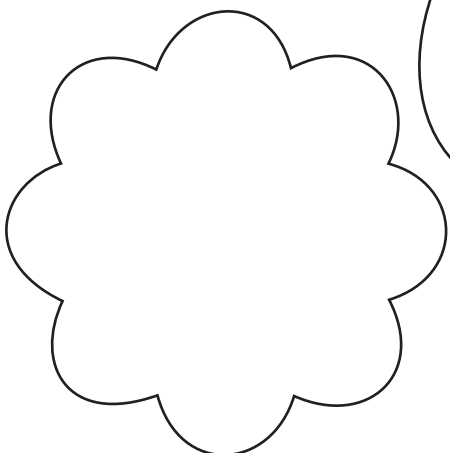
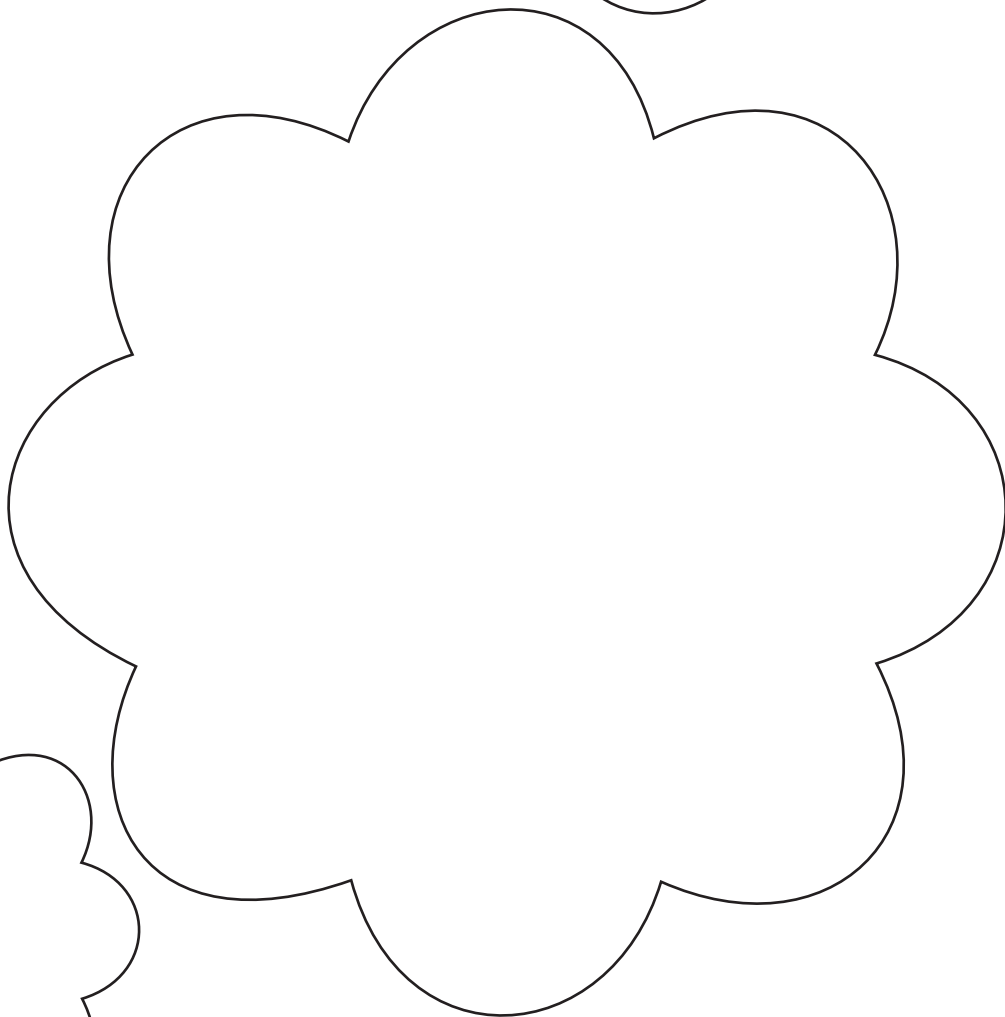
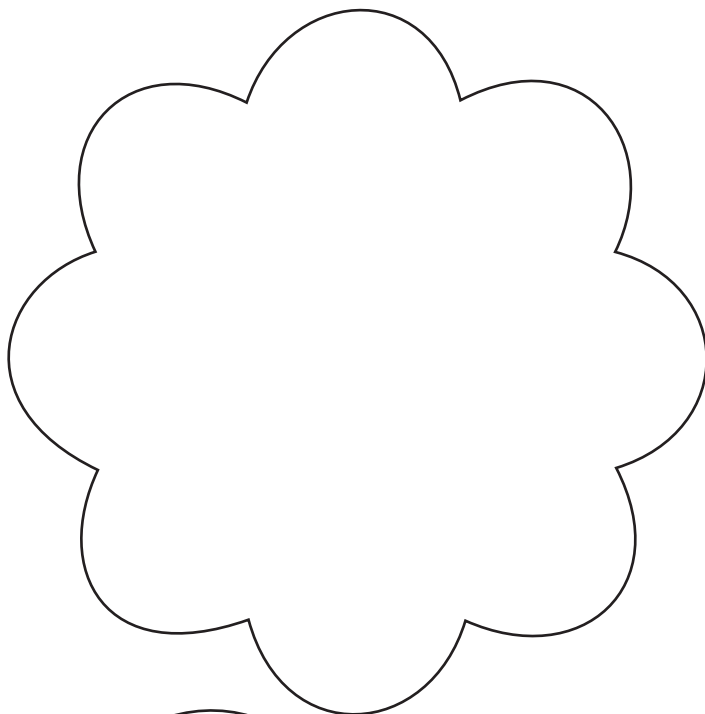
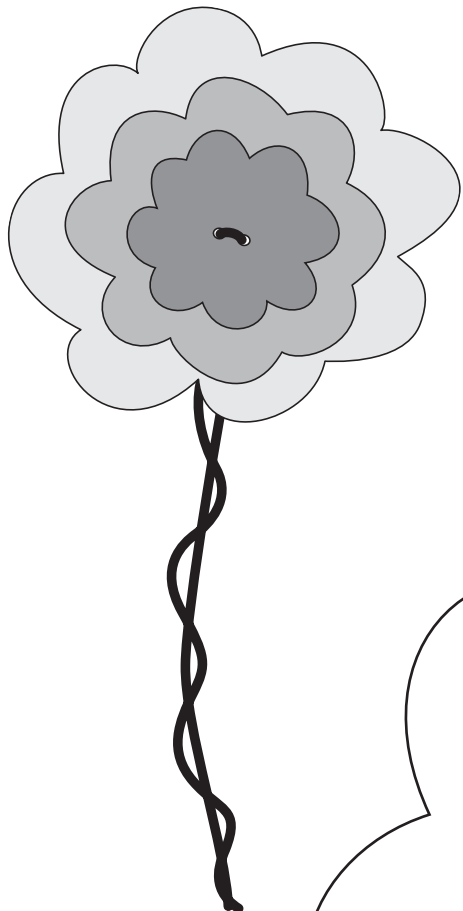
- 3** Now that the students know how to make the flowers, divide them in partners or small groups and have them try to make as many paper flowers as they can in a set period of time (such as five or ten minutes). At the end, tally up how many each group made.
- 4** Ask students to figure out how long it would take their group or the class to make 100 flowers. Tell them to imagine that they are being paid 5 cents per 100 flowers. How many would they have to make to earn \$4.00 a week? How long would it take them?
- 5** Organize the students into assembly lines of five students each. The first student traces the flower pattern, the second cuts it out, the third pokes holes in it, the fourth threads the pipe cleaners through, and the fifth twists them together to finish the flower. Again, give students a set amount of time for their work.
- 6** Compare the number of flowers each group produces as an assembly line to the number it produced when each member made flowers individually. Repeat the math exercise in Step 4.

### Discussion Questions:

- How many hours would it take to make \$4.00 per week if five students worked together, the way poor and working-class families often did 100 years ago?
- What if the family were just a mother and child? How much money would they make in a year if they worked the number of hours each week as the family of five did?
- Which is faster—making the flower by yourself or in an assembly line? Why would breaking down the steps make it faster or more efficient? How do you feel when you do only one thing over and over again?
- What examples of assembly line work do you see today? (Hint: Sometimes this can be seen in short-order diners, pizza shops, car washes.)

**See page 24 for details on how this activity meets New York State Learning Standards.**

Paper Flower  
Pattern



## ACTIVITY 5 Let's Play!

### All Grades

### Related Objects: Marbles, Sears, Roebuck Catalogue

Here's an opportunity for students to have fun and experience what playtime was like for children one hundred years ago! Besides the marbles game suggested below, you can supply other games from that period, too, such as jacks, patsy (hopscotch), and jump rope.

### Materials:

- Set of glass marbles (please do not play with the antique marbles in the case)
- Chalk or tape with which to make a ring on the ground or floor

### What To Do:

- 1 Discussion with your class the sort of games children played in 1900. Show them the Sears, Roebuck Catalogue, and point out how few toys there are in it. Talk about what else children could do to entertain themselves.
- 2 Introduce the game of marbles. Has anyone in the class played it? Did their parents or grandparents? If they don't know, have them ask at home.
- 3 Create a circle on the ground two to three feet wide. You can use chalk on asphalt or concrete, a stick in dirt, or tape on the classroom floor.
- 4 Explain how marbles is played. The object of the game is to knock as many marbles as you can out of the circle.

- 5 Players should each select one "shooter" marble and place any marbles they wish to use as targets inside the circle. Shooters are large marbles used to knock smaller target marbles out of the ring.
- 6 Players take turns kneeling on the ground and flicking their shooter marbles from outside the ring at any marble (s) inside the ring. (Try to shoot by making a fist and flicking with your thumb.)
- 7 If a player successfully knocks a target marble out of the ring, he or she should collect that marble and take another turn.
- 8 Continue shooting in turn until the ring is empty. Count marbles at the end of the game. The winner is the player with the most marbles.
- 9 Return the marbles to their original owners (unless you're playing "keepsies," in which case each player keeps the marbles he or she won during the game).

### Discussion Questions:

- What are your favorite games? Did they exist one hundred years ago?
- Do you play any games similar to marbles? What are they? How are they different?
- Where would you play this game in your home? Where do you think children played when their homes were very small?

See page 24 for details on how this activity meets New York State Learning Standards.



### MOVEMENT AND RESEARCH EXTENSIONS:

- Check out [www.streetplay.com/links/](http://www.streetplay.com/links/) for details about games children in New York have played for years, as well as games children continue to play all over the world.
- Do some research: find out how games like stickball, stoopball, and patsy were played.

## ACTIVITY 6

# Additional Activities and Curricular Connections

### **Social Studies: Oral history interviews** **Grades 3–5**

Have students conduct an oral history interview with an older adult in their life (such as a parent, caretaker, family member, or neighbor). As a class, brainstorm ideas about questions to ask during their interviews. For example, they might ask interviewees about their childhood, including what school was like for them, and what their favorite games or pastimes were. They might ask interviewees about their family history, and when their ancestors immigrated to the U.S. Students might ask about a particular artifact in their interviewee's possession, and its personal or historical significance. Students may draw a picture, write a report, or give an oral report about what they learned from their interviewee. See the PBS American Family website at [www.pbs.org/americanfamily/gap/sharing.html](http://www.pbs.org/americanfamily/gap/sharing.html) for more tips and ideas about how to do an oral history interview.

### **Social Studies: Create a timeline** **Grades 3–5**

Create a timeline of the twentieth century to give students a better idea of how long ago 100 years really is! Start with a grid that has the decades written across the top. Create left-hand columns with themes that will be meaningful to your students, such as *Ourselves* (for birth years and special memories); *Our Families* (for family dates, such as when they moved to New York); *School* (when was it founded); *News and Events* (presidents, wars, and so on); and *Inventions and Explorations* (such as the creation of television, and the first man on the moon). Have students suggest themes and fill in information in each box. In conjunction with the timeline, have them interview older family members or neighbors about their family history and what life was like when they were kids. Add appropriate information to the timeline.

### **Geography: Mapping immigration** **All Grades**

Immigration was an important aspect of life in New York one hundred years ago. Your students can learn about immigration and study geography by mapping their ancestors' regions or countries of origin. For homework, have students ask their parents or caretakers about where their family is from. The next day, students should plot their ancestors' regions or countries of origin on a map, either individually (on a photocopied worksheet of a world map) or as a whole-class activity (on a world map hanging at the front of the classroom).

### **Math: Outfitting a home** **Grades 4–5**

Tell your students they are to imagine that it is 1900 and they have \$40 to spend on equipping one room in their home, such as a kitchen, bedroom, or sitting room. Working individually or in groups, they can use the [Sears, Roebuck Catalogue](#) to look up the price of the items they need. Their total purchases can be no more than \$40. If they can furnish their room completely for less, they can also order something they want for themselves, like a toy.

### **Science and Technology: Interesting inventions** **Grades 3–5**

The turn of the 20th century was a time of great technological innovation. Many exciting inventions we now use every day were created in the twenty-odd years before and after 1900, such as the telephone (1876), the electric light bulb (1878), and the airplane (1903). Discuss these inventions with your class, and brainstorm other important inventions that have improved our everyday lives. Working individually or in groups, have students research those inventions (such as when they were invented, who invented them, and why they were important) and present their findings to the class in a poster or an oral report. At the end of the presentations, have students vote on which invention they think most significantly improved human life.

See page 24 for details on how these activities meet New York State Learning Standards.

## Vocabulary Words

**artifact:**

an object that a person made and used in the past.

**child labor:**

the employment of a child in a business or industry (such as a sweatshop), usually for long hours and low pay, and in poor working conditions. Child labor was an important social issue in the U.S. in 1900, but national laws to help working children were not passed until 1938.

**culture:**

a group of people's way of life, including its common ideas, customs, and traditions.

**darn:**

to mend a hole in a piece of cloth using interweaving stitches.

**diverse:**

made up of different parts that are not like one another.

**emigrate:**

to leave one's own country in order to live in another country.

**ethnic:**

having to do with a group of people sharing the same national origin, language, or culture.

**immigrate:**

to settle in a new country.

**modernize:**

to change something to better suit modern needs, tastes, or usage.

**newfangled:**

something newly invented or of the newest fashion.

**patent medicine:**

a packaged, commercially-sold remedy advertised as a cure for disease. Despite their extravagant claims, many patent medicines were ineffective, and had little or no medicinal value at all.

**piecework:**

work done by the piece, and paid for at a standard rate for each piece produced.

**primary document:**

a written document, image, or object that provides a direct, firsthand source of information about a particular event or period in time. Artifacts are one type of primary document.

**reader:**

a book used for teaching or practicing reading.

**shortening:**

a substance made of vegetable fat, which is used in cooking as a substitute for lard.

**strop:**

to sharpen a straight razor by rubbing it against a band of leather; or, the band of leather used to sharpen a straight razor.

**sweatshop:**

a small factory employing workers under unfair and unsanitary conditions.

**tenement:**

a room or set of rooms used by one tenant or family; or a building of tenement apartments.

**tradition:**

the handing down of customs, ideas and beliefs from one generation to the next; or a custom, idea, or belief that is handed down in this way.

**vaudeville:**

a stage entertainment popular in theaters in the early 20th century. A vaudeville show usually included a variety of unrelated acts, such as acrobats, performing animals, dancers, singers, comedians, or magicians.



■ RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS ■

## Correlations with New York State Learning Standards

The activities included in this guide meet the following New York State Learning Standard Performance Indicators for elementary students (K–5):

New York State Learning Standard Performance Indicators (Elementary Level)					Activity					
Standard Area	Standard #	Subject	Letter	Students will	1	2	3	4	5	6
Arts	1	Visual Arts	a	Experiment and create art works, in a variety of mediums (drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, video, and computer graphics), based on a range of individual and collective experiences		•	•			•
Arts	4	Visual Arts	a	Look at and discuss a variety of art works and artifacts from world cultures to discover some important ideas, issues, and events of those cultures		•				
English Language Arts	1	Listening & Reading		Gather and interpret information from children's reference books, magazines, textbooks, electronic bulletin boards, audio and media presentations, oral interviews, and from such forms as charts, graphs, maps, and diagrams	•	•	•		•	•
ELA	1	Listening & Reading		Ask specific questions to clarify and extend meaning	•	•	•	•	•	•
ELA	1	Speaking & Writing		Present information clearly in a variety of oral and written forms such as summaries, paraphrases, brief reports, stories, posters, and charts	•	•	•			•
ELA	1	Speaking & Writing		Use details, examples, anecdotes, or personal experiences to explain or clarify information	•	•	•			•
ELA	1	Speaking & Writing		Observe basic writing conventions, such as correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, as well as sentence and paragraph structures appropriate to written forms	•	•	•			•
ELA	2	Speaking & Writing		Create their own stories, poems, and songs using the elements of the literature they have read and appropriate vocabulary		•				
ELA	2	Speaking & Writing		Observe the conventions of grammar and usage, spelling, and punctuation	•	•	•			•
	4	Speaking & Writing		Listen attentively and recognize when it is appropriate for them to speak	•	•	•	•		•
ELA	4	Speaking & Writing		Take turns speaking and respond to other's ideas in conversations on familiar topics	•	•	•	•		•
Social Studies	1			Know the roots of American culture, its development from many different traditions, and the ways many people from a variety of groups and backgrounds played a role in creating it	•					•
Social Studies	1			Distinguish between near and distant past and interpret simple timelines						•
Social Studies	2			View historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music, and artifacts		•				•
Social Studies	2			Develop timelines that display important events and eras from world history						•
Social Studies	2			Explore the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, rules and laws, and social/cultural needs and wants of people during different periods in history and in different parts of the world	•	•	•	•	•	•

■ RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS ■

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New York State Learning Standard Performance Indicators (Elementary Level)					Activity					
Standard Area	Standard #	Subject	Letter	Students will	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social Studies	2			Study about how people live, work, and utilize natural resources	•	•	•	•	•	•
Social Studies	3			Ask geographic questions about where places are located; why they are located where they are; what is important about their locations; and how their locations are related to the location of other people and places						•
Social Studies	3			Gather and organize geographic information from a variety of sources and display in a number of ways						•
Health	1	Physical Education		Participate in physical activities (games, sports, exercises) that provide conditioning for each fitness area					•	
Math, Science, & Technology	1	Mathematical Analysis		Explore and solve problems generated from school, home, and community situations, using concrete objects or manipulative materials when possible				•		•
MST	3	Number & Numeration		Use whole numbers and fractions to identify locations, quantify groups of objects, and measure distances				•		
MST		Operations		Add, subtract, multiply, and divide whole numbers				•		•
MST	3 5	Tools, Resources, & Technological Process		Use simple manufacturing processes (e.g., assembly, multiple stages of production, quality control) to produce a product				•		
MST	5	History and Evolution of Technology		Identify technological developments that have significantly accelerated human progress						•
MST	5	Impacts of Technology		Describe how technology can have positive and negative effects on the environment and on the way people live and work	•		•	•		•

## Corresponding Field Trips

The following museums and organizations are among the many in the New York area that have exhibits or programs related to New York City history. Check with each for details.

### Tenement Museum

108 Orchard Street, Manhattan  
(212) 982 8420  
[www.tenement.org](http://www.tenement.org)

### South Street Seaport

Fulton and Water Streets, Manhattan  
(212) 748-8590  
[www.southstseaport.org](http://www.southstseaport.org)

### Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History

1698 - 1708 Bergen Street, Brooklyn  
(718) 623-0600  
[www.weeksvillesociety.org](http://www.weeksvillesociety.org)

### Brooklyn Historical Society

128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn  
(718) 222-4111  
[www.brooklynhistory.org](http://www.brooklynhistory.org)

### New-York Historical Society

170 Central Park West, Manhattan  
(212) 873-3400  
[www.nyhistory.org](http://www.nyhistory.org)

The Brooklyn Children's Museum also offers programs on a variety of historical and cross-cultural topics. For a listing of programs currently available, please see our website at [www.brooklynkids.org](http://www.brooklynkids.org), or contact the Scheduling Assistant at (718) 735-4400, extension 118.

## Bibliography

The following books may help you to enrich your experience with the objects in the case.

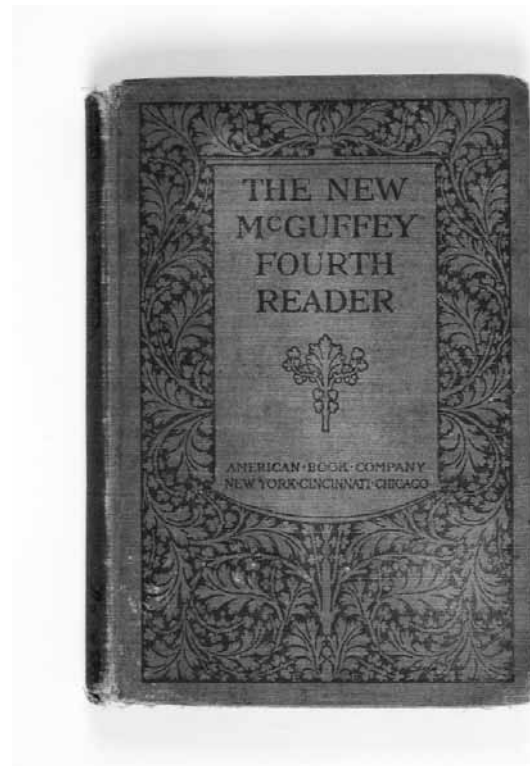
**Gillon, Edmund V. and Edward B. Watson.** **New York Then and Now.** New York: Dover, 1976.

**Levine, Ellen.** **If Your Name Was Changed at Ellis Island.** New York: Scholastic Press, 1994.

**Morrison, Joan and Charlotte Fox Zabusky.** **American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It.** Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993.

**Schoener, Allon, Ed.** **Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925.** New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.

**Tarbescu, Edith.** **Annushka's Voyage.** New York: Clarion Books, 1998.



## Web Resources

### **Library of Congress: Teacher Resources — Using Primary Sources in the Classroom**

Provides guidance for introducing and using different types of primary sources in your history curriculum.  
[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/primary.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/primary.html)

### **Library of Congress: Port of Entry: Immigration**

This page features an activity that leads students through a process of identifying and dating historic images.

[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/port/start.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/port/start.html)

### **PBS, 1900 House**

Information from the TV program about a modern family that lived in a 1900 house for three months, including a floor plan of the house and virtual tours of different rooms.

[www.pbs.org/1900house](http://www.pbs.org/1900house)

### **Street Play**

This site offers links to the history of hopscotch, marbles, and street games of boys in Brooklyn in 1891.

[www.streetplay.com/links](http://www.streetplay.com/links).

### **Heaven Will**

### **Protect the Working Girl**

Information about immigrant women and working conditions in New York circa 1900.

[web.gc.cuny.edu/ashp/heaven/index.html](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/ashp/heaven/index.html)

### **Museum of the City of New York: Byron Collection**

Search this database to find historic images of New York City.

[www.museumofnyc.doetech.net/voyager.cfm](http://www.museumofnyc.doetech.net/voyager.cfm)

### **Schools 100 Years Ago**

A page of links to information about schools 100 years ago.

[www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000191.shtml](http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000191.shtml)

### **Brooklyn Children's Museum**

Collections Central Online. Look up cultural objects from New York and around the world in Brooklyn Children's Museum's searchable online collections database.

[www.brooklynkids.org/emuseum](http://www.brooklynkids.org/emuseum)



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145 Brooklyn Avenue  
Brooklyn, New York 11213  
718-735-4400 ext. 170  
[www.brooklynkids.org](http://www.brooklynkids.org)

For information about renting this or other Portable Collections Program cases,  
please contact the Scheduling Assistant at 718-735-4400 ext. 118.