

## Write a Label

### Lesson Plan

Grades 9-12  
Secondary Cycle 2

#### Pedagogical Intent

Students learn about the history and cultures of aboriginal peoples and French Canadians, and learn how to write concise, meaningful label text, by selecting objects from the Canadian Museum of Civilization's database, writing several labels in different ways, sharing their labels with their classmates, and making a presentation in a format of their choice.

**Grade:** Grades 9-12; Quebec Secondary Cycle 2

**Subjects:** Social Studies, Geography, History and Citizenship Education, Language Arts, Arts Education

**Themes:** Canada's aboriginal peoples, First Nations, life in aboriginal societies before and after contact, French Canada, cultural groups in Canada, customs and traditions in North America, change and continuity, Marius Barbeau, methods of historical inquiry; communities: local, national, global

**Objectives and Competencies:** Use information, use information and communication technology, communicate appropriately; observe, describe, summarize, reason, use critical thinking, use creativity, cooperate with others, listen to others, use oral communication, conduct research using a variety of information sources and develop research skills

**Duration:** 120-180 minutes

#### Web Resources:

- Marius Barbeau web module  
[www.civilization.ca/tresors/barbeau/index\\_e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/tresors/barbeau/index_e.html)

#### Optional Technical Equipment

- One computer with Internet access for each pair of students, needed for 60-90 minutes; if computers are available, the artifact information package for each student is not required
- Projector and computer with Internet access

#### Student Handout

One copy per student:

- An Artifact Information Package from the [Selected Artifacts](#) list (Teacher Preparation, Step 3)
- [Write A Label: Sample Text](#)

#### Teacher Preparation:

1. Ensure students have been introduced to the history of Canada's aboriginal peoples and the history of French Canadians.
2. Visit the [Marius Barbeau web module](#). Select the Objects tab, and view the available categories of objects. To view artifact records, select a category from the side menu, and then at the bottom of the page, select "View all items in the collection". A list of objects is displayed. Select the link for an object to display its artifact record.
3. Print out two or three copies of each artifact information package from the [Selected Artifacts](#) list below, to provide one package per student.



Hooked rug  
(F-642)

### Selected Artifacts



Rag rug  
(A-278)



Basket  
(III-H-344)



Maple sugar ladle  
(77-1102)



Medicine cabinet  
(78-180)



Jewelry box  
(79-693)



Scissors case  
(III-H-203)



Hackle  
(72-1309)



Toy worktable  
(77-907)

*Optional:* Consult the artifact database and select artifacts related to a subject you are exploring; print out one record per student, or save the records so that you can project them.

*Optional, if computers with Internet access are available:* Instead of printing out artifact records for students, allow each pair of students to select two artifacts from the database.

### Procedure

- 1. Begin with a classroom discussion about museum exhibition text.** Who has been to a museum recently? What did you see? Do you remember seeing artifacts with text labels? Explain that "labels" are what we call the text that accompanies an object or group of objects. If necessary, explain that museum artifacts are objects made by humans that belong to a museum collection.

Ask students why labels accompany objects. They tell visitors about the objects, and specifically they tell visitors what museums want them to know about objects.

- 2. Introduce the two main types of labels and their purposes.**

- a) Identification labels (museums sometimes call them tombstone labels): provide the most basic information about the artifact, usually the name, age, place of

manufacture, museum owning it, and artifact number. These are written in point form.

- b) Interpretive labels: tell more about an object than the identification labels. These are usually written in full sentences, and often include a heading.

Brainstorm on what an interpretive label could talk about.

Ideas: why it was important to someone; why the museum collected it; why someone made it; how they made it; something special about when or how it was used or who used it.

Hand out the Sample Text sheet, or project the text onto the wall. Read out each label sample, and ask students to identify which is an identification label, and which is an interpretive label:

Label 1:  
Hooked rug  
No date  
Canadian  
Wool, burlap  
CMC Artifact F-642

Label 2:  
Made from strips of old army blankets hooked through a burlap background, this colorful rug is an innovative mix of the old and the new. The design, featuring four stylized whales, was inspired by the traditional art of the Tsimshian and Haida peoples.

The first is the identification label, while the second is the interpretive label. Discuss with the class which they find more interesting, and why.

### 3. Explore what makes an effective interpretive label.

Ask students to look at the following two examples of text on their Sample Text sheet plus the previous example (Label 2), or project the text onto the wall:

Label 3:  
It wasn't easy to earn a living as an artist in 1918, even if you were Emily Carr. To make ends meet, she ran a boarding house, painted, and made hooked rugs. For this rug, featuring four stylized whales, she drew upon traditional west coast designs.

Label 4:  
Who could imagine that old army rugs could make an attractive rug like this? Artist Emily Carr cut the blankets into strips and hooked this native-inspired design in 1918.

What does each emphasize? Which does the class like the best? Why?

Brainstorm about what makes for good artifact label text. Make a list of "Criteria for good label text".

Some ideas:

- Answers questions about what you see
- Answers other questions that you have about the artifact
- Is relevant; connects to your life
- Not too much information; one main idea per text

- Concise, quick to read
- Is easy to read
- Uses proper grammar
- Uses active verbs rather than passive verbs
- Uses people words, friendly words: you, your
- Short sentences
- Easy-to-understand words
- Vivid words: visual, concrete nouns, things you can see
- Tells you to look, using words like notice, find, look for
- Appropriate tone for the artifact: light, serious, bold, friendly, fun, witty, authoritative, caring

4. **Introduce the artifact database. Move to the computer lab, if possible.** Explain that this database includes photos of and information about thousands of artifacts collected by the Museum, most of which were made and used by aboriginal peoples and French Canadians.

If you have a projector, or students are at computers, show how the database is organized by category, and show the highlighted artifacts with supplementary information that appear in each category. Take a few minutes to explore themes and artifacts of interest to the students.

### 5. Introduce the small group work.

Form groups of two students. Hand out one Artifact Information Record to each student, ensuring each pair has two different artifacts.

*Optional, if computers are available:* Each group chooses an artifact category from the database. Take 10 minutes to review the artifacts within the category. Ask each group to select two artifacts of their choice.

Ask each group to brainstorm about their artifacts. What do you know about the artifacts? Look at the photograph, and read the information available. Look at the materials used to make each artifact. Look for wear marks to give you hints about how an object was used. What does each artifact tell you about the people who made it or used it? If possible, encourage students to use the Marius Barbeau web module, and other resources, to conduct additional research.

**6. Assign the text writing challenge to each group.**

Each student will now have the chance to write artifact labels.

Ask each student to select one artifact, and to write three labels for the artifact:

- 1) an identification label; the group should decide on the format for the identification labels, using the Sample Text, Label 1 as a guideline;
- 2) an interpretive label that focuses on the object;
- 3) an interpretive label that focuses on a person, such as the person who made or brought the object.

For the interpretive labels, each group should develop text guidelines based on the criteria for good text developed by the class. As part of these guidelines, each group should decide on a maximum word count (for example, under 35 words, under 50 words), keeping in mind that short texts are more likely to be read.

**7. Students share their labels within their group.**

Ask students to read their labels to each other. Do they satisfy the guidelines set out by their group? Ask students to rewrite the labels until all team members feel that they meet the criteria for good label text.

**8. Students present their labels to the class.**

Groups can choose how to present their text to the class, such as verbally or with the assistance of drawings or mock-ups.

Encourage students to ask questions about each label. Ask students to discuss what the most interesting artifacts were and why. How did the text help to make the artifacts interesting? Which were more successful, the texts that focused on the object or the text that focused on the person who made or used the object? Why?

**9. Ask students to reflect on the experience.**

What did students find challenging about writing artifact labels? Do they feel that their text conveys the importance of the artifacts and of the people who made or owned them? Would working as a museum exhibition text writer interest them?

---

**Extension Ideas**

**Thematic Labels:** Use artifact labels to present specific themes. For example, ask students to select artifacts and write labels to show how different cultures fulfilled similar needs, such as clothing, cooking or furnishing their homes.

**Same Object, Different Voices:** Write the labels using the voice of the museum expert, the person who made the artifact and the person who inherited the artifact from a grandparent.

**Images and Labels:** Ask students to locate a photograph or image from the archival records and to write a label for the image. The archival database can be searched by categories just like the artifact database.

**Hold a Display Fair:** Ask students to create displays of their selected artifacts with the headings and labels in your classroom. Invite other classes to visit the displays and ask questions to your students about the artifacts and the text.

**French as a Second Language:** Use the French version of the artifact record. Ask students to write an identification label for the artifact in French, using the terms in the record to assist them.

**English as a Second Language:** Ask students to identify an object they use at home that is similar to an artifact. Ask them to describe their household object, and explain what it is used for, how it is used, what it is made from, and who uses it. Class members can each write a label about their choice of object.

## Write A Label: Sample Text

Label 1:  
Hooked rug  
1918  
Canadian  
Wool, burlap  
CMC Artifact F-642



Label 2:  
Made from strips of old army blankets hooked through a burlap background, this colorful rug is an innovative mix of the old and the new. The design, featuring four stylized whales, was inspired by the traditional art of the Tsimshian and Haida peoples.

Label 3:  
It wasn't easy to earn a living as an artist in 1918, even if you were Emily Carr. To make ends meet, she ran a boarding house, painted, and made hooked rugs. For this rug, featuring four stylized whales, she drew upon traditional west coast designs.

Label 4:  
Who could imagine that old army rugs could make an attractive rug like this? Artist Emily Carr cut the blankets into strips and hooked this native-inspired design in 1918.