

The Curator's Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with The Rosenbach's Collections

Class Curation Activity (Object Label Writing Assignment)



Rosenbach visitors read object labels in the American Voyager: Herman Melville at 200 exhibition, fall, 2019.

Objective:

Write an object label for inclusion in The Rosenbach's digital exhibition "*I Am an American!*": *The Authorship and Activism of Alice Dunbar Nelson*. The label will be featured in the "Rosenbach Artifact Stories Blog": <https://rosenbach.org/virtual-exhibits/blog/>. Your label will highlight an object from The Rosenbach's collection that builds on themes, concepts, and interpretive approaches showcased in the exhibition, deepening the connection between the exhibition and The Rosenbach's permanent collection, while showcasing diverse and inclusive voices in the institution's holdings. Your label will invite website viewers to engage more deeply with our collection.

Guidelines:

- Because of the digital format of your object label, it can be somewhat longer than what we would generally display in the galleries. However, we want the text on the website to utilize the object-label format and embody the interpretive priority of the genre. Labels should be between 100 and 500 words, including the “tombstone” information (i.e., the basic object data at the top of the label) but not including image captions.
- Please abide by The Rosenbach’s label style guidelines when crafting your text.
- The Rosenbach will produce photos of your object for posting with the label after the course ends. Please include a list of what images you would like on the website, as well as complete captions for each image. Use captions currently on the blog as models.

Instructions:

- 1) Complete the readings Carol Bossert, “Labels Unleashed” and Judy Rand, “Less is More” to understand their theoretical and methodological approach to label writing.
- 2) Familiarize yourself with Rosenbach labels via our Gallery Gateway Online Exhibition Portal and previous entries in the “*I Am an American!*” exhibition, especially the “Rosenbach Artifact Stories” blog. (Do not model your work after the Matisse entry; this is the one blog post that does not use object-label format.)
- 3) Following object selection on September 28, visit The Rosenbach’s reading room to study your object, from material, literary-historical, and social-historical perspectives.
- 4) Conduct secondary-source research on your objects via the Internet, databases available through the Free Library of Philadelphia, and other sources as you see fit.
- 5) Write a first draft of your label and submit it to Alex Ames as a Microsoft Word document by 5:59 p.m. on Tuesday, November 23. The Collections Department will share initial feedback with you via email.
- 6) Following the Tuesday, December 7 writing workshop, make revisions to your label.
- 7) Submit your final draft to Alex by 5:59 p.m. on Tuesday, December 14.
- 8) At 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 14, give yourself a pat on the back and congratulate yourself for having successfully written an object label!

Tips of the Trade:

- Concise, approachable, and engaging language is a virtue. Even if you have a lot you want to communicate, try to do so in an efficient way.
- Treat the label as both *descriptive* and *interpretive*. Provide basic information that a reader will need to make sense of the object, but then use your curatorial voice to encourage visitors to appreciate the object for its multiple cultural resonances.
- Don't view your label as an information dump but rather as an invitation to your reader to continue learning and exploring. Emphasize close looking over outside research.
- Feel free to ask members of the Collections Department for guidance and feedback throughout your research and writing process.

Timeline:

- Tuesday, September 28: Artifact selection
- Tuesday, November 23: First draft of label due
- Tuesday, December 7: Object label crit session
- Tuesday, December 14: Final draft of label due

Engaging Object Labels...

