

How to do a History Mystery

Introduction

History Mystery is designed to challenge children to use their skills of deduction and critical thinking to identify the multiple artifacts included in this activity. All objects are from the State Historical Museum of Iowa's collection, providing children with a unique opportunity to tour museum artifacts from their own classrooms.

By participating in History Mystery, Goldie detectives will:

- Use problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Analyze clues to deduce the name and use of objects
- Explore and use background information provided for each object to determine historical significance
- Make real-world connections between the use of the objects and Iowa History

What's Included

This History Mystery Activity Features

- Photographs of Objects
- Videos of Select Objects
- Background Information for Each Object
- History Mystery Worksheet
- Guided Questions and Object Instructions for Adults

Objects

Each object has photos specifically taken for children to analyze. Most objects include multiple photos at different angles, close-ups, etc. to provide different perspectives to help in their detective work. Objects photos and videos are available to view on the [Goldie's At Home webpage](#).

Object Instructions for Adults & History Mystery Worksheet

Each individual object has an instructions page that provides background information about the object, its historical significance and questions to encourage children as they attempt this activity. This worksheet and questions help children identify the object and its significance in history. The worksheet can also be applied to any activity similar to History Mystery, such as having children use family artifacts around the home.

History Mystery Set Up

1. History Mystery can be done in small groups or independently. Either print or display the object photos and videos for children to use. Print off the worksheet to guide them in their detective work.
2. To provide more context about the objects before starting, it is encouraged to read aloud the background essay. Sometimes, it can be extra fun to cover each object photo before revealing it to the child to explore.
3. History Mystery detectives will go from object to object, filling out their worksheet and discovering what the object is and how it would be used. Spend about five minutes on each object.
4. If IDing the artifact is difficult, use the adult instructions for the object to help guide the child to answers.
5. After working through all of the objects, go through the answers with your detective(s). Use the object instructions to help them understand the historical significance of the artifact.

Background Information about Immigration to Iowa

Utilize this background essay to provide further context about immigration to Iowa.

Iowa has been a destination for immigrants since it began welcoming settlers in the 1830s. The origins of those new arrivals changed significantly over the past 175 years and can be roughly divided into three waves. In each case, they came in response to a combination of “push/pull” factors. Push factors like wars or persecution at home or poverty and lack of economic prospects forced them to seek a new home. Pull factors included the advantages they saw in relocating to Iowa. The rich farmland and economic opportunities were the major factors in early Iowa.

Following the Black Hawk War, when Native Americans were pressured to relinquish a significant portion of eastern Iowa, pioneers headed for the “land across the river.” Most early settlers were attracted by the acres of cheap government land. Farmers from the Ohio River Valley comprised a large share of the early population. The states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri were stopping points along the way for many families who had begun in New England or the states of the upper South, like Virginia, Maryland or Kentucky.

Europe also began contributing to Iowa. Political revolutions and repressive reactions swept central Europe in the late 1840s. Germany supplied the largest contingent, with a tidal wave following failed revolutions in 1848. Many Germans settled in Mississippi River towns like Dubuque and Davenport where they formed strong ethnic communities. However, Germans were a sizable presence in many other Iowa communities and rural neighborhoods. The potato famines of the 1840s forced many Irish families to seek a new home in America, making Ireland the second largest source of early European immigrants. Great Britain, Canada, Holland and the Scandinavian countries also contributed residents to early Iowa. Railroads and the state itself promoted foreign immigration. They developed and distributed brochures throughout northern and western Europe in native languages describing the state’s climate, economic prospects and practical information on how to reach Iowa.

In the late 1800s and until World War I, a second wave of immigrants from Italy, Russia and Eastern Europe began showing up in the Iowa census. Because most of the land was now privately owned and no longer available at cheap prices from the government, it was early Iowa industries that attracted these new arrivals. Coal mining attracted many Italians and Croatians. Often a single man would arrive and get a job in a coal mine. When he had saved enough, he would sponsor a brother, son or nephew who would then also contribute to the migration costs of other family members. World War I fostered distrust of these later immigrants and efforts were made to “Americanize” them and to limit the numbers of future arrivals. Mexican immigration also increased with the demand for farm labor during the war.

Beginning in the 1970s, a third wave of immigrants began to enter the state, and this immigration continues today. These individuals were often the victims of civil wars or natural disasters. The Vietnam War created thousands of displaced persons confined in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. In 1975, President Gerald Ford urged the nation to help resettle refugees here, and Iowa’s Governor Robert Ray responded by setting up a state agency to work with private organizations. As a result, many Vietnamese arrived in the state, learned English and became productive citizens. Wars in their homelands also “pushed” Bosnians, Ethiopians and others from Africa and Asia to seek new homes in Iowa. Hispanics from Mexico, South America and the Caribbean were drawn here by work in Iowa’s meat-packing plants and became a significant segment of the population in several Iowa communities, including Perry, Storm Lake, Marshalltown and Denison.

Iowa boasts several nationally-recognized museums that pay tribute to Iowa immigrant groups: Vesterheim for Norwegians in Decorah; the Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids; the German Heritage Center in Davenport; and the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn.

Hmong Story Cloth



Description

This object is a Hmong (pronounced muhng) story cloth that was embroidered by hand by Shoua Her around 1999. Also referred to as a "Paj Ntaub," the story cloth depicts multiple images telling the history of their family's journey to America. One embroidered image shows Hmong daily life in Laos prior to and during the Vietnam War, while another features a refugee flight to Thailand. Images also show life in refugee camps for the Hmong and the arrival of planes to take them to the United States.

Object Significance

Shoua Her, who created the story cloth by hand, was among 20 Hmong families that resettled in Oskaloosa, Iowa (Mahaska County), in 1976. The Hmong are an ethnic group from Laos who were targeted and forced to flee their homes at the end of the Vietnam War. In 1975, Iowa became the first state to welcome thousands of Vietnamese, Tai Dam, Lao, Khmer (Cambodian) and Hmong refugees fleeing the aftermath of the war. Iowa Governor Robert Ray was a strong ally and humanitarian leader, and he led the efforts to resettle refugees, like Shoua Her, across the state. He also created the Iowa SHARES campaign to rush food, medicine and Iowa doctors and nurses to the Thai border to save Cambodian refugees, and he pushed for national reform of refugee entry into America.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 This story cloth illustrates the history of one family's journey to America. For what reasons would Shoua Her create this story cloth? Why might she create a textile rather than using other art forms (like photography or video)?
- 3 This story cloth has very few words. How does the artist use imagery to tell the story? What are some key events that took place? What did the artist do to highlight those events?
- 4 By looking at this story cloth, tell the story of this family and their journey to Iowa.
Hint: the story starts in the top left corner and ends in the bottom left corner.

Water Bottle Holder and Pouch by Alma Chavez



Description

These two handwoven containers are a water bottle holder and pouch that were made by Alma Chavez, who immigrated from Guatemala to Iowa. The cotton holders were created around 2010 and are made in shades of dark blue, purple, teal, red, pink and green. The larger holder has a blue strap for carrying it over one's shoulder. Both items have a velcro strip to keep the top flap closed. Chavez came from Guatemala to Postville, Iowa (Clayton County), on an artisan visa. After the Postville raid in 2008 (more info below), a weavers co-op was formed and Chavez sold her items at farmers markets. Chavez stayed in Iowa at least through 2014, but her current residence is unknown.

Object Significance

These objects highlight the immigration of the state's largest minority group, the Latinx population. In 1910, there were only 590 Latinx immigrants in the entire state of Iowa. In 10 years, this number increased to more than 2,500. Mostly from Mexico, these immigrants worked as farm laborers and others worked in railroad yards. In the 1990s, the Latinx population grew by 153 percent to 83,000. These handwoven holders from Chavez, a Guatemalan immigrant, highlights not only the beauty of Latinx culture but also the struggle immigrants face in America and Iowa. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raided the Iowa town of Postville in 2008 and arrested 398 people at a slaughterhouse and meatpacking plant because they were suspected of living in the U.S. undocumented. This was the largest single raid of a workplace in U.S. history, and it devastated the community of Postville.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at these objects? What else do you notice?
- 2 Why might Alma Chavez have chosen a geometric pattern, rather than something not designed with straight lines?
- 3 After the raid and knowing she had an artisan (craftsperson) visa, why would Chavez create hand-made items?
- 4 Chavez was part of a weaving co-op (group). Why might immigrants want to be part of groups with similar interests? Why might immigrants create and sell crafts that have ties to their native culture?

Thai Embroidery



Description

This textile is an embroidery created by Nat Khouangsathiene, who immigrated to Iowa from Thailand in 1975. The cloth is shown to have bright geometric patterns with detailed cross-stitching. The embroidery is 19.5 inches long.

Object Significance

In 1975, Iowa became the first state to welcome thousands of Vietnamese, Tai Dam, Lao, Khmer (Cambodian) and Hmong refugees fleeing the aftermath of the war. Many were living in refugee camps in Thailand, and some brought such textiles as the embroidery seen here from Nat Khouangsathiene. Iowa Governor Robert Ray was a strong ally and humanitarian leader, and he led the efforts to resettle these refugees across the state. He also created the Iowa SHARES campaign to rush food, medicine and Iowa doctors and nurses to the Thai border to save Cambodian refugees who suffered under the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 Why might embroidery and textile work be important in different cultures, particularly those that have suffered through war?
- 3 Why would someone leaving their home bring something like this embroidery with them?
- 4 *Compare this Thai Embroidery to the pieces created by Alma Chavez.* These items are created by people who immigrated from different countries. What is similar? What is different? Why might there be so many similarities in the design?
- 5 *Compare this Thai Embroidery and Hmong Story Cloth.* These items are created by people who immigrated from similar cultures. What is similar? What is different?

Steamer Trunk of Matilda Charlotte Lind



Description

This wooden steamer trunk carried the personal possessions of Matilda Charlotte Lind from Sweden to America. As seen on the painted inscription on the side of the trunk, Lind immigrated from her native Sweden to 504 Front Street in Des Moines, Iowa (Polk County), during the 19th century.

Object Significance

This artifact showcases one of the objects typically associated with early immigrants to Iowa: the steamer trunk. Used to store personal possessions of the owner, this trunk accompanied Matilda on her voyage to America. The first Swedish settlement in Iowa was at Bush Creek, later known as New Sweden, in Jefferson County during the fall of 1845. Other settlements were soon made in Henry and Wapello counties, and by 1850, 250 immigrants from Sweden had located in Burlington. The counties of Boone, Hamilton and Webster also had many early Swedish settlements. Madrid, located in Boone County, was first named Swede Point as a tribute to its early settlers' original home.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 Why might Matilda Lind have left Sweden to come to Iowa? Why was a trunk important for an immigrant?
- 3 Why was her destination painted on the side of the trunk rather than on a tag?
- 4 What might an immigrant pack in a trunk? How does this trunk compare to luggage today (hint: think about materials and construction)?

Irish Coverlet



Description

This object is a navy blue, red and tan coverlet that was created with a hand loom in Ireland. It had once belonged to David and Avis McQuiston, who married in Saylorville, Iowa (Polk County), on Oct. 28, 1858. Saylorville was named after Avis' father and town founder, John B. Saylor. A coverlet is a type of bed covering with a woven design in colored wool yarn on a background of natural linen or cotton.

Object Significance

The coverlet was donated by the grandchildren of David and Avis McQuiston and was passed down within the family. This coverlet was made on a hand loom in Ireland. The potato famines of the 1840s forced many Irish families to seek a new home in America, making Ireland the second largest source of early European immigrants (after Germany). Brochures were developed and distributed throughout northern and western Europe in native languages describing the climate, economic prospects and practical information on how to reach Iowa.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 This coverlet (bedspread) was made in Ireland and brought to the U.S. Why would a family bring items like this with them? Look closely at the coverlet, what design elements found in nature do you notice? Why might this Irish coverlet include those items?
- 3 Why might families pass down heirlooms in celebration of life events, like marriages and births?
Heirlooms are valuable objects that have belonged to a family for several generations.
- 4 Compare the design of this Irish Coverlet to the Hmong Story Cloth. These items were created by people who immigrated from different countries. What is similar? What is different?

Irish Doll “Fanny Maria”



Description

This doll was given to Rev. John Martyn when he was a pastor in Dublin, Ireland, in 1882 to give to his grandson Claude Martin Robinson, who lived in Iowa City, Iowa (Johnson County). The body of the doll was new, but the head had been passed down to different doll bodies from a parishioner's family for several generations in Down County, Ireland. The doll was christened by the pastor as “Fanny Maria” (pronounced Ma-Rye-Ah) because he said “an image to be loved as a human being by a little child should bear a Christian name.” The doll's original garments were of silk and satin but due to use, new clothes were fashioned for the doll in 1883. The little boy rubbed away parts of its complexion, hair and nose.

Object Significance

This object is an example of objects immigrant children brought to America. Children can reflect on what items they would bring with them if they had to immigrate and how this object compares to the toys they use today.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 This doll was a toy for a child in the 1880s. How are toys today similar? And how are they different? Why would toys be important to immigrant children?
- 3 This doll's head was passed down between different families in Ireland (the body of the doll was new). Think about the story of the Irish Coverlet. Why would items be passed from one generation to the next? Do you have any items that are passed down in your family? Why do you keep them?

Kohrs Packing Co. Lard Pail



Description

This is a Kohrs lard pail that was distributed by Kohrs Packing Co. in Davenport, Iowa (Scott County). Markings on the pail are in black and the image shows a gold crown on a gold pillow with leaves. Kohrs was considered the largest and most successful hog processing center in the city and a national center for meat processing. The company was housed in a structure called the "Hog Hotel." Kohrs was founded in 1872 by Henry Kohrs, a German immigrant. Kohrs began as a local butcher who became an international supplier of pork products. The Oscar Mayer Company acquired Kohrs in 1946.

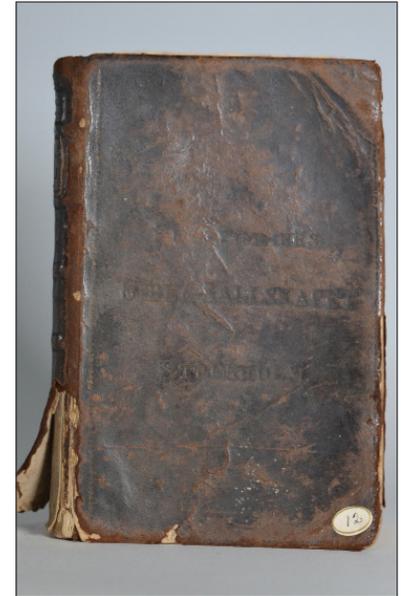
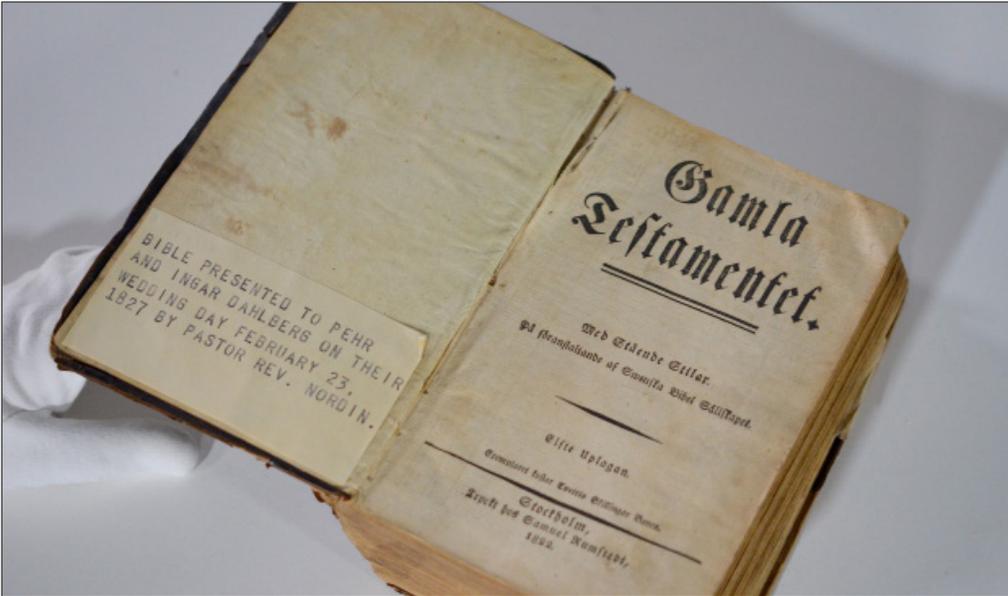
Object Significance

This lard pail is a significant example of the contribution immigrants had on Iowa's economy. A German immigrant went from opening a corner butcher shop to creating a business that employed thousands of people in Davenport and around the Quad Cities. The increase of German immigrants to Iowa was, in part, a result of political revolutions and repressive reactions that swept central Europe in the late 1840s. Germany supplied the largest contingent, with a tidal wave following failed revolutions in 1848. Many Germans settled in Mississippi River towns like Dubuque and Davenport where they formed strong ethnic communities.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 This Kohrs Packing Co. Lard Pail is from a company started by a German immigrant. Are there any businesses in your community that were started by immigrants? How do these businesses add to your community?
- 3 Why might immigrant culture groups settle together and form communities? What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?
- 4 Lard is fat from pigs that is processed to be used in cooking. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, why would this company package lard in a pail?

Swedish Bible of Pehr and Ingar Dahlberg



Description

This Bible was presented to Pehr and Ingar Dahlberg on their wedding day on February 23, 1827. The book was given to them by Pastor Reverend Nordin and was printed in Swedish.

Object Significance

This Bible is significant in that its owners, Pehr and Ingar Dahlberg, were among the first people to create a Swedish settlement in Iowa. Pehr was originally born in Chevick, Sweden, and was taught how to make shoes by his father, Truls. But he wanted to leave the business to acquire an education, and he became a sailor. He met and married Ingar, and after immigrating to America in 1843, he sent for his family in 1845 to join him. The Dahlberg family, along with a company of Swedes, traveled to Brush Creek, Iowa, and purchased government land. They christened the land, New Stockholm, after the Swedish capital.

Questions about History Mystery Object

- 1 What do you see when you look at this object? What else do you notice?
- 2 Why would an immigrant family bring a book in their native language with them to a new country?
- 3 Some people in the past kept family records of birth, death and special events written in their Bibles. Why would families keep these records in books?
- 4 Why would one person in a family immigrate first and then send for their family members?
- 5 Both this Bible and the Matilda Lind trunk are from Swedish immigrants. What items, like a native language book, might an immigrant pack in a trunk to bring to a new country?

History Mystery - Analyze an Object



1	1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.	4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.
	2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined?	5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year?
	3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year?	6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner.
2	1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.	4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.
	2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined?	5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year?
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	<p>3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year?</p>	<p>6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner.</p>
4	<p>1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.</p>	<p>4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.</p>
	<p>2) What is the object made from? Is it one or more materials combined?</p>	<p>5. What year or time period do you think it is from? Why do you think it was from that year?</p>
	<p>3) Is there any writing or details? Why do you think it was from that year?</p>	<p>6) Who is the owner? Write a brief description of the owner.</p>
5	<p>1) What does it look like? Think about size, shape and color.</p>	<p>4. Do you see any signs of wear? Does it mean anything about how the object was used.</p>
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