

Assignment Ideas for Undergraduate Students: The National Museum of African Art

This document contains ideas for assignments geared toward undergraduate students or students in a college course.

For the National Museum of African Art:

- Discussion Board or Journal Prompt: Africa is a large, diverse continent. Discuss your thoughts on the medieval items you viewed at the museum while also reflecting on what surprised you. Did you have any assumptions about what Africa was like in the Middle Ages? What did you learn from your visit to the National Museum of African art that makes you think differently about medieval Africa?
- Essay Prompt: Write a 4-6 page paper responding to the question: Does the “medieval period” accurately describe the same period of time in Africa as it does in Europe? Why or why not?
- Exam Question: Using class materials and art from the museum as examples, explain why the terms “medieval” or “Middle Ages” can be controversial when applied to places outside of Europe. Do you think the chronology of the European Middle Ages fits well for Africa? If yes, why? If not, how might you approach it as a historian?

For Art Museums:

- Choose a work of art and write a 2-4 page essay about how it portrays the period, person, or concept featured in the work. Was it created during or after the period in question? How does one interpret the context in which this subject was painted/sculpted/created?
- Discussion board post: Which work would you most clearly connect to [insert course theme here]? (Example, National Museum of Asian Art: Which work would you identify as being most clearly connected to the discussion about Buddhism and its expression in Japan/Japanese art? Why does that work stand out to you?)
- Exam or essay prompt: Choose a work featuring a medieval subject but created much later. What does the artist’s interpretation of the middle ages tell us about their understanding? How is that the same or different from our own understanding? Tie in the course readings and class materials in your answer.

General questions (reflecting on the website and its offerings):

These questions are useful for building discussions leading up to the visit to the sites or the use of materials on the webpage. These questions may also inspire a connection between sites and course themes.

- What is “medieval”?
- What is “global history”?
- What are the “global middle ages”?
- What are the defining characteristics of the Middle Ages and how might some sites fit (or not) these various characteristics?

