

Assignment Ideas for Undergraduate Students: The Library of Congress

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

For the Library of Congress:

- Discussion Board or Journal Prompts:
 - Manuscripts: Choose a manuscript from the Library of Congress collection and reflect on why you think it was so important that it be preserved. What is special about this particular item? Is there more to it than meets the eye?
 - Maps: Reflect on what you think was important to the person making the medieval map [selected by instructor]. Is it accurate? Does it depict any important landmarks? Is there something surprising about this map?
- Essay Prompts:
 - Manuscripts: Write 4-6 pages about a manuscript discussed in class or featured in the course materials. When and where is it from? What is significant about the contents? What materials were used to create the manuscript? Who produced it? Analyze the historical significance of the item in your conclusion.
 - Maps: Write 4-6 pages about one of the maps or digital mapping projects featured in the course materials. What is so important about this map or project? How does it portray the subject? If you chose a medieval map, explain the historical context and significance of the item. If you choose a digital project, explain how the project allows us to better understand the topic at hand through the use of space and digital tools.
- Collaborative Project: Give your students the chance to be a curator. Students should each choose a different item from a 100-200 year window (defined by the instructor). Students will do a report on the object, its source, its historical context, and the subject of the work (if the manuscript is transcribed and translated). All students will then each create an entry in an “online exhibit” through <https://padlet.com/> where they can either choose a timeline or map format for their “digital exhibit.”

For Museums and Collections:

- Choose a series of artifacts and, using images of them, build a slideshow that tells a story about how people lived. Some ideas:
 - How people grew, cooked, and consumed food
 - The evolution of medieval architecture
 - Items that were valued by medieval people (and how they may have changed over time)
 - What it was like to be young or old

- Use a tool like <https://padlet.com/> to create a map of images and links connecting artifacts across space. Perhaps use the timeline option to also connect the items over time. What impressions does this leave? How did you choose the items you featured?
- Research paper prompt: Choose one artifact and do a “deep dive” on the history of the time and place from which it comes. Some questions you might ask about the item, as well as the period from which it comes:
 - What does the museum know about it (its provenance)?
 - Who owned it (if applicable)?
 - What materials is it made of and how was it constructed? Do we know who crafted it (if applicable)?
 - What was this item used for, by what kind of people was it likely used, and why did the museum choose to feature it?
 - What part does this item play in the “big picture” of the Middle Ages?
 - Is this item common or uncommon for the time and place?
 - Are there many or few examples of this item surviving?
 - Is there something unique this particular example shows us about medieval life?

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?