

## Assignment Ideas for Undergraduate Students: The National Museum of the American Indian

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

For the National Museum of the American Indian:

- Discussion Board or Journal Prompt: Consider why the period before European Contact in the Americas is referred to as “Pre-Columbian” by scholars. If you had to select a new name for the period, what would you choose and why?
- Essay Prompt: Write a 4-6 page essay focusing on one Indigenous American people and their culture before contact with Europeans. Use class materials and the exhibits in the NMAI to answer these questions. What was life like for the Indigenous Americans you chose to write about? What important things about their culture have been preserved? In what ways have these things been preserved or recorded?
- Exam Question: Did the Americas have a “medieval period”? Why or why not?

For Museums:

- 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?