

KEEP THE STORY GOING



THE YOUNG DOCENT

The Keeper's Inventory

What will disappear if nobody writes it down?

A reader journal and creative challenge

Your Assignment

Choose one object, photograph, artwork, document, recipe, tool, garment, letter, or keepsake whose story is not fully recorded.

Your job is not to prove that the object is valuable. Your job is to find out what it carries.

The object I am investigating

Why I chose it

1. Accession Record

Museums begin by recording what is in front of them.

Object name / description
Approximate date
Material / construction
Maker, owner, or user
Current location
Condition

1. Accession Record - Continued

Record what the object itself can tell you, and separate certainty from inference.

Marks, labels, signatures, inscriptions

Copy them exactly if you can.

What I know for certain

Facts supported by the object, a document, or a reliable witness.

What I only suspect

Ideas or family stories that still need evidence.

Evidence I might look for next:

- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Receipts or letters
- ☐ Family records
- ☐ Newspapers or archives
- ☐ Museum / collection databases
- ☐ Another person's memory

2. Look Before You Know

Before researching, spend five full minutes looking. Describe only what you can actually observe.

I notice...

Shape, wear, repairs, stains, handwriting, materials, missing pieces, smells, sounds, weight, texture.

Questions the object creates

Write at least five.

3. Interview the Keeper

Find someone who knows something about the object. Ask slowly. Let silence do some of the work.

Where did this come from?

Who had it before you?

What was it used for?

What story is always told about it?

What part of the story are you unsure about?

Who else might know more?

What should happen to it next?

4. Provenance: Follow It Backward

Provenance is the history of ownership and movement. Start with where the object is now and work backward.

When	Who had it?	Where was it?	Evidence

Where are the gaps? A gap is not automatically suspicious. It is simply a place where the story is not yet known.

5. The Missing Name

Choose one person connected to the object whose story is incomplete.

Name, if known

What role did they play?

Owner, maker, keeper, giver, seller, wearer, reader, photographer, witness...

What is missing?

What do you wish you knew?

Where could you look next?

Family papers, newspapers, archives, museum databases, public records, oral history...

6. Museum Provenance Challenge

Choose one artwork from a museum's online collection. Read its provenance from the most recent owner backward.

Artwork

Title, artist, museum, accession number if available.

Ownership trail

List each owner or location you can find.

The 1933-1945 question

If the artwork existed during this period, is its ownership history continuous? If not, what does the museum say about the gap?

What would responsible research require next?

7. Return, Keep, Share, or Record?

Objects can carry competing claims: legal ownership, family meaning, cultural belonging, memory, responsibility.

If this object could speak, what might it ask from its current keeper?

What would responsible stewardship look like?

Does anything need to be returned, shared, copied, labeled, digitized, or recorded?

8. The Keeper's Record

Write the version of the story you hope survives.

Object story

Write a short museum-style label: what it is, who it belonged to, why it matters, and what remains unknown.

Who should receive a copy of this record?

9. The Keeper's Pledge

A keeper does not have to own a museum. A keeper is anyone who refuses to let a name, story, or object disappear without trying.

I will look carefully.

I will distinguish what I know from what I assume.

I will write down names.

I will ask where things came from.

I will leave a record for the person who comes next.

One thing I will make sure someone remembers
