



HISTORICAL OBJECTS LESSON PLAN

High School; Grades 9-12

Related Museum Programs: All; Uses material from the Hard Times Tour

BIG IDEA: Objects are a tool to learn about people, places, and events.

DESCRIPTION: Students investigate how historians and curators use historical objects to inform our understanding of people, places, and events from the past. As students learn about Josephine Baldizzi, the daughter of Italian immigrants who lived in 97 Orchard Street in the 1930s, they consider what her home may have looked like and how the objects that we surround ourselves with, make statements about our own identity.

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

- Understand that objects provide information about people, places, and events.
- Experience how researchers use information and objects to find clues that help them understand the past.
- Learn how curators use historical research to reconstruct the spaces in which people from the past lived and worked.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How do historians learn about the past?
- How do curators recreate spaces from the past?

TIME FRAME: 1-3 class periods. This activity has been designed to be customized based on your learning goals and your students' individual needs. Choose to do the complete lesson plan or select parts with your students based on your schedule and objectives.

MATERIALS:

- Description of Josephine Baldizzi (located in appendix)
- Photograph of Josephine Baldizzi (located in appendix)
- Designing Josephine's Home worksheets (located in appendix)
- Apartment image (located in appendix)

VOCABULARY:

- Curator
- Historian

PROCEDURE:

Part 1: Introduction

- Explain that in today’s lesson, students will consider the work of historians and curators at museums and historic sites.
- Explain to students that historians working in museums often need to design a space in which a person from the past lived in order to help museum visitors learn about that person.
- Have students think about their own homes, bedrooms, or lockers. In what ways have these spaces been personalized? Reinforce that spaces often provide clues about the people that use them in the form of design and their contents.
- Connect the idea of spaces informing our understanding to the work of historians, who use the clues they find about a space to learn about people and events from the past and to curators who use this historic research to recreate historic spaces in museums like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Part 2: Activity

- Introduce Josephine Baldizzi by explaining that she was the daughter of Italian immigrants and lived on the Lower East Side in the 1930s at 97 Orchard Street, the current site of the Tenement Museum.
- Display the photo of Josephine and her mother, Rosario. Ask students what they notice and begin to collect observations about them.
- Distribute the Description of Josephine Baldizzi (see: appendix) and read aloud or have students read individually.
- Ask students to use the information they gained from the historic description to begin to consider what objects might communicate her story to visitors in a museum.
- Display the blueprint of an apartment in 97 Orchard Street, which was three rooms and 325 square feet.
- Divide students into groups and have each one begin to curate some of the contents for the Baldizzi apartment using the Floor Plan Worksheet (see: appendix). Students should use the description along with any additional research they need to determine what objects might a curator select to communicate Josephine’s experience. Students can choose a particular year to think about or moment in Josephine’s life, such as moving day or Christmas.
- Give students time to create their plans. Students can either describe the contents using words or draw their designs.

Part 3: Wrap-Up

- Have groups present their designs for Josephine’s home. Ask students to explain their choices and “moment in time” and how that is communicated through their designs. Instruct students to also explain which objects reflect Josephine’s personality and background.
- Facilitate a discussion regarding the curation process. Guiding questions might include:
 - What did you learn about Josephine from designing her home?
 - What did you feel was important for other people to understand about Josephine and how did that factor into your designs?
 - What were some challenges in designing this space?
- Display the picture of the Baldizzi apartment at the Tenement Museum and compare the choices the Museum made with the suggestions of the students.
- Discuss what is similar and different about the designs and what the variety tells us regarding the complexity of defining and curating history.

ASSESSMENT:

- Review the Floor Plan Worksheets designed by students.
- Ask students to explain their rationale behind choosing certain objects for Josephine’s home.

EXTENSIONS:

- Have students research how people decorated their homes in the 1930s. Tell students to use that information to revise their designs to be historically accurate.
- Instruct students to write a story or play about Josephine that takes place in her apartment. Ask students to provide detailed descriptions of the space and explain how she engages with it.

APPENDIX: PHOTOGRAPH OF JOSEPHINE BALDIZZI



APPENDIX: DESCRIPTION OF JOSEPHINE BALDIZZI

Josephine Baldizzi was born in the United States in 1926. Her parents, Adolpho and Rosaria Baldizzi, emigrated from Italy in the 1920s. Josephine was a charismatic person and a wonderful storyteller. In interviews with the Tenement Museum, she painted a picture of a happy childhood, despite the fact that she and her little brother, Johnnie, grew up on the Lower East Side in the Depression Era.

In these interviews, Josephine told stories about living in the tenement building at 97 Orchard Street as a small child. In one story, Josephine recalled how she and Johnnie would amuse themselves by playing “movie star” and “stage acting.” She also loved music and dancing, though she was shy about it as a little girl. Josephine tried to hide her love of dancing and music by dancing behind chairs in her family’s apartment. Josephine eventually grew out of her shell and even took on a leading role in a play at a local community center.

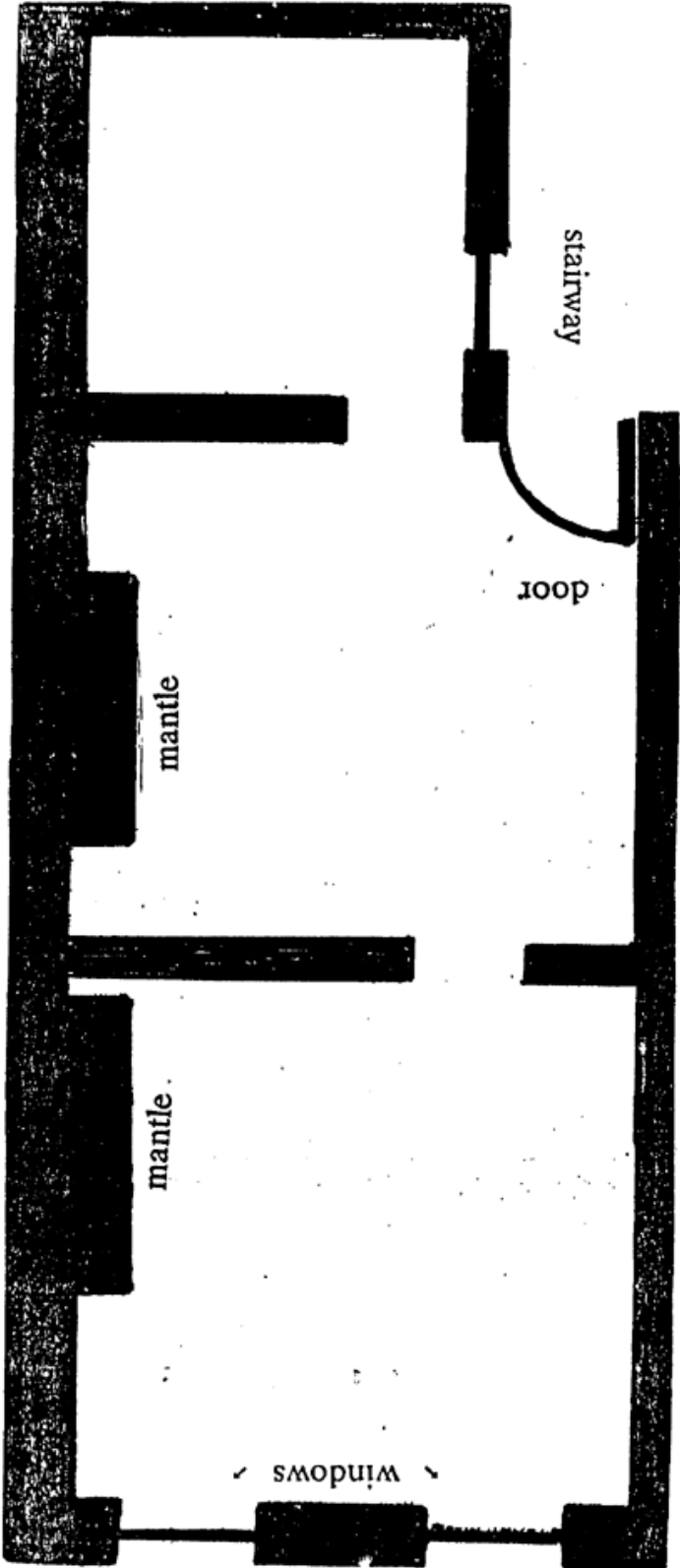
Josephine had a close relationship to her brother and her parents. She fondly remembered sitting around the kitchen table with her father, who eventually changed his name to Al, playing cards and solving riddles. Al worked as a cabinet maker and Josephine loved the furniture he crafted. She even held onto some of the pieces he made, including a large kitchen cabinet and tables. Josephine also recalled that her mother, who changed her name to Sadie, cleaned the family’s apartment until it was “immaculate.” Josephine’s mother was so tidy, in fact, that she earned the nick name “Shine-‘em-Sadie” from her neighbors. Josephine remembers her mother as incredibly hard working—what she called a “supermom” because she “worked, kept the house clean, she cooked, and made sure the kids always looked perfect.” Sadie urged Josephine to start working as soon as she could, even if that meant not graduating from high school. Despite her mother’s suggestions, Josephine did graduate high school and went on to study nursing, though she recalled not having “the stomach for it.”

Josephine married a man named George Esposito and had two children named Maria and Roger.

APPENDIX: BALDIZZI FAMILY APARTMENT



APPENDIX: APARTMENT FLOOR PLAN



APPENDIX: FLOOR PLAN DESIGN WORKSHEET

Name:

Date:

Based on the description, what information do you know about Josephine?

What parts of her personality and life experience might influence how her home looked?

Select what “moment in time” you will design her apartment to look like

What objects might have been in Josephine’s home during that “moment in time”?
