Project Prompt

In “Everyday Use,” the two sisters, Dee and Maggie, can be seen as symbolic of two different attitudes toward historical artifacts. Maggie uses her history, knows how to make a similar object, and embraces the idea that history is most important when it becomes family tradition and part of a person’s life. In comparison, Dee is interested in looking at history, displaying it, and sharing it with others as an object to be marveled at but not used. If interpreted in this way Walker seems to suggest that Maggie’s attitude is the “right” one, but that doesn’t mean we all agree with her. A similar conflict is presented in the chapter we read from *Ghost Singer* by Anna Lee Walters.

W.P. Kinsella suggests the importance of family memories and Tim O’Brien compares the things we physically carry to the emotional baggage we carry. He lists the weights of all the equipment, but it is the small trinkets, representative of specific memories, practically weightless in comparison, that the soldiers are burdened by.

In each of these stories, the emotional and personal history of items is highlighted, but historical value is also shown to be important.

Your goal for this project is to locate a piece of family history, or a personal “thing you carry” and analyze it, keeping all four stories in mind and making direct connections to the texts as you do so, quoting where applicable.

Include the following ideas in your analysis:

**Artifact analysis**: Describe your object so carefully that your audience could visualize it. Note any identifying marks, the material of which it is made, the texture, color(s), weight, size, method of manufacture. What distinguishes it as unique? What features indicate that it is a typical object of its type? Establish an approximate date of creation for your artifact based on your knowledge [or family members’ knowledge] of its original acquisition or manufacturing information you have located through research. Does anything about it indicate the historical time period? Do you know its approximate value at the time it was made? Do you know its value now?

In the case of the quilt in the story, Maggie knew what each piece was originally, when it was made, how it was made, and knew that the quilt had no dollar value when it was made, but it has a different kind of value. In comparison, Dee no doubt knew the monetary value of everything she asked for, but little else. The men in O’Brien’s story were all very aware of the physical weight of everything they carried, but didn’t always recognize the history of the items. Ray in “Shoeless Joe Jackson” destroys something of physical value [part of the farm] to recreate something of emotional value [a way to relive his memories]. The dress in *Ghost Singer* has an emotional value for the family and also has a cultural value, both of which are priceless.

**Functionality:** What was/is its use? How does/did it work? Where might your artifact have been found in a home in the past? What does it tell us about the manner of life of the user? Does it provide any clues to social class, ethnicity, gender, or age of its original owner or any other owner through out its history? Are such objects still available for purchase today? If so, why might having this artifact be preferable to having a new version?

**Provenance:** Trace the item’s history as completely as you can. How did it come to belong to your family? To you or the person who currently owns it?

**Oral History:** Again, in the case of the quilt, Maggie has stories she can tell about pieces of the quilt, about the making of it, even about “Grandma Dee.” However, if Dee had left with the quilt, her children and grandchildren [if she had any] would not know the same stories. In your project, consider what stories might be told about your artifact. Share what you consider to be the most important stories.

**Cultural Relevance:**

Your goal is to assess whether your artifact should be treated like Dee would treat the quilt, like Maggie would treat the quilt, a midway point between the two, or in a different way entirely. Are the “things you carry” a burden or a blessing? Be sure to explain your conclusion, referencing the stories where appropriate. Additionally, your analysis should lead you to conclusions about what is most “valuable” about your artifact, based upon the use to which you would [or do] put it.

**Additional research will be required for this project**, but much of it will be in the form of conversations rather than scholarship, with the exception of possibly needing to research a manufacturer and monetary value.

Your findings may be presented as an essay or in a different format [such as separate sections with headings, a brochure, or even an “auction affidavit and appraisal”]. Visual aids may be used, but should **not** take the place of careful description.

Evaluation rubric:

Description of artifact is clear and useful \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Artifact is placed in a historical framework (time, place) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Maker and method of manufacture is identified \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Original user identified [or reasonably suggested] , \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10 with attention to clues of class, ethnicity, etc.

Provenance traced. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Appreciation/assessment of historical and familial discovery is evident \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10

Assessment of artifact’s “value” is explained, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 30 with use of detail from self and stories

Final product is free of grammar and sentence errors \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 10