

Joseph Allen Skinner: The Collector
Educator's Guide to Slide Presentation
Estimated Time: 45 min

The slide presentation includes an introductory activity that asks students their thoughts on what collections are and why someone would build a collection. It then moves through Joseph Allen Skinner's life starting with his childhood collection of minerals and culminating in the donation of his life-long collection to Mount Holyoke College. At the end of the slideshow, there is an opportunity for a brief class discussion to summarize the lesson topics.

The next section is a guide to the slideshow including slide headings (blue), introductory information (black), guiding questions (red), and image key (green), to promote student engagement and discovery.

Note: Quotes from Joseph Allen Skinner are included in several slides. The teacher and/or students can take turns reading these quotes aloud during the slide show presentation.

SLIDE 1 – Joseph Allen Skinner – The Collector

SLIDE 2 – What is a collection?

Q: What is the difference between a group of similar objects and someone's collection? Do any of you have collections? What are they? Why do you collect those things?

SLIDE 3 – Joseph's First Collection

- When he was 13, Skinner wrote about his first collection of rocks and minerals (share quotes)
- The next slides examine some of the different collections that together make up the Skinner Museum

SLIDE 4 – The Natural World: Rocks and Minerals

- The study of rocks and minerals is called Geology and Mineralogy

- Rocks are the host material and minerals form within the rock.

Q: Describe the rocks and minerals that you see. What are the colors and textures? Are they all similar or do they have differences?

Objects on Slide (these are examples of minerals and ores)

1. Fluorite
2. Galena (lead ore)
3. Feldspar (amazonite)
4. Gold ore
5. Malachite (green) and Azurite (blue)

SLIDE 5 – The Natural World: Sea Life

- Skinner acquired hundreds of seashells, minerals, fossils, taxidermy animals, and other specimens for his museum.

Q: Have you ever collected seashells? Where and Why?

1. Triton's Trumpet (Type of shell named after Greek God)
2. Venus's Comb (Shell from a type of sea snail called a Murex)
3. Painted Spondylus (The shell of spiny oyster)
4. Nautilus (The nautilus is a distant cousin of the squid and octopus)
5. Coral

SLIDE 6 – Native American Artifacts

- Skinner collected many Native American artifacts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- An artifact is an object made or changed by human beings. Artifacts like these are excavated by archaeologists.

Q: What do you already know about the Native Americans and how they lived? What do you think these artifacts are and how do you think they were used?

1. Algonquin Arrowhead (Springfield, MA)
2. Algonquin Knife Blade (Springfield, MA)
3. Zuni Earthenware Olla (Jar) (Southwest)
4. Algonquin Tobacco Pipe Bowl (Springfield, MA)
5. Steatite (Soapstone) Bowl (MA)
6. Anasazi Canteen (Southwest)

SLIDE 7 – What are Ethnographic Objects?

Q: What is an ethnographic object?

- Ethnography is the study of different cultures
- Root words ethno and graphic: ethno (Greek) meaning people and graph (Greek) referring to writing or recording. Ethnography is in many ways a record of what people do.
- These are artifacts that came from a group of people that were still using the objects. The excavated artifacts in the last slide were hundreds or thousands of years old when found, but these items were still in use.

1. Sioux Dress (Great Plains, ca. 1870s-1880s)
2. Sioux Bison Horns (Great Plains, ca. 1890)
3. Apache Basket (Southwest, late 19th century)
4. Navajo Rug (Southwest, ca. 1925-1930)
5. Cheyenne Cradleboard (Great Plains, ca. 1870s-1880s)
6. Iroquois Snapping Turtle Rattle (Northeast, late 19th century)

SLIDE 8 – Early American Objects

- Skinner was interested in Early American history. (Early America is often considered the pre-industrialized era - late 1700s to 1850s)
- A large part of Skinner's collection had to do with early America and objects of everyday life.

Q: What do you see that gives you hints that these objects are from early America? What objects have we already looked at that are from early America?

1. Levi Smith Tavern Sign (Granby, MA, early 19th century)
2. Creamware Pitcher (Great Britain, ca. 1804)
3. Document signed by George Washington (1774)
4. Fifteen Star American Flag (1795-1818) (This flag was actually a later flag that was cut down to make it seem older - and more valuable)
5. Thanksgiving Proclamation (Massachusetts, 1792)
6. Portrait of Sarah Elizabeth Ball (Amherst, ca. 1835)

SLIDE 9 – Maritime Objects

- Maritime objects are objects that are related to the sea (trade, whaling, the navy, etc.)
- Skinner felt that maritime objects were an important part of American history.

Q: What do you see? Why do you think these things are an important part of American history?

1. Sperm Whale Tooth
2. Whalebone and Ivory War Ship Model (late 18th century)
3. Whalebone and Ivory Swift (19th century) (A swift is a device for winding yarn)
4. Ship's Figurehead (early 19th century)
5. Model of an East Indian Trading Ship (17th century)

SLIDE 10 – Arms and Armor

- Joseph Allen Skinner collected many examples of arms and armor
- His arms and armor are from many different cultures, periods, and regions.

Q: Can you guess when these different objects were made based on the way they look and how they might have been used?

1. (top to bottom) Mauser Pistol (Germany, ca. 1898), Remington Revolver (United States, ca. 1850), Flintlock Pistol (Great Britain, ca. 1810), Ottoman Flintlock Pistol (18th or early 19th century)
2. Union Calvary Officer's Saber (United States, ca. 1864)
3. Infantry Sword (Springfield, MA, ca. 1835)
4. Suit of Armor (Europe, 16th and 17th century)

SLIDE 11 – Skinner Expands His Collection

- Objects came to the Museum in many different ways. Some were Skinner family heirlooms, others were donated to the Museum by South Hadley residents, but most were acquired by Joseph Skinner himself. Skinner collected some of the objects when he was a young man, purchased others at antique shops and auctions, and acquired many during his worldwide travels.
- The following slides examine some of the places Skinner visited and the objects he acquired there.

SLIDE 12 – Africa

Q: What do you know about Africa or African cultures? Can you name any African countries?

1. Portion of Elephant Tusk
2. Zulu Neck Rest (South Africa)
3. (left to right) Songye Nzappa Zap (Axe) (Democratic Republic of Congo), Dagger (Africa), Dagger (Africa), Sword

(Democratic Republic of Congo)

SLIDE 13 – Skinner puzzler

Q: What type of animal do you think this skull came from?

SLIDE 14 – Hippopotamus

- This skull comes from a Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibious*). It seems likely that Skinner acquired the specimen on his trip to southern Africa.

SLIDE 15 – Egypt

Q: What do you know about Egypt or ancient Egyptian culture?

1. Hand Mirror (Egypt). Although the mirror was labeled by Skinner as “A copper hand mirror from one of the old Egyptian tombs” it was not an ancient object but a fake. There are more than a few items in the Museum that are not quite what they seem.
2. Faience Baboon Souvenir (Egypt)

SLIDE 16 – The South Pacific

Q: Can you name any of the islands in the South Pacific?

1. Gata (Ceremonial War Club), (Fiji)
2. Waseisei (Whale Tooth Necklace), (Fiji)
3. Shark Tooth Sword (Kingsmill Islands)

SLIDE 17 – Japan

Q: What do you know about Japan or Japanese culture?

1. Sword, 19th century
2. Ivory Figure of Buddhist monks (Buddhism is a religion that has origins in ancient India, now practiced all over the world [including Japan]. Buddhist monks are students, teachers, and followers of Buddhism.)
3. Netsuke, Ojime, and Inro (In 1800s Japan, most people didn't have pockets, and cases like these were hung from belts and held everyday things.)

SLIDE 18 – Europe

Q: Can you name any European countries?

1. Spectacles (17th century)
2. Glass Vase (Great Britain, late 19th century)
3. Zogrscope (Great Britain, early 19th century) This is an optical device that when looked through, creates the sense of depth perception (kind of like 3-D glasses).

SLIDE 19 – Summary

- From the opening of the Museum in 1932 to his death in 1946, Skinner continued to acquire new objects for his museum.
- By 1946, the collection consisted of more than 7,000 objects.
- When Skinner died, he gave his Museum to Mount Holyoke College

SLIDE 20 – Pre-visit Questions

Things to consider on your visit

- Why do so many of us collect?
- What are the different collections on display?
- Why did Skinner think these objects were important?
- What messages was he trying to convey to visitors?

SLIDE 21 – Curating a Classroom Collection

- How can we use our classroom objects to reflect this moment in time?
- What is the message of your collection?
- What do you hope people will learn from your collection?
- How did you come up with your title?