Writing
Object Labels

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ENGL 102
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What is curation?
“...[curation] should attempt to contribute new ideas that shed light on some unseen aspect or that allow us to see things in a new context.”

-eyecurious, “Word of the Year 2009: Curate”
Label Questions

Should
What is it?
Why is it here, and why should I care?
What is the story?
How was it made?
How was it used?
What can I discover by looking more carefully?

Labels

Be crisp, clear, and concise.
Encourage looking and thinking.
Use an active voice.
Avoid technical/specialized language.
When they must be used, define specialized terms. Break text into paragraphs of easily read chunks.
Case Study: A Pea Spoon

"La Marquise" Pea Spoon, c. 1895
Manufactured by Reed & Barton, Taunton, MA
Sterling Silver
Bequest of Judge John Webb Green and Ellen McClung Green, 1957.3.462

This pea spoon was manufactured by Reed & Barton, a well-known silver company. The Taunton, Massachusetts, firm of Reed & Barton began in 1824 as Babbitt & Crossman, which produced a cousin of pewter known as Britannia, or Britannia ware. Reed & Barton itself dates to 1840, the same year electroplating was patented in England, but became more well known during the American Civil War, when they manufactured weapons for Union troops.

The spoon has elaborate repoussé scrolls down its body resembling flowers, and space for a monogram for a bride or other purchaser at the bottom of its handle. The spoon of the bowl also has elaborate scrollwork, enhancing its overall elegant look and feel. The bowl of the spoon is pierced to allow water to drain away from cooked peas while serving. It is part of the “La Marquise” pattern of flatware, which was designed by Austin Jackson, a designer who worked for the company at the turn of the century.
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What do we want to say?

What is the history of Reed & Barton?

How have spoons evolved over their history?

How did silvermaking techniques evolve/advance in the 19th century?

How did changing table manners change the table wares used?

Why did Americans have a lot of weird serving ware?
Revising Pea Spoon Label

"La Marquise" Hidden Message Pea Spoon, c. 1895
Manufactured by Reed & Barton, Taunton, MA
Sterling Silver
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Silver flatware proliferated during the Gilded Age both because of a silver mining boom after the Civil War, and as consumers desired to show off their wealth and taste with large flatware sets.

Servingware for specific foods—like asparagus tongs or sardine forks—became common as improved preservation techniques and transportation gave Americans greater access to specialty goods. Once only available fresh for a limited Spring season, peas became a fashionable side dish available year round as canning techniques improved.

Food-specific servers were desirable novelties often embellished with designs that gave a nod to their use. Can you find the hidden message “PEA SPOON” inscribed within the bowl of the spoon?
Using Secondary Sources
Case Study: Gilded Age Exhibit

Want to talk about how during the 1870s–1900, changing ideas about children and increased access to consumer goods and advertising created a “consumer class” related to children.
Resources

Getty Museum Guide to Gallery Texts and Graphics

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers

Google Books

Google Ngram

Internet Archive