



BLOG OBJECTIVES

The National Museum of American History’s blog, *O Say Can You See?*, takes readers behind the scenes at the Museum, sharing insights and information about our exhibitions, events, collections, research projects, and other topics of interest to staff and visitors. Readers are encouraged to use the comment area to dialogue with us about the work of the Museum.

The goals of the National Museum of American History blog are:

Offer multidimensional, authentic communications

- The blog provides an opportunity to move beyond a single, institutional voice to a more informal dialogue that incorporates a diverse set of perspectives.

Increase relevance and currency

- The blog features regular, brief updates alongside compelling photos, short videos, and behind-the-scenes insights into the work of the Museum.

Build community

- The blog creates opportunities to build ongoing relationships with online audiences. When readers respond to blog content—whether by posting comments on the blog itself or on related social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter—they are participating in a conversation with the Museum. The blog promotes an interactive and social experience.

Expand promotional outreach

- The blog supplies a regular supply of substantive content that supplements and extends the messages featured in the monthly e-mail newsletter, on the main website, on social media platforms, and in press materials. It attracts visitors to the museum’s physical and virtual offerings and showcases the breadth of our collections and programming.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

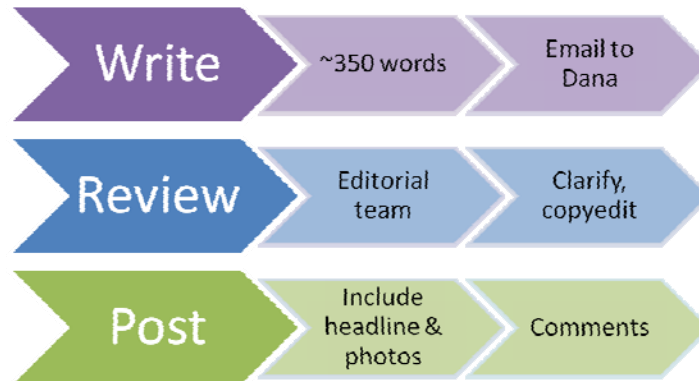
- The Museum’s blog “O Say Can You See?” was launched in July 2008, prior to reopening.
- Typically, 2-4 posts are published each week. Over 350 posts have been published and over 1,300 comments have been submitted by readers since launch.
- Nearly 140,000 people visited the blog in FY2010.
- Subscriber numbers are steadily growing; over 160 people receive each blog post by email and another 300 access the blog via RSS reader.
- Most visitors arrive at the blog through a search engine or by clicking a link on another website.

In a recent survey of 165 readers we found:

Where	Who	What
About ¼ of readers are local to the DC metro area.	When asked, “how would you describe yourself?” (check all that apply): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 66% history enthusiast • 24% Museum professional • 15% K-12 teacher • 10% professional historian, scholar, or researcher • 5% teacher in higher education 	The topics readers are most interested in are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information about historical artifacts 2. Updates on “what’s new” at the Museum 3. Online and on-site exhibitions 4. Behind-the-scenes stories about curators and other staff



PROCESS



1. Write (author)

- Prior to or during writing, please feel free to contact Dana Allen-Greil (managing editor) about your topic, questions about blog readers as an audience, ideas for a blog series, timing of your post, etc.
- Draft a blog post, 350-500 words, in Microsoft Word. In this document you should identify any images* (typically 2-3 images, including captions and credit information, where applicable), links, or other digital media to be used in the post. You should also include a brief headline/title for your post.
- Notify your department head. Also be sure to notify other colleagues who have responsibility for collections or staff mentioned in the post.
- Email your blog draft to Dana and attach digital media files (e.g., images). If your post is time-sensitive or should be posted on a particular date (e.g., historic anniversary, holiday, heritage month), please include this information in your email.

** Please only use: images in the public domain; images published with Creative Commons licenses; images you have obtained permission to use; your own personal image; or Smithsonian images with no known copyright issues. If you need help locating images that fit these criteria, alert the managing editor.*

2. Review (editorial team)

- An editorial team made up of representatives from Public Affairs, Development, Public Programs, Curatorial Affairs, and Business Programs will perform a quick review. The process involves light copyediting, clarification, and a check for accuracy, alignment with the Museum's mission and communications strategies, and reader-friendliness.
- Note that if a post is extremely time-sensitive (e.g., related to breaking news) the review can be as short as a few hours. Otherwise we ask for 5 business days between delivery of post and final publish date.
- The managing editor will contact you with any clarifying questions, comments, or edits prior to the publish date.

3. Publish (managing editor)

- The managing editor will publish the post to the blog and will email you the Web address. You are encouraged to share the link with your colleagues and interested parties outside of the Institution.
- The New Media office will promote the blog post through appropriate means, including sharing it on the Museum's Facebook page (<http://facebook.com/americanhistory>) and Twitter feed (<http://twitter.com/amhistoryMuseum>).
- Comments from readers are moderated by the managing editor. Should a comment be submitted which requires a response, the managing editor will forward the comment to you by email. You may respond to the commenter via email and cc: the managing editor (if appropriate) to include the response on the blog site.

CONTENT IDEAS

Curatorial and object-based posts

New	Rediscovered	Relevant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent acquisitions Why we collect Process of collecting Interviews with artifact donors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent research Objects out of storage (also: in Artifact Walls) Clarifying myths Recontextualize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current events Objects in the news Heritage months Anniversaries

Example posts

- "@ at MoMA"
http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/03/22/at-moma/
 (Response to public queries about an acquisition.)
- "Value Added Books"
<http://discussions.mnhs.org/collections/2008/06/value-added-books/>
 (Discussion of criteria used for collecting an artifact.)
- "A curator's favorite from the Scurlock Studio Collection"
<http://blog.americanhistory.si.edu/osaycanyousee/2009/06/a-curators-favorite-from-the-scurlock-studio-collection.html>
 (Focus on one intriguing object.)
- "South by Southwest Digest"
http://wp.moma.org/talk_to_me/2010/03/south-by-southwest-digest/ (Chronicle of a research trip informing an exhibition in development.)
- "Decisions, decisions..."
<http://blog.americanhistory.si.edu/osaycanyousee/2010/05/decisions-decisions.html>
 (Example of prior work that was transformed into a blog post...in this case, the post was developed from remarks given at a donation ceremony.)
- "The Last Digit of Pi"
<http://www.dancohen.org/2010/03/08/the-last-digit-of-pi/>
 (Another example of prior work—in this case, a lecture—revised into a blog post with illustrations.)

Events

Preliminary survey research shows that the blog isn't the most effective means of promoting physical attendance to events or exhibitions, and many of readers are not local.

Blog posts that address events should provide either:

- Opportunities for virtual visitors to participate in the event (e.g., to submit questions, to watch a live or archived webcast, etc.)
- A useful and informative wrap-up of a past event including photos, audio, or video, when possible.

Feedback and audience research

The blog provides opportunities to test ideas, generate feedback, and encourage conversation about the work of the Museum. Comments are the most common feedback feature but surveys and polls can also be used.



APPENDIX A: TIPS FOR WRITING BLOG POSTS

STONE

- Posts should use a less-formal writing style and offer a unique point of view on the work of the Institution. Be yourself - a personal voice can be very engaging.
- Using words like “I,” “we,” “us,” and “you” gives blog posts a more human touch than our other, more formal means of outreach communications such as press releases and email newsletters.
- Share your enthusiasm.
- Think about demonstrating the value of the work we do at the Museum and sharing what excites and challenges you about this work.
- Not all blog posts need to be in the style of a personal journal or reflection, in fact, many are not. The blog is an opportunity to share your interest and work in a particular topic with a wider community, helping Smithsonian activities gain increased exposure and become more accessible to the public.

MULTIMEDIA

- Your topic may be better conveyed via a video, interview, or photo slideshow. The New Media office can help with these formats.

ORGANIZATION

- Consider breaking your post up into a series of posts on aspects of your topic, instead of an exhaustive single post.
- The Introduction: Getting people to read beyond the headlines, and to stick with a story beyond the first paragraph, is an art. Consider making your first sentence one which intrigues the reader, not necessarily telling them the entirety of the story, but introducing a figure, a fact, or an experience which they would like to know more about.
- Hyperlinking is encouraged within your text. Link readers to websites (SI, educational, and nonprofit preferred) with additional or detailed information that doesn’t fit into the parameters of a blog post.
- Your story does not necessarily need a conclusion. You can use the final space to encourage discussion, link to related posts, or lead in to a follow-up blog posting.

ENGAGE READERS

- Invite ideas from our readers and encourage discussion.
- Consider ending your post with a question.

THINGS TO AVOID

- Please do not make announcements related to unconfirmed exhibitions, programming, or projects unless cleared by the project director.
- Feel free to discuss an upcoming event or exhibition at the Museum with which you are involved, but please avoid turning it into a commercial. We do have a “don’t make it sound like a marketing piece” policy. Speak from your point of view; do not copy and paste marketing material or press releases. Make sure it’s your own voice.

STYLE GUIDE

- The blog editors use *The Chicago Manual of Style* in conjunction with the Museum’s Web content style guide maintained by the New Media program. To request a copy of the Web content style guide, please contact Dana Allen-Greil.



APPENDIX B: BLOG POLICIES

COMMENT POLICY

The following policy is accessible on the blog to inform readers of our process and policy for handling comments.

The purpose of this blog is the exchange of ideas and information, including discussion through the use of comments. Accordingly, the Smithsonian encourages you to interact with its site, subject to the following conditions:

- You are solely responsible for the content that you submit.
- By posting content, you are giving the Smithsonian and those authorized by the Smithsonian permission to use it for any educational, promotional or other standard Museum purpose.
- You will not post any content that is unlawful, harassing, discriminatory, libelous, obscene, false, inflammatory, pornographic, or that infringes on the rights of any third party.
- You will only post content that is yours or for which you have received permission from the person or entity that owns the content and the related intellectual property rights.
- You will not insert your own or a third party's advertising or promotional content into your posting;
- You understand that the Smithsonian may monitor or review discussions, chats, postings, transmissions, bulletin boards or any other postings from time to time and reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to edit or remove any content that does not comply with these conditions.
- You understand that the Smithsonian assumes no responsibility or liability arising from the posting of your content or for any error, defamation, libel, omission, obscenity, danger or inaccuracy contained in any posted information or from any failure or delay in removing such content.
- You will not introduce any software viruses, worms or other programs designed to damage software, hardware or telecommunications equipment.
- You are not under the age of 13.

The Smithsonian reserves the right to monitor content or information provided by website visitors in its sole discretion, to edit or remove any content that, in the Smithsonian's judgment, does not comply with the foregoing rules, or is otherwise objectionable, inappropriate, or inaccurate. The Smithsonian is not responsible for any user-generated content that is posted on Smithsonian Institution websites or for any failure or delay in removing such content.

REPOSTING GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are provided to organizations requesting to republish content from our blog on another website. These requests are reviewed by the Office of Public Affairs .

For permission to repost an article from the National Museum of American History's "O Say Can You See?" blog on your website or other publication, please email allen-greil@si.edu. We request that a prominent note at the top of the re-post that alerts the reader to the fact that this content is a re-post from our blog. This notice should also include a link to the original post.

Example:

Editor's Note: This post was originally published on the National Museum of American History's ["O Say Can You See?"](#) blog and is republished here with permission.

No changes should be made to the content of the post without notification. Images should be attributed in the same way they are captioned in the original post.

INTERNS

Interns are encouraged to write about their experiences for the blog. Please see the Social Media intern policy for details: <http://160.111.247.162:8085/servlet/portal/serve/8772>