UNESCO’s Memory of the World Programme: A Global Treasure Trove for Future Generations

in association with sixredmarbles
How to Make the Most of This Lesson

This lesson serves as a road map for your journey through a rich and exciting collection of online content made available by Google Arts & Culture’s partners. You will explore photographs, slideshows, voice recordings, and more. The images in this lesson are just a sample of what’s available to you via the Google Arts & Culture website.

You can complete this lesson independently or with fellow students, a teacher, or another adult. The content is accessible to a wide range of ages, but it’s especially geared toward students ages 14 to 18.

Your journey in this lesson will take you through two major topics:

Chapter 1: What Is Memory of the World?
Chapter 2: A Sampling of Our Collective History

You’ll see some helpful signs along the way:

- Estimated time for completing the chapter
- Audio recording or video
- Link to more online content
- Learning activity
Tools for Learning

Below are tools for learning that you may need for Digital Discovery lessons:

- A device that connects to the Internet (a computer or tablet)
- A tool for writing your responses and big ideas (pen, pencil, computer, etc.)
- Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint)
- Scissors
- A notebook
- Scrap paper

**Explore! Google Arts & Culture** pictures are big. If you want to explore a picture in greater detail, click on the magnifying glass symbol and zoom in with the zoom slider. By dragging the white box around, you can see even tiny details.
Welcome to UNESCO’s Memory of the World Programme: A Global Treasure Trove for Future Generations

In this lesson, you’ll learn about Memory of the World (MoW), a programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The programme aims to preserve some of the world’s most significant items of our documentary heritage. What makes them significant? They reflect key aspects of societies around the world—their culture, traditions, history, technology, or science. Preserving these items provides us and future generations with an understanding of our origins and how they’ve shaped us and how we must work to shape our future. After reading this lesson, you’ll create your own “memory artifact” that tells future generations who you are and what is important to you.

What Will You Do?

1. Learn about MoW and the International Register.
2. Understand what makes up our documentary heritage.
3. See items of the MoW programme up close.
What's in this lesson?
1. Learn about what kinds of documents can be found in the International Register.
2. Explain what is meant by the term collective history.
3. Understand how items are chosen for the MoW International Register.

By participating in this lesson, you will be able to:
1. Explain the significance of writing as part of the historical record.
2. Identify the themes of the International Register.
3. Understand the importance of preserving items that reflect our collective past.

Vocabulary

documentary heritage, register, human rights, civil rights, Middle Ages, codex, apostle, tsunami, collective, illuminated manuscript, technology, innovation, literature, neuroscience

Need help with some of these terms? See the glossary at the end of this lesson.
What Is Memory of the World?

What is this chapter about?
The content that makes up our documentary heritage

How long will this chapter take?
1 hour
Chapter 1: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

**Consider**

1. You have probably already had at least one history course in your time at school. What kinds of topics are covered in a history course? Why do you think historians emphasize these topics?

**Discover**

2. What is a document? What kinds of items can be considered documents?
What Makes Up Our Documentary Heritage?

When you hear the words *documentary heritage*, you may think of old books, aging sheets of paper, or carved symbols on stone tablets. While these things *are* part of the world’s documentary heritage, “documents” aren’t just books or papers. They include other records of our time on Earth, such as photographs, paintings, oral traditions, music, films, television programs, digital files, and audiovisual media. In other words, our shared past is both ancient and modern.

This is an image from the Landsat program. How are satellite images part of our documentary heritage? They are the only accurate image record of Earth’s land surfaces, coastlines, and reefs. The images show both natural and human-made changes over a period of some 40 years.

Read more about how we learn from both our near and distant past in [this story](#). See more images from Landsat [here](#) and [here](#).
About Memory of the World

UNESCO’s MoW programme was established in 1992. Historians, scientists, world leaders, and others recognized that preserving the records of the world’s past was critical. Many of these items are fragile and easily lost to damage, decay, neglect, or intentional destruction.

In 1995 UNESCO created the MoW International Register. A register is a list made for record keeping. Countries can apply to have their items added to the list for protection. At this point, more than 400 records of “world significance” have been added to the list. The registered items represent several key themes, including human rights and civil rights, inscribed stone and tablets, technology, and world literature.

Learn more about the International Register and its wide range of records [here](#).

Learn about the people who made this tablet [here](#).

This record is a stone tablet inside a stone envelope. It dates to more than 4,000 years ago. It is one of more than 23,000 tablets documenting the history of an Old Assyrian trading community in what is now Turkey.
Handwritten History

With the development of written language came humans’ ability to record their history for future generations. As you saw on the previous slide, some ancient peoples wrote their histories on stone tablets. Others used palm leaves. Later, people created various forms of paper to write on.

Read more about the document shown here in [this story](#).

Explore palm leaf manuscripts from South and Southeast Asia in [this story](#).

View a handwritten medical textbook from the Middle Ages in [this story](#).

See stone shrines inscribed with Buddhist scripture in Myanmar [here](#).

This document describes the conditions for Christopher Columbus’s first voyage from Spain in search of the Indies. Instead of reaching the Indies in 1492, Columbus arrived in the Americas. The document gives historians an understanding of how government worked in 1400s Spain.
Many early documents are religious in nature. The one shown here is a codex—an ancient book manuscript. It is made up of five books believed to have been created by Pope Callixtus II in the 1100s. It tells the story of the apostle Saint James.
Modern History

Today, we can record the events that shape our times through not only text but also photographs and digital media. Modern technology allows us to understand an event such as a natural disaster in a much more up-close way. This increases our understanding of the event’s consequences. The photograph below shows the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
Chapter 1: Wrapping Up

Now that you’ve read the chapter, reflect on what you’ve learned by answering the questions below.

• What are some of the items that make up the world’s collective history?
• What items reflect your own history? Make a list of these items. You’ll use the list in a later activity.
Chapter 2:
A Sampling of Our Collective History

This piece of music was written by Arnold Schönberg, one of the most influential composers of the 20th century.

What is this chapter about?
A few of the items in the International Register

How long will this chapter take?
1 hour
Chapter 2: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions in your notebook.

Consider

1. Why is learning about the past important? What can world history tell us about ourselves today?

Discover

2. What role do new inventions and new ideas play in what and how we learn about history?
Why Preserve the Past?

As you’ve read, much of our present relates to what happened in our past. As humans in a collective world, we need to remember and reflect on the past so that we understand our present and can better predict our future.

Watch this video to learn about the importance of our collective memory.

See more of the work of the pioneering photographer who took this photo here.

"The Daydreaming" (El ensueño), Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1931, UNESCO Memory of the World
Human Rights and Civil Rights

As you saw in the last chapter, one of the themes of Memory of the World is human rights and civil rights. Human rights are those one naturally has as a living person. Civil rights are those given to members of a particular political state.

As you likely already know, world history is characterized by turning points in the struggle for rights for many of the world’s people. Governments around the world have both limited and expanded the rights of their people throughout history. In many places, these decisions have impacted the development of the nation’s history and culture.

Between 1788 and 1868, some 165,000 British prisoners were forced to migrate to Australia. Historians believe that the British government had several goals: to decrease the prison population, to settle a strategic location, and to economically exploit a new area.

Read about some of the major turning points in rights struggles [here](#).

See some political documents representing key moments in history in [this story](#).
Illuminated Manuscripts

This is a detail from a page of an illuminated manuscript. The MoW International Register lists many illuminated manuscripts. Illuminated manuscripts get their name from the fact that their pages were accented with gold or silver, which “illuminated”—or lit up—the page. In Europe, illuminated manuscripts reached their height during the Middle Ages. Some Islamic societies also created illuminated manuscripts.

Learn more about the document shown here in this story.

See a Jewish illuminated manuscript that dates to the 1300s here.

Read about an illuminated manuscript from the 5th–6th centuries here.

This page comes from the Utrecht Psalter. A psalter is a book containing the psalms of the Christian Bible. A psalm is a sacred song or prayer. The illustrations in the Utrecht Psalter reflect the violence and warfare of the historical period in which they were created. The psalter is a key manuscript of Christian art.
Maps

Maps are one of the most important human inventions. Early maps show us how people viewed the world during their time. They also show us how mapmaking has changed over time. Maps allowed people in different countries to explore the world.

This map comes from a 50-volume atlas created during the 1600s. Learn about the atlas in this story.
The map shown here is part of a series that tells the story of the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. The maps tell the stories of the siege as they happened from May to September. The maps were circulated around Europe. This map is about the end of the siege.
Politics

The MoW International Register contains many examples of items of great political significance. The one shown here is a trade proposal sent from the king of Burma to the king of England in 1756. The letter was engraved on pure gold and is decorated with rubies.

Read more about this golden letter in this exhibit.

See political documents of the ancient Hittite Empire—carved on clay tablets—here.
Technology

Technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. Innovations in technology include tools and systems that transform society and its environments. Technology can lead to economic growth and societal change. The MoW International Register includes remarkable stories of technological innovation and scientific achievements, from railway construction to silk production to monitoring changes to Earth’s surface.

This huge machine shop in Bucharest, Romania, is making parts for weapon shells in 1940. Industrialization—the movement of society from mostly farming to manufacturing—began during the mid- to late 1700s. It led to major economic and social change around the world.

View this story to see other ways technology has changed the world.
World Literature

Literature is defined as written works with lasting significance. Reading the literature of a particular culture or nation helps us to understand and appreciate the lives and histories of different people around the world. It also helps us develop our worldview—our internal collection of stories, values, and attitudes that inform our thinking about the world around us.

Read about some important works of literature from around the world in this story.
The studies of Santiago Ramón y Cajal form the basis of neuroscience today. Learn more about him and his students [here](#).
Chapter 2: Wrapping Up

Now that you’ve read the chapter, reflect on what you’ve learned by answering the question below.

Which of the items in this chapter were most innovative, in your opinion? Explain your answer.
Digital Learning in Action

So, what did you learn? Read the questions and complete the learning activities below to extend your learning based on what you just experienced.

Reflect Answer these questions:

• Why were the MoW programme and the International Register created?
• What modern items did you see on the International Register? Are there any items that you didn’t see that you think should be on the list? Explain your answer.

Summarize: Think about some of the themes of MoW. Is there one that you think is most significant to human history? Explain your answer.

Create: You saw many different types of documents in this lesson, including photographs, satellite images, inscribed stone tablets, illuminated manuscripts, and drawings. Think about your own history. Use the list you created earlier to create an item of your choosing that reflects your personal history. Be sure it shows future generations who you are and what’s important to you.
Glossary

- **apostle**: in the Christian faith, one of the 12 original disciples, or followers, of Jesus Christ
- **civil rights**: rights given to members of a particular political state
- **collective**: related to a group of people who are considered part of one whole group
- **codex**: manuscript book
- **documentary heritage**: recorded history in any format
- **human rights**: rights that belong to all people
- **illuminated manuscript**: book or document adorned with gold or silver leaf
- **innovation**: a new idea, device, or system
- **literature**: writings with excellent form that have universal interest
- **Middle Ages**: European historical period from about AD 500 to around 1500
- **neuroscience**: the study of the structure and function of the brain and nervous system
- **register**: a written record or list
- **technology**: the use of science to create useful things or processes
- **tsunami**: a huge sea wave most often caused by an earthquake or volcanic eruption