

A Matter of Style: 19th Century Furniture

Finding Historical Motifs in Today's Furniture

- Purpose:** students will observe and understand continuity with the past in contemporary design.
- Objective:** After viewing A Matter of Style <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ms.html> and discussing style elements, the students will be able to point out and identify ornamentation and design elements of nineteenth-century furniture styles in pieces of new furniture pictured in current advertisements in newspapers and magazines.
- Materials:** advertisements collected from Sunday papers of various cities and catalogs
scissors, gluestick, pencil
printout of "Today's Furniture Worksheet"
- Motivation:** Pose the question: **Do we still use the same designs in furniture that people used 150 years ago? If so, why? If not, why not?** Discuss the online A Matter of Style <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ms.html> with students. Printout and photocopy the glossary. Tell students they are going to look for furniture shape and decoration in the advertisements or catalogs that are similar to the furniture shape and decoration in the Web site and glossary. Students may want to view At Home in the Heartland Objects (1800-1850) <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1800/objects/index.html> and At Home in the Heartland Objects (1850-1890) <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/1850/objects/index.html> to see more examples of the same styles. The glossary can also be used as a visual resource of design. Look around the room to see if you can find any furniture that has similarities to any of the furniture online. Point out that a table in the room may be similar to a desk or a chair on the Web site. It does not have to be the same piece of furniture. Pass out the inserts or catalogs and the worksheet.
- Procedure:** Students will look through the inserts for examples of furniture with ornamentation, shapes, or motifs that may match those they saw online. Using their glossary, they can identify the element that matches or is derived from the antique.
- Students carefully cut out three examples of furniture (including the label or description, if any) they found in the advertisement/catalog and paste it in the left box of each pair of boxes on the worksheet. In each right-hand box students write the name of the style to which the advertised piece is similar and the name of the motif, shape, or ornament that was the clue what style it was. At the bottom, students write one or more reasons why they think old designs are still used.
- Publication and Closure:** Share the results orally with other students. Post the worksheets on a bulletin board. Do an analysis or count of the most popular antique style still sold today. Are finials still popular? Which furniture still has molding? Discuss the results.
- Assessment:** Students' worksheets should be completed. Reasons in the "How do you know?" section can be from personal observation, comparison to other objects, recognition based on an online example, or other reliable source. Examples cut from the advertisements should have at least one design element similar to one online or in the glossary. Reasons they give for the continued use of old design may include: they match old furniture we might have; some people still like this style; old designs are familiar; old designs look important, big, pretty, expensive, etc.

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Historical Motifs in Today's Furniture Worksheet

Student Name _____

glue here

Style

Motifs, ornament, or shape clue

glue here

Style

Motifs, ornament, or shape clue

glue here

Style

Motifs, ornament, or shape clue

Write why you think we are still using motifs, shapes, and ornament from the past and ancient past in our furniture today.