

# A Note of Introduction

Chad Reid

“Any Marvel fans in the audience?” My class starts with a suit jacket and a question. Once I have everyone’s attention, I tell a story about how my friends and I went to a Sotheby’s auction on the weekend. After breezily noting the many pieces of Renaissance art, Roman coins, vintage cars, and Rock n’ Roll memorabilia on sale, I focus my tale on a blue, upscale jacket worn by Ryan Reynolds.

Reynolds is an actor who has been both the Green Lantern and Deadpool. These comic book superheroes have made millions of dollars for Hollywood around the world. A Canadian with family in British Columbia, many students instantly know Reynolds’s Deadpool character. I sprinkle my introduction with a few movie trailers, a few Powerpoint pictures of Reynolds, and a quick explanation of how much money his movie franchise has made over the years. I retell a few stories of how *Deadpool* was filmed in Vancouver, how you can see the cityscape in the background, and how some of the major roads used in the movie clogged commuter traffic for hours. Many ears perk up as I connect Reynolds as a Hollywood movie star with local roots.

“So does anyone want to try on his jacket?” I ask this question to bring a different dimension of engagement to my lesson. The typical spectrum of reactions within the class emerge. The silence of one student is often broken by shrieking students. Many rush to the front of the class. Pictures immediately are posted on the Internet. One student smells the sleeve. Another tries not to cry. This jacket is my favorite object for teaching.



The collection of essays featured in this issue reflects innovative teaching from around the world: North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. The focus for many articles is on one primary source that has proven successful and memorable in the classroom. Inspired by Neil MacGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* and the anniversary forum, “What Books Should be More Widely Read in Environmental History” in *Environmental History*, this project brings together a variety of writers - teachers, professors, independent and retired scholars.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Penguin UK, 2012); “What Books Should be Read More Widely in Environmental History,” *Environmental History* Vol. 10, no. 4 (2005): 666-769; In British Columbia and other provinces in Canada, the Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts were important for teachers and

During a time when British Columbia renewed its curricular emphasis on primary sources, I reached out to these scholars for their thoughts and ideas. It is difficult to address how amazing these contributors are without printing each one of their CVs here. As each article appeared in my Inbox, I found myself becoming increasingly excited about how I can incorporate these objects and teaching styles into my own practice. They represent a chance to add another tool to my toolbox. Their works understandably show a myriad of teaching methods that emphasize not only the “cultural biography of objects,” but the racial, social, economic, and political lives of objects.<sup>2</sup>

Many books have sprung up over the years attempting to mirror MacGregor’s “best of” list.<sup>3</sup> The articles in this issue of *Detours* do not attempt to cover an entire history of the world like MacGregor’s tome. But through an emphasis on personal success by educators in the classroom, their works do encompass a wide swath of time. Methods and focus can certainly be used and replicated by *Detours* readers at their own institutions. Importantly, these articles show how history is often taught with a personal attachment and connection that engages the audience and makes history memorable for everyone.

---

students to reorient their thinking of the past. Throughout middle and high school courses, lessons and scaffolding has been implemented for students to learn the six concepts over several years. The volume won the Canada’s Governor-General’s Award for Excellence in Teaching History, see Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Nelson Education, 2012), <https://historicalthinking.ca>. Tom Morton’s article, “The Rise and Fall of the Dauntless Hero” is included in this *Detours* forum.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects” *World Archaeology*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1999): 169-178.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in 12 Maps* (New York: Viking, 2013); Harold Holzer, *The Civil War in 50 Objects* (New York: Viking, 2013); Peter Doyle, *The First World War in 100 Objects* (New York: Plume, 2014); Toby Creswell, *The History of Australia in 100 Objects* (Sydney: Viking Australia, 2017); Roger Moorhouse, Tim Newark, Nigel Jones, *The Third Reich in 100 Objects: A Material History of Nazi Germany* (London: Pen and Sword Books, 2017); Teasel E. Muir-Harmony, *Apollo to the Moon: A History in 50 Objects* (New York: National Geographic, 2018); Adam Shoalts, *A History of Canada in Ten Maps: Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2018). Another work that is notable for its focus on the study of primary sources, teasing out histories, and the mobilization of material things is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ivan Gaskell, Sara J. Schechner, Sarah Anne Carter, *Tangible Things: Making History through Objects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).