Young Writers Workshop

Fiction Inspired by Iowa Artifacts

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Table of Contents

Introduction by Stephanie Hemphill 2

Elias Bethards 3

Ronak Bhargava 8

Adela Osmundson 13

Isabelle Raymer 20

Lucy Skouson 24

Group Photo 28

Each student’s object of inspiration precedes their fiction story. A brief introduction about each object is provided.
“All objects exist in a moment of time.”
   ~ Amy Tan, “The Bonesetter’s Daughter”

“Every object holds a story.”
   ~ A.D. Posey

“Remember, the object only reflects a feeling that came from a human. It holds a story from where it came from, but it’s not alive.”
   ~ Kim Neville, “The Memory Collectors”

The artifacts on display at The State Historical Building of Iowa come from and represent specific moments of time in Iowa’s history. “Every object [on display] holds a story.” Some of these stories have been recorded and cataloged. But other objects’ held stories have been lost over time. Their stories remain unknown.

Fiction allows an author to breathe life into the inanimate, to tell the story an object holds. Blending the known and unknown, documented history with imagination, is the essence of great historical fiction. The writers in The Young Writer’s Workshop were tasked with creating a story inspired by their object where none existed or to expand upon an object’s story where the real historical details remain hazy.

Through their stories the young writers take us on journeys to the times and places where their objects originated. Carefully balancing historical truth with a constructed plot, their stories engage readers and seek to create a greater understanding of the world of the object and the world we live in now.

Historical fiction invites us to experience the past in our present. With distance and perspective our experience of history and the way we tell her stories is revised and transformed. And in the process so are we.
Object Information: Percussion lock rifle, stamped on plate "Joseph Gulcher" and "Hunter and Grouse". Silver inlay on the buttstock of a squirrel, hunter and hound.
Abe moved across the forest as quiet as a falling feather. He instinctively avoided the slender sticks and the first dry leaves of autumn that scattered across his path. His tall leather boots padded across the soil without leaving a mark. Not even one leaf in the sea of crimson and gold was broken. He paused, shifting his weight ever so slightly as his keen eyes caught a glimpse of gray fur. He watched the creature scuttle down the wide trunk of an ancient oak and pounce on its prey. He waited for the squirrel to collect its weather-beaten nut and disappear into the thicket before he continued on his hunt. The hunter caught a whiff of something strange in the crisp autumnal air. It was something too faint for the average man to detect. Only the hunter’s finely tuned senses from years of prowling the great forests of Oregon allowed him to expose a disturbance in the usually stable gaia.

It was not to say that the many forests of the newly settled west were particularly jejune. On any particular day, the woods would be alive with a plethora of vibrant fauna and flora. However, when day turned to night a new kind of interesting would fall upon the trees. Dangerous creatures would roam free. Under the unblinking eye of the moon, havoc would ensue. The hunter stopped abruptly. He noticed shallow impressions in the mud, soft from the recent rainfall. The impressions were like a paw print, only much larger with wickedly curved claws tearing deep gouges into the soft dirt. He had seen these impressions before. The impressions were recent, maybe an hour old. What was odd was that there was only one set, a lone wolf. The hunter pulled back his hood, revealing his sun-beaten face to the elements. He was ancient and withered. He had a flowing white beard and long white hair. They were wavy in contrast to his lined and craggy face. Abe’s sharp intelligent green eyes were adorned by large bushy eyebrows drawn into a permanent scowl. A scowl that was broken, as was the peace, as a large hunting hound bounded towards him scattering leaves every which way. The dog’s auburn hair looked like flame in the harsh light leaking through the canopy above. The hound was holding something between its teeth with a proud look on his face. The hunter turned to pet the dog, his scowl returning as he identified the creature held in his hound’s strong jaw, the squirrel from earlier. “Hello Clover,” the hunter softly whispered, patting the dog. He gestured at the prints, “whatta you say we follow ‘em.” The dog barked happily in reply. Raising a hand to his lips, a smile growing on his face, the hunter bent over to more closely inspect the trail of prints. He adeptly followed them until the mud ended on the bank of a murmuring brook. He threw his gaze across the panoramic scene in front of him, zeroing in on a set of long gashes on the far side of the stream. He vaulted to the far bank, rolling into a crouch. The dog, unable to perform the same feat of agility paddled across the stream, panting loudly. When the dog reached the far bank he shook himself dry,
splattering the hunter with muddy water. The grin fell off of the hunter’s face when he noticed a trail of dark maroon on the crimson of the leaves. His eyes followed the trail from beneath his furrowed brow. Walking along the trail of blood, he fell into a predator’s lope, his dog padding along, once playful, now deadly serious. Abe, caught up in the hunt, stumbled, finding the trail’s end at the eviscerated body of a young buck. It lay, dead in the tall grass, barely recognisable. The hunter kneeled, muttering at the inequity of the stolen kill. Abe picked up the body, hefting it over his shoulder. He turned to begin his hike back to the town. Right then the dog began to bark frantically. The hunter whipped his head around, dropping the deer. The tall grass began writhing and a wolf barreled out from within the dancing foliage. It was massive and savage, growling and foaming at the mouth. Quickly and skillfully the hunter reached for the gun slung across his back and began the painstaking process of loading the rifle, dumping powder and a lead ball down the barrel. The hunter’s movements were quick but even with his prowess the gun took a full minute to load. The beast leapt at the hunter, but the hound leapt faster, smashing into the wolf. The rabid animal crashed to the forest floor, laying still with one bullet to the flank from the hunter’s smoking rifle. Abe let out a tired laugh. The wolf would never take the life of another animal again.

After Abe had dropped off the carcass of the deer at the house of the local butcher and informed farmer Abbot that the wolf that had been killing his chickens was vanquished, Abe’s first stop was the small town's gunsmith. The town that Abe called home was isolated. Without knowing the geography of the uncharted state, Abe and his caravan had chosen an unforgiving home. Outside of a few small farms, Abe’s prey was the only food that the town ate. When he arrived at the small shop the smell of molten steel and gunpowder assaulted his nostrils. Inside the wooden building several guns were lying about in various stages of completion. The guns that the smith, Alexander, made were notoriously bad. They frequently misfired and broke within weeks or days. The man was making serious profit off of Abe, who bought guns more frequently than food. A door at the back of the shop was flung open, thick smoke curling out of it. A spluttering man staggered from the haze coughing. He had long greasy hair, tied back in a braid. His face was marred by scars, caused by burns in accidents not dissimilar to this.

“Again,” chuckled Abe. It was far from the first time that Alexander had set his shop on fire, and Abe had a hunch that it wouldn't be the last. The gunsmith didn’t even dignify the umbrage with a response, only glaring. Without a word the gunsmith grabbed a long rifle, placed it on the counter and held his hand out towards Abe, as if expecting something. This interaction wasn’t unfamiliar to either of the men. Abe reached into his coat’s pocket. Producing a small lump of shimmering stone. It was
an almost egregious price considering the poor craftsmanship of the plain wood and iron rifle. “This is
the last Alex.”

“The last of what? Your father’s gold?” grunted the man. Abe’s father had been a gold miner
who found his fortune in California.

“The last gun I’ll ever buy from you. I’m setting off tomorrow to the town on the far side of the
forest. I hear there’s a legendary gunsmith there.”

“You’ll never make it,” sneered Alex. “It’s a month's journey through wolf infested wilds.”

“The only thing that won’t make it, is that shoddy rifle,” grumbled Abe, again proffering the
gold. Greedily snatching it and pushing it into his overcoat, Alexander reluctantly turned over the
weapon with a snarl of “there.”

Slinging the gun over his back, Abe walked out.

By day Abe and his loyal hound traversed the great redwood forest. To those who know where
to look, the forest provides. Small crystal streams quenched the thirst of the hunter and the dog, and
they cooked fish and venison over a small fire every night. It was fortunate that Abe’s first encounter
with a predator happened during day’s reign over night, for the shadows would have hidden the wild
cat that attacked him. Abe was first alerted by the halt of his dog. Clover was adept at sniffing out
unseen assailants. The hunter meticulously loaded his gun as he and his companion tried to identify
the source of the disturbance. Only thinking to look up just in time, Abe grabbed his gun. His reflexes
honored by his years of protecting the town, Abe quickly aimed and fired at the beast. The bobcat was
dead before it hit the ground.

The following two weeks continued as previously. Only now the food that Abe had packed was
running dry, and he was having to expend more and more energy hunting. Even though Abe moved
through the wilderness like a wraith and with the dexterity of a young man, Abe was not a young man.
He was growing old and he knew that soon, maybe in a year, maybe two or three, he wouldn’t have
the strength to provide for his town. All of the time Abe didn’t spend in the woods was spent teaching
the basics of hunting, farming, and fishing to the youth of the town. The settlers had picked a poor
spot to build a town. As Alexander had said, the nearest town was almost a month's journey through
wolf infested wilds.

It was the third night of the final week of Abe’s travels. The light of day had retreated into the
west, conceding the rule of the sky to the bright, nearly-full moon. Clover and the hunter were
camped in a small clearing, tall redwoods making a ring around their camp. As autumn faded to the
very beginnings of a ruthless early winter, the dead grass underfoot had become less and less suitable for comfortable slumber. As the last embers in the fire died out Clover abandoned his role as a sentry and closed his eyes for only a second, but a second was all it took. From deep in the thicket pounced a wolf. A wolf with a familiar red bullet mark in its flank. Growling the animal pounced on Abe, waking him and clawing at his chest. Abe woke with a roar of agony. Muster ing every bit of his fading strength, Abe shoved the wolf off of him. He reached for his gun. It was then that he made a horrible realization. His gun was in his bag at the other side of the clearing. The wolf launched at the hunter who only just avoided a slash to the back by the animal's large claws. As the hunter dashed towards his pack the wolf was hot on his heels. Just then a red streak barreled into the larger animal. The two large canines rolled across the clearing, gnashing their jaws and clawing at one another. Without a second to spare, Abe grabbed the already loaded gun from his bag and aimed at the wolf. Inhaling, the hunter steadied his aim. It would take an incredible feat to hit his mark with the two animals so close together. Finally confident in his shot, Abe pulled the trigger. His gun imploded in his hands, wood splintering. Not waiting to ponder how hard he should punch the useless gunsmith, he hurled the broken weapon at the wolf. It was, however, futile. The animals' mortal combat had resulted in lethal wounds, not only for the wolf, but Clover as well. Abe fell to his knees and cried out. The sky tore open and rain began to fall in the night, a torrent hiding the mirror waterfall of his tears. Abe punched the earth again and again, yelling into the rain.

It was the next day when a grief stricken Abe flung open the door to a large stone building. On the door hung a sign reading: ‘Gunther's fine Firearms.’ The walls were lined with beautiful guns, and behind a counter stood a large well muscled man with close cropped black hair who sported a leather apron and gloves.

“What can I do for you old man?” asked the man, presumably Gunther.

“I need a gun, finer than you have ever crafted,” muttered Abe, eyes still red-rimmed. “And I have a somewhat special request.”

It took only a day for the master craftsman to create the gun, made of fine auburn wood that shone like fire in the sunlight. The stock was embossed with a steel image of a hound. And above the trigger was a carving of a squirrel. Without a word, not even a thank you, the hunter reached into his pocket and withdrew a cloth wrapped gold nugget the size of his fist. This truly was the last of his dead father’s gold. With a nod of assent from Gunther, Abe collected his gun. He walked straight out of the shop to the edge of the woods, where he stopped to gaze dolefully into the forest. Then pulling up his hood, the broken old man strode into the maze of redwood trees alone.
Object Information: Poster for Communist Party Election Rally held on October 4, 1932, at the Jewish Community Center, 8th Street and Forest Avenue.
“Hear James W. Ford, the Communist Candidate for Vice President at the Jewish Community Center! Tomorrow at 7:30!”

“Evil commie! Get out of our town. We don’t want you here!” A few men wearing ragged clothes and torn shoes jeer and throw stones at the kid. Since the stock market crash every other family was barely scraping by, including mine. Many were unemployed and had nothing better to do.

I hold up the posters to the kid, he looks about the same age as my son. The boy looks frightened by the men. I wish I could help but as a Black man if I try to stand up to them, I bet I’d be killed.

He gives me my money and I walk away from the busy street, with one of the posters in my hand. Mr. Patten saves all of our posters. He says that one day someone is going to look at them as if they were treasure.

I look down at the bright orange page. Reading the poster, I walk past the church, across the bustling road filled with vendors, people, and automobiles until I reach the print shop. The smell of dirt, smoke, and filth overwhelms my nose at first, but I get used to it. I stand in the tiny doorway, opening to the cramped room. Equal rights, higher wages, insurance; interesting. I look up. The blue printing press stands in the corner on the cobbled floor. There are no windows and grime covers the place, but now papers are flung across the floor.

“I’m sure I cleaned up before I left,” I say, shaking my head. I bend down to pick the papers up and I spot a flask of whiskey and a patch of black cloth.

The next day, October 4th, 1932, I’m at the Jewish Community Center. I have more posters that need to be delivered. There are dozens of people here. Including about ten coppers. There are Black people, workers, crumbs that lost everything in the market crash, and some businessmen. Everyone here looks weary and is dressed in torn clothes. They have bags under their eyes and their hair is ruffled. In the large, ornate room, stands a wooden platform at the back. A Black man comes up and everyone cheers. I can see the police tense. That must be James Ford.

He smiles. “Hello everyone. I am James Ford, your Vice Presidential Candidate for the United States Communist Party.” Applause fills the room. “I know that times have been especially tough. The capitalist system is broken and you have to be the ones to bear the largest consequence. If I am elected I will make sure to fight for the people and …” His speech continues, as interesting as it is, I can only focus on the police officers. An officer with a short brown beard and bald head stares at me.
He whispers something to the officer next to him. I focus on the floor, when James Ford starts to talk about Black rights and equality. I am an advocate for the Black community of Des Moines, and I most commonly work within the community. After the event, I push my way past all of the commies to the front of the room. James Ford is meeting with some of his supporters.

I wait for him to finish. “... And that is why I think that I would be the best choice for the common man.”

“James Ford, I am Thomas Pail. I work for Robert Patten. I think I met your assistant, I helped to print posters for him.” I hand him the vibrant posters.

“You’re a printer? We could use your help. If you’re up for it.”

“Well, that depends. If it will help the community, I’m interested.”

He reaches into the pocket of his dress pants. He hands me a few crumpled pages of propaganda. “I need you to print these and hand them out. Put them up around town and get people interested. Your reward for helping will come soon enough.” He walks away to go meet some of his other supporters. I stand there, wondering what just happened.

The next day I give the posters to my church.

“In order to gain equality and rights, we have to support Ford.”

A few people look at me as if I am crazy, but the rest read the flyers.

I hang the rest of the posters around town. In alleyways I hide for a few seconds and when no one’s around I run out to the street and hang a poster on the building. I do this the whole night. My sixteen year old son does the same on the North side of town. I get back to the shop and hide the rest of the flyers inside my desk. I find a notecard in the desk. It has an address and a time, 1:30 am Forest Avenue and 9th Street. I look down at my dirty watch. It’s 1:25! I let the papers fall and run out.

Panting, I reach the intersection. There is a white man with blue jeans and a black, long sleeve shirt. He walks toward me.

“Thomas Pail?”

“Yes.”

“You have been a great asset. Here is your reward.” I reach for the money, but he stops me. “Let me remind you that if you fail us, your family is coming down with you.” I stop and weigh my decisions. I really need this money.

My son and I continue our mission: hanging up posters, talking to people, and handing out flyers. We make sure to be careful today, if I get caught the whole operation is done.

The following week, I continue to do what I do, but I hand out a small paper to those most likely to join our cause saying, “It’s time that the poor of this community take the initiative. We are barely
scraping by and with winter coming, the measly amount of coal we get is simply not enough. The Polk County Board of Supervisors is not looking out for us, help yourself and take the fight to them.” On top is a hammer and a sickle, the communist symbol. At the bottom it reads a time and location for Iowa’s Communist League.

After over a month of hard work we have three hundred members. The Polk County Board of Supervisors meeting is on Monday. After a long day of hanging up posters, I get back to the shop. I turn the filthy corner, families still have to sit on the sides of roads and with winter coming, many will find it hard to survive. The air is sharp and cold, and the wind is piercing. I get to the doorway, rubbing my hands and shivering. Then I stop. Papers are scattered and Mr. Patten’s desk is overturned. The big, blue printing press lies on its side, right next to two officers, wearing black uniforms. These are the same officers from the rally. They must be drunk and the first officer’s beard is unruly and curled about in strange ways. The other man holds a whiskey bottle, the brown liquid falling out of the flask and in the other hand he clutches a communist poster. These are the men who dirtied the shop last month.

I swallow my anger. “Hello officers. Is there something wrong?”

“You, you commie filth,” the one holding the beer says in a drowsy voice. “You’re coming with us.”

I turn to get out of there, but the officer holds up his gun. “You don’t dare to run from me!” he says, stumbling towards me.

He grabs me and raises his fist up. Everything goes black.

I wake up in prison. As a known communist and a Black man, I’m stuck in jail. My son and wife are out in the world fighting for themselves. Hopefully the money from the Communist Party will be enough for them to survive through the end of the year.

Days pass, but my son and wife visit me.

“Father!” my son says when he sees me.

“I am sorry that I’m in here. I promise to make things up to you.” My son wordlessly hands me a newspaper: *The Daily Worker*, a communist paper. The three hundred unemployed members stormed the Polk County Board of Supervisors’ meeting. Each worker presented how hard it was to survive, especially in the winter, and they asked for more coal. Our original demand of two tons of coal a month was reduced to one ton of coal every three weeks. Now the Unemployed Council is branching out through the city. Next to it is an article covering the
continued oppression of Black people. My efforts were just one small step, but perhaps one day we will be treated equally. We have to keep fighting. We will fight with Patten's Printing Press.
Object Information: Revolutionary War musket with bayonet, former flintlock converted to percussion lock.
David Williams was an old hand at this, he would say. The weight of a musket in his hands, the scent of gunpowder heavy in the air, wafting from the men’s powder horns. Sometimes it felt like the man’s feet were still half-frozen, like he was still tearing down those British soldiers in Ticonderoga, his limbs heavy and his musket weightless.

Van Wart sighed heavily as he laid down his cards. The lanky Continental colonel pulled himself to his feet in the same motion he tugged on a hessian coat that he had taken from an old friend, a dead one, but an old one.

Sighing, Williams stared down at the cards in his hands. Bad hand. There was no point in continuing. It was a three person game. He threw them down. Taking a moment of silence before pushing to his feet, Williams stretched. Paulding barely spared him a glance. His bones creaked and groaned with every stretch of the arm, the hips, the spine. His feet ached.

There was only a moment of this before Van Wart loudly proclaimed, “There comes a trader!” Sergeant Paulding nodded in recognition.

Colonel Van Wart walked ahead, urging the other men toward the road which they had hidden near, awaiting any passing British in order to capture them.

Williams called, “To arms, men,” all listening to the sound of a horse crossing the bridge, not fifteen rods from them as they rushed to resume arms.

Hastily, Paulding and Williams donned their blue coats from where they had discarded them earlier. Hurrying down the road toward the bridge, all three militiamen stayed as silent as they could. Musket presented, Williams stepped forward in measured, careful steps.

Before them a single, elegant, man, wearing a Continental uniform rode atop his horse.

“Halt!” Van Wart called.
The rider urged his horse to a slow, and then a stop, calling back, “My lads, I hope you belong to my party.”

Paulding furrowed his brow at him in the way he was wont to do anytime he disliked a person, and plainly, “Which party would that be?”

“The lower party,” the man uttered, expression serene.

This caused a stir amongst the Continental men. Paulding did his best to fix his expression and failed miserably as he always did. Van Wart just stared, quite shocked into silence. Though Williams stepped forward, musket still at ready, “We do.”

The rider’s gaze seemed to linger on Van Wart’s hessian coat.

“Well, lads,” the rider exclaimed. “Good to know! Myself, am a British officer, and, really, would not wish to be detained a moment.”

“Sir,” Van Wart began, recovering himself quickly. “I am afraid for your sake that we are Americans and now we must consider yourself our prisoner.”

Sighing heavily, the rider smiled, seemingly serene still. “Of course, of course,” he muttered. Then, louder, “But, I happen to have a pass from General Benedict Arnold himself to conduct my business. Please, you must allow me to pass. See here, lads.” He tugged at his sleeve briefly so they could see the ornate gold watch which he wore. “This gold watch, a token of my being a gentleman, there is really no need.”

Van Wart shook his head stalwartly. “I’m afraid that as you are our prisoner we cannot enable you to pass. Here, here.” He motioned for the major to dismount, his own musket in hand as he took the officer’s horse by the lead and pulled it along. Quickly, they reached the brush in which they had been hidden earlier. Passing off the horse’s lead to Paulding, the sergeant taking it with a quiet respect, Van Wart took initiative and informed, “I’ll take guard.”

Paulding stepped back a bit as Williams motioned for the prisoner to take off his hat.
Williams took the hat, inspecting it closely, before instructing, “Now the coat and vest.” The officer complied, easily, pulling off his coat and then set about unbuttoning his vest. Williams took his coat and inspected it as well. Nothing. Williams, again, instructed, “Regretfully, your small clothes.” Again, the officer submitted without complaint. Now it was truly veering on hopeless, but Williams continued, “Sit here then.” He motioned to the ground. “I will remove your boots.”

The prisoner carefully lowered himself to the earth, allowing Williams to pull off his boots. There, clearly, a bundle of papers lay under his stockings and Williams hurried as Paulding exclaimed, “Here ‘tis.”

Williams inspected the papers just as well as he had the clothes and then handed them off to Paulding to read, as he was the only of the three that could. After a moment, Paulding turned to Williams and murmured softly for him to follow.

With great care, Paulding pulled the other man out closer to the road, only stopping once they reached Van Wart.

“What’s this?” Van Wart motioned toward the paper clutched in Paulding’s hands. Williams shrugged, directing his gaze to the usually solemn man that was Paulding.

Paulding spoke, hushed, “These.” He shook the papers. “are plans that show the British Army how to take Fort Arnold near West Point, written by Arnold himself.”

Van Wart stared, a non-reaction as always, and Williams might as well have rushed Paulding with the way he grabbed his arm.

Williams’ head spun, vision going shaky as his heart raced in his chest. He felt weightless with the shock. Not only a British officer, but effectively a traitor to their country. “A spy?” he asked, motioning toward where they had left the British officer.

Paulding nodded solemnly, papers pressed to his chest.

Van Wart finally seemed to shake himself out of his state. “Paulding, Williams, you two go make ready of the spy so that we can take him to Colonel Jameson. I’ll remain here and stay on
Williams hummed shortly, advising, “You better take those papers though so he can’t try and snag them from one of us.”

Van Wart took the papers readily and carefully tucked them away.

The spy seemed to be waiting for them, calling out from his place on the ground as soon as he saw them, “Well, now you’ve got all. I don’t think I could persuade you men to let me go for a proper reward?”

Paulding and Williams’ still faces were enough. Despite this, the spy’s countenance did not shift or change, he simply asked, “Might I be allowed to redress?”

Williams acquiesced, “Yes, do, we’ll take you to camp as it is.”

Quietly, the officer redressed, not paying them mind as the men whispered amongst themselves.

Succinctly, “We’ll ask you to mount now, officer.”

The spy didn’t hesitate to follow Paulding’s command, briskly making his way over to his horse and mounting cleanly.

They had only made it about ten rods, with Williams leading the horse, when Paulding asked, “Where might you have got those papers?”

The officer answered calmly, “Of a man down at Line’s Bridge.”

Van Wart looked over, arching a single eyebrow before looking away and lowly, “Who was the man?”

The spy responded, “That I would not know.”
Sharing a questioning glance with his fellow militiamen, Paulding eventually moved to speak, the spy continuing before he could, “But, I do know that I could get you a thousand guineas, for my freedom and you could keep the horse and her bridle and saddle,” he paused here, brandishing his watch as best he could while riding, “and my watch too.”

Van Wart spoke evenly and immediately, that same distanced panic from earlier pushing through, “No, sir, we’re loyal to our country.”

The spy smiled, “What about ten thousand guineas and as many dry goods as you could ever want-”

“No, sir, we’re loyal to our country,” Paulding interrupted, his expression stiff.

The smile strained briefly, Williams noting the calmness that seemed to follow and, “I could get you all that and you could secret me away until the goods and gold arrives, just to make it sure.”

Tightening his grip on his musket it was Williams now, “No, sir, we’re loyal to our country.”

The spy smiled coolly. They rode on.

The spy held himself like an officer, spine straight, demeanor calm, except for those brief shows of frustration or fear. He folded his hands delicately, an elegant gentleman, a sharp mind about him. And, yet, Williams couldn’t help but doubt. A gentle doubt, of truth and reason, and this British officer deserving what came to him.

Eventually, they delivered him to camp and Williams couldn’t help but meditate on the cool unconcernedness that the spy, now known as Major John André, conducted himself with.

As it was, the spy was captured, and even with his fleeting doubts that the coolness had inspired, he was still very much a British spy, and Williams would always be loyal to his country.

The trial passed in a quick manner, and André was sentenced to an execution by hanging.

Williams wasn’t sure whether he attended the execution out of some misguided sort of guilt or a misplaced sort of pride. Either way, it was an eerie sort of day.
The crowd was hushed in a type of eager expectation that only an execution crowd could hold. Williams stood among them, watching carefully as the spy, André, made his way out of the stone house, pausing briefly to bow to whom, Williams would assume to be some gentlemen he knew, them reciprocating politely.

The man’s face went white as a sheet as he saw the gallows before him. And though Williams could see it, he could not hear the words that left the man’s mouth in return to an officer’s question as he retook his composure.

As the major walked up the steps he paused, something that seemed indefinite as he swallowed heavily, choking on air. Williams watched as the man, for he was just that, a man dying and a soldier dying a death that of a dog, hesitated before stepping into the wagon with an air of finality to him. Steadily, he pulled two white handkerchiefs from his pocket. The executioner bound his arms loosely with one and he tied the other round his eyes in a spectacle of perfect desolation, before pulling the noose around his own neck and fastening it without help.

The executioner awkwardly informed him that he had a chance for his last words.

Major John André raised the handkerchief from his sight and spoke with the courage that only a dead man had, “I pray you to bear me witness that I meet my fate like a brave man.”

The wagon was swept from beneath his feet and, instantly, the spy expired.

Williams grimaced at the sight, indeed this was a melancholy fate for even a soldier of Britain.
Object Information: Paper currency from 1857, City of Wapello, $3.00.
“Sir, what is the plan to rob the museum?”

“Don’t you dare try to rush my planning session. I will make you regret it, but the robbery will take place at the State Historical building of Iowa in 2 days. Nothing can stand in our way and remember we steal stuff from museums and then we add the bills to our collection so that they have more value. We have been stealing since 2019 and now it is 2021 and this is our last one,” said the man’s boss.

Meanwhile on the other side of town Marisol is a 14-year-old Latina-American with curly brown hair and mahogany brown eyes who loves to read and go to the museum. Marisol is asking her mom if she can go to the museum in 2 days so that she can see her favorite exhibit which has a 3-dollar bill that her ancestor had helped create for his county in 1847. Marisol liked to see it because she has a connection to it. The next day she works on an argument so that her mother will let her go and when she finishes, she presents it to her mother.

Her mother says, “Oh honey of course you can go. I love that you enjoy the museum and it is great that you want to go so often.”

Marisol is overjoyed that she can go and packs her bag for tomorrow, with an enjoyable book, a sweater because it is always cold in the museum and five dollars for the restaurant in her bag. The next day she sets off on her adventure to the museum. She loves traveling downtown in Des Moines and always enjoys doing it. The colors are so vibrant. And the streets are always so full of life. When she gets to the museum, she goes through all the exhibits and looks at everything except the case with currency in it.

Marisol goes to the bathroom and once she is there an announcement loudly blares, “Thank you for visiting the State Historical Museum of Iowa and research center the time is now 4:00. The museum and research center will be closing in 30 minutes”. She hurriedly washes her hands and leaves the bathroom.

She rushes to the exhibit while still walking and gets there just in time to have a good minute to look at the bill because she never takes the elevator. She looks at the dollar bill and it is so vibrant, it has a picture of a women in one corner and a pasture with cows and other livestock in the other corner and at the top between two 3s there is a train, and, in the middle, it says treasurer of the city of Wapello with a red line that looks quite like a mustache.

She inspects it from all angles as she always does and at that moment an announcement occurs, “Thank you for visiting the State Historical Museum of Iowa and research center the time is
now 4:30. The museum and research center is closed to the public. Thank you for visiting and have a nice evening”.

Marisol then hears voices. She looks around but there is nobody on either side, and she realizes that they are coming from the stairwell. She doesn't know why, but she hides by the trunks. As she hides the voices grow louder until they are inside the room. And then they enter. One man is quite large and short, and the other is tall and skinny.

The large man calls, “Boss, it is safe to enter.”

The tall man exclaims, sounding furious, “Have you checked!”

The large man looks around more carefully and looks back up to his boss to shout with equal annoyance. “There isn't anyone here. You don't have to yell!”

Marisol trembles in fear, but her resolve does not waver because she decides that she will stop the thieves from stealing the 3-dollar bill because she wants to preserve her ancestor’s legacy.

While Marisol is thinking, the tall one enters, obviously the boss. Marisol gathers her courage, preparing to fling herself at them or break the case or something so that they leave. But then decides to bide her time. The men look so sweaty from the small amount of physical exercise that it gives her an idea. Her idea is to dash away or make a loud noise to draw their attention away from the 3-dollar bill. Then she will find a night guard and loop back around to protect the case with the 3-dollar bill in it. She rushes out of her hiding spot. She runs past them and out of the room. But then she trips over nothing at all. The large man had followed her and catches up to her easily because of the small distance. He grabs Marisol by her hair and drags her to the tall man.

He deposits her in front of his boss and says,” This girl was running about and mucking up our plans sir.”

The tall man is pleased. “You did an excellent job today, Jonny. You'll now get a cut of the money from the tours we give through our collection.”

“But boss,” the big man says. “I thought that I would get a share no matter what because I helped make the plan.”

His boss responds with a chuckle. “You think I would share what I got with you. I promised myself that I would only do it if you proved to be useful.”

At that point Marisol has an idea to get her out of this situation. Even though she’s scared she says, “Will you let me go? I won't cause you any harm. I just got stuck in here trying to steal the bill myself. But I see now that you are experts and I shouldn't get in the way.” This is all a lie of course, but they believe it.

The tall man says, “Let her go, she is just an insignificant girl, and she is right, we are the experts. So race away girl.”
Marisol does in fact run away but as she speeds past them, she thinks about the best way to stop their evil plan, and it comes to her she will need to get the night guard to help her stop them. She rushes to the guard station and asks the guard there to “Please help, there is a robbery taking place right now!”

The guard looks up and with a worried tone says, “Take me to the scene of the crime.” Marisol leads the guard to where the display case is, but right before they arrive he turns around and chokes her. With the guard's hands still around her neck he drags her into the room and takes in the scene.

After the guard sees what was going on he yells, “I thought you both said the situation was under control. I don’t think a girl coming and asking for my help means the situation is under control.”

Both men look embarrassed, and the big man says, “She said she was trying to steal the bill and we believed her and let her go.”

During this exchange Marisol realizes that the guard was working for them. She decides the only thing she can do is pull an alarm and so that the authorities are informed. She struggles with all her might and then bites the man as she’s running out of air, and he releases her.

The tall man screams, “Get her now!”

She runs for the nearest fire alarm and pulls it. She runs away as quickly as she can from the men, but they chase her down the hallway and down the stairs with her stumbling just in front of them. At one point she thinks that she is about to fall but she keeps her balance and makes it through. She then runs past the mammoth exhibit and past the globe through all the doors. She gets out of the building hearing the men screaming for her to stop and to come back, but she just keeps sprinting. She runs all the way home and at the doorstep she dusts herself off and makes herself look presentable and catches her breath. She enters her house and sits down, her mind still racing about the events that happened that evening. She vows to never tell anyone.

Months later on the news she hears a story about three men who are going to jail for thirty years for the charge of attempted theft and multiple successful thefts. Marisol smiles knowing that she is the reason that they are going to jail.
Object Information: Wedding dress from 1908, sheer white cotton lawn with lace inserts, pin-tucked bodice, ruched elbow-length sleeves, stitched pleats at back, flounce at bottom with lace inserts and pin-tucks.
Curse of The Draft  
By Lucy Skouson

1910:

Blythe beamed at Harry, who tenderly smiled back. Standing in the chapel, they were finally getting married. It was the summer of 1910, and they had been planning this since 1905. Blythe's mother had to finish the wedding dress that she was wearing at his moment. The young couple looked at each other with love in their eyes as they recited their vows to stay together forever. Two hours later, the same fondness radiated from them as they held hands under the dinner table. Though it was piled high with fruit preserves and toast, it was definitely not as important as their adoration. Blythe's mother thought Harry would punk out, but the couple had fallen for each other hard.

1930:

Mary looked in awe as she held up her mother Blythe's dress in her hands. She stood in her attic, surrounded by heavy piles of dust. Because economic hardship hit her family, she had been forced to wear the heirloom dress for her wedding. She didn't care, though, now that she held the beautiful white cotton in her hands. She took a deep sniff. It smelled like mothballs, but that didn't quell the excitement of wearing it. She wondered if her mother had felt the same excitement to get married, to wear this dress. Did Mother feel the same love for Father as Mary did William? Even though Father wasn't around anymore, she still remembered his hugs. She wondered if Mother's face would still light up if Father were to walk through the door. Would Mary's children see it on her face? If another war draft came around, it could take Will away. Would William get drafted? Wait-who was she kidding? There wouldn't be another draft for a long time. She shook her head, took hold of the dress, and headed to the church.

1950:

Linda tugged her mom through the busy church yard, eager to be there when George arrived. The high-necked dress itched, but Mary, her mom, said that she had to wear it if she was going to get married at all. She sure didn't appreciate her daughter getting married when she was such a young lady, especially since youthful marriage hadn't turned out well for Grandma or herself. They didn't talk to Grandma much anymore, after that big argument over Grandpa and Dad. Linda had pestered her mom until her mom revealed that Grandpa and Dad had both died in war, Grandpa in the First World War and Dad in the Second. Her mom didn't want the same heartbreak to happen to her. Lisa,
Linda’s older sister, shared the sentiment. But Linda loved George, and didn’t want to leave him. Because what were the chances that he would get drafted and die in a war? She saw George and waved, pulling up her skirt to sprint toward him.

1970:
Jennifer huffed as she pulled on the ancient wedding gown. She was getting annoyed by her mom lecturing her on why it was such a bad idea to get married at such a tender age. Apparently, her geezers of a granny and a great granny had married guys who went off and killed themselves in America’s hassles. Her dad died in the Vietnam war. Jennifer walked downstairs in the living room and threw herself across the new-fangled futon, which was pulled out so Chris could sleep over that night. He had already gone to change into his new white-and-black wedding suit. Her mom yelled for Jennifer to go get her hair done at the stylist. Chris wouldn’t enlist in war and die, though. He was going to college for dentistry. He had his whole life ahead of him! There was no chance that he would get drafted and die. He wasn’t gonna die in battle. He wasn’t even going to go to battle. Jennifer sighed at her goofy thoughts, got up, and walked out the door to the garage.

1990:
Emily flipped her ‘do and stared at the white lacey fluffed-up bag of a dress. Her mom must have been straight-up crazy to have given her this to put on. Larry would sure look bangin’ with his black suave tux, but she would look as out of place as a black sheep in a field of white ones. Anyway, her mom was acting unfair as anything, because she didn’t want Emily getting married to this war junkie of a man. Something about how their family had a history of war deaths. Neither Mother nor Daughter, Jennifer or Emily, were too happy ‘bout the way the other was acting. But Larry and Emily would get hitched, plain as that. And it would be all that and a bag of chips. Emily slung on the dress and walked downstairs. She greeted and kissed Larry, and Larry her. Emily thought back to her mom’s superstitious words and then dismissed them. It’ll be fine, great, even. What are the chances you die in a war in this day and age? It’ll be good. Good.

2010:
Olivia looked in the mirror at herself, wearing the hundred-year-old dress, snapped a selfie, and sent it to Sophie, her long-time friend. Her mom apparently had worn the gown to her wedding, and her mom, and her mom and her mom and so on and so on. She stared, knowing that she was about to enter the ‘adulting’ stage, the married stage of life. Olivia turned towards the stairs, pulling up the skirt
when going down them. She stared out the window and met eyes with her soon-to-be-spouse, Noah. Smiling, she gestured inside. Last night her mother told Olivia that she didn’t want Noah to marry her, but her mom would allow it. Olivia learned that her grandpas up through generations had all died in the wars that America fought. Noah planned to enlist, but he wouldn't die, right? She went downstairs and opened the door for Noah; and he side-hugged her and kissed the top of her head. She hugged back and dragged him towards the bathroom to do his hair.

2030:

Riley stared at her mom, who handed her a small pile of papers. The papers were laminated and smooth. As Riley took the papers into her own hand, she saw a date written in one corner of the page.

“1930?” She wondered how these practically ancient documents had made their way into her hands.

“Read it, darling?” her mom asked. After Riley nodded, her mom walked out of the room, seemingly nonchalant, but her mom’s hands were shaking.

After reading the journal entries, shocked and shaken by the words written upon them, Riley walked over to her dad’s room. Quietly entering, she heard a soft hello.

“Hey Riles. What’s up?” Her dad laid in bed, permanently crippled by bombs set off in Iraq. “Here to ask about the ‘Curse of The Draft,’ huh?” Riley nodded and her dad jokingly smiled. “There’s nothing more to it than what was in the papers. I’m pretty sure I broke the curse when I came home, but that’s for you to decide.”

Riley nodded again and stepped outside the room. She had proposed to Oliver in the fall, and had no intention of changing her plans. Oliver was blind, and wouldn’t be accepted into the military, even if he wanted to go. Which he definitely didn’t.

She read over her vows, vows that promised them to stay together forever.

(This time it would happen.)
Group Photo

Left to Right: Kenedy Heimerdinger, Matt Beyer, Isabelle Raymer, Lucy Skouson, Ronak Bhargava, Adela Osmundson, Elias Bethards, Stephanie Hemphill, Emma Haren