

In-Archives Handout - Art of the United States

by Jennifer Wingate



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/civil-war-envelopes>

Group 1: Scrapbook of Civil War envelopes, 1861-1865; William Irwin Martin Civil War envelopes, 1974.259, box 1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Please follow the handling instructions given by archives staff. **The album is fragile, and Prof. Wingate or a BHS staff member may need to help turn pages.**

You may work on these exercises as a group, but each student should fill in his or her own worksheet.

By the late 1840s, the development of new cheap printing techniques led to the production of illustrated advertising envelopes. By the spring of 1861, many took on patriotic and political themes, like the ones collected by William Irwin Martin in this scrapbook.

Identify and photograph examples of envelopes made by the following processes (one each). What is it about the way the image looks that helps you identify the process?

Wood engraving _____

Lithograph _____

Chromolithograph _____

Find and photograph an envelope that features an allegorical figure or personification (a person that stands for or represents an abstract concept). Describe the figure and his or her attributes.

What abstract concept or idea might this figure have represented? What do you see that makes you think that?

How does the way the figure is represented affect the meaning of the abstract idea? For example, what does this figure, its attributes, and the way it was designed, tell us about “America” or “Liberty” or another abstract idea?

Find an envelope with a political message and attempt to summarize its message. Describe the image and the message. Does the envelope support the campaign of a presidential candidate? Does it make a case for Northern rejection of secession? Does it support or promote another cause?

How was the illustration designed to enhance that message? What specific details or design choices do you think affected its overall impact? Have you seen anything similar to this image in the art we’ve studied in class so far? If so, where? If not, how is it different?

Choose an envelope to study in more depth and take a picture of it. It may be one that you've already described for this worksheet, but it should relate in some way to art we've studied in class so far.

You will be given a separate assignment asking you to compare and contrast the envelope you choose with a work of art that we've studied in class. The assignment will be due on the day of the midterm exam and will count as _____ points toward your midterm exam grade.