Washington Authors mix it up at the Washington State History Museum

Tacoma, WA – What happens when you bring creative writers into a building filled with tens of thousands of historic artifacts and ask them to pick a few objects? The Washington State Historical Society did just that. The resulting exhibition is a lively and nostalgic nexus, as if your favorite bookstore befriended your Great Grandma’s attic. *A Thousand Words’ Worth: Washington Authors Tell Stories With Objects* opens this Saturday, March 9 and runs through August 4 at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma.

“We invited a group of well-loved authors with diverse voices from around the state to dive into our collections. We asked them to select objects to tell stories with,” said Audience Engagement Director Mary Mikel Stump. “We want to actively use our collections to engage communities with history in unique and accessible ways.”

Historic artifacts, ephemera and images hold significance and embody story; that is one reason we seek to preserve them. The thirteen selected authors, or interpreters in the cases where authors are deceased, have sought objects with a resonating essence to combine into meaningful vignettes. The “object stories” are paired with their published or newly-inspired writing.

As the exhibition’s introduction reminds us, “The Pacific Northwest is a place of fierce beauty and savage landscapes … its unusual environments have inspired those who have spent their whole lives in this land, as well as those who have seen it for the first time. The Northwest character has been shaped by legend and story, exploration and innovation, and this, in turn, has created a place where authors have been inspired to bring their own myths to life.”

Each author brings a unique perspective to the exhibition through their writing and through the choices they have made from the Historical Society’s collections.

“Through this exhibition, we’re exploring how history interweaves with popular culture and other parts of the humanities,” said Lead Curator Gwen Whiting. “Many of these objects would not necessarily be shown together in a traditional exhibition. *A Thousand Words Worth* is more like
a library, where we invite visitors to consider each author's display as a book. Metaphorically, you can pull one off the shelf and take some time to read the objects. We hope visitors will make connections between the author's selections and their own experiences of Washington."

The gallery includes an interactive space for visitors to create and tell their own stories, too.

The authors were selected through community conversations as well as an internal review process. Among other criteria, authors were selected who have lived in Washington, who represent a diverse variety of genres and cultures, whose work was significantly influenced by this place, and/or those who have had a literary influence in our region. Authors include:

- Octavia E. Butler
- Chenoa Egawa
- Kathleen Flenniken
- Jamie Ford
- Samuel Green
- David Guterson
- Frank Herbert and Brian Herbert
- Dr. Charles Johnson
- Debbie Macomber
- Betty MacDonald as interpreted by Paula Becker
- John Okada as interpreted by Frank Abe
- Chandler O'Leary and Jessica Spring
- Shawn Wong

The History Museum hopes that visitors will be inspired to explore other works by Washington authors and to draw new connections between historic objects and contemporary life, as well as potentially creating work of their own with ideas drawn from items in the museum.

The museum developed related programming for people of all ages, including:

- Family Saturday: Write Your World, Saturday March 9, 1:00-3:00 PM
- Wine & Words, Friday March 15, 6:00-8:30 PM, a Member and Invitation-only event
- History Museum's Book Fair with hands-on activities, Saturday April 6, 10:00 AM- 5:00 PM
- Question & Answer with Washington Author David Guterson, Saturday April 6, 6:00-7:30 PM at 7 Seas Brewing, 2101 Jefferson Ave, Tacoma
- Scholarly Selections: Young Adult Dystopias in Popular Culture, Thursday April 18, 6:30-8:00 PM
- Family Saturdays at the History Museum: Make Your Own Book, Saturday May 11, 1:00-3:00 PM
- Scholarly Selections: From Emily Dickinson to Lucinda Williams, Thursday May 16, 6:30-8:00 PM

Get further details at http://www.washingtonhistory.org/1000words.

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Woman’s proper right shoe worn by Fay Fuller to climb Mount Rainier. Circa 1885-1890. Made of brown leather, leather soles, button closure along outer side. Metal hobnails are implanted in the sole. Washington State Historical Society, 1898.2.1. Artifact selected for *A Thousand Words’ Worth* by Chandler O’Leary and Jessica Spring.

Roll-up style needle case made of black leather (or possibly a type of oil cloth), lined with red satin, circa 1800-1899. The case contains a white wool cloth attached to the red backing on which are black and silver buttons with the words "ne plus ultra" and "our own make", black paper with 12 small white buttons attached, a spool of white thread, one large darning needle, one smaller needle, thick white cord and pieces of black yarn. A loop of twill tape holds the case together when rolled. Washington State History Museum, 2001.0.232. Artifact selected for *A Thousand Words Worth* by the estate of Octavia E. Butler.


Diorama with labels showing internment and relocation centers for Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II, 45 × 27 inches. Made by John Sasaki at an unknown date (1946-1994). Map of the
United States hand-drawn in green pencil on white cardboard, attached to thin plywood and edged with black ribbon. Three-dimensional models of barracks with watch towers, armed guards and fenced areas are labeled with the center names. The military restricted zone along the West Coast is colored tan. In the lower right is a typed list of internment camp names with dates and populations. Names of assembly centers also noted. Signed by the artist John Sasaki. Washington State Historical Society, 1946-1994.14.34. Selected for *A Thousand Words Worth* by Frank Abe interpreting John Okada.

Washington State Historical Society partners with our communities to explore how history connects us all. The Society’s most visible activity, the Washington State History Museum (WSHM) is located in Tacoma’s downtown core along Pacific Avenue among a thriving cultural scene. The museum features interactive permanent exhibitions about Washington’s past in the Great Hall, unique rotating exhibitions highlighting the Society’s collections, and dynamic feature exhibitions.

**Address:** 1911 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402  
**Hours:** 10:00AM–5:00PM Tuesday through Sunday. Third Thursday of each month, 10:00AM–8:00PM.  
**Admission:** Free for members; Adults $14; seniors (age 65+), students (age 6-17) and military (with ID) $11; free for children 5 and under; family rate $40 (up to two adults and four children under age 18). Patrons with a Washington Quest card and licensed Washington Foster Parents can attend for $1 per person or $2 per family.