

MAKING TEACHING WITH OBJECTS EASY WITH CABINET

BENEFITS

- Large numbers of students can handle otherwise inaccessible objects.
- Cabinet promotes student thinking during lectures.

TIPS

- Start early. The digitisation process takes a bit of time.
- Take the time and effort to annotate your objects fully.
- Walk your students through the process of logging in to Cabinet via Canvas or WebLearn.

TOOLS USED

- Cabinet

Abstract

The online platform Cabinet makes museum objects which are usually kept behind glass or in the archive accessible for large groups of students. Cabinet opens up new ways of teaching with objects, allowing both teachers and students to create 'papers' consisting of annotated images and 3D models. This case study on Professor Christine Gerrard's use of Cabinet highlights how she created more interactive lectures and how her students engaged with museum objects in Cabinet before, during and after class.

Classical literature and culture become accessible

Studying the Long Eighteenth Century is compulsory for all English students at Oxford. But students tend to see the legacy of Greece and Rome – with which the literature and culture of this period is imbued – as dull, intimidating or elitist. Christine Gerrard, Professor of English Literature at Lady Margaret Hall, is convinced that this is mainly because of the students' limited access to objects from this time, with direct handling of objects at the University's museums usually being restricted to a small number of students due to space, staff time and the fragility of the objects.



With Cabinet
I found a way
of making
Classical
literature and
culture fun and
accessible to
everyone.



– Dr Christine Gerrard
Lecturer at Lady Margaret Hall

To allow all of her 280+ students to experience this period more directly, Prof Gerrard devised her course 'Democratising the Classics: popular literature, consumer taste and material objects in the eighteenth century' around 3D models and 2D images in Cabinet (Figure 1).

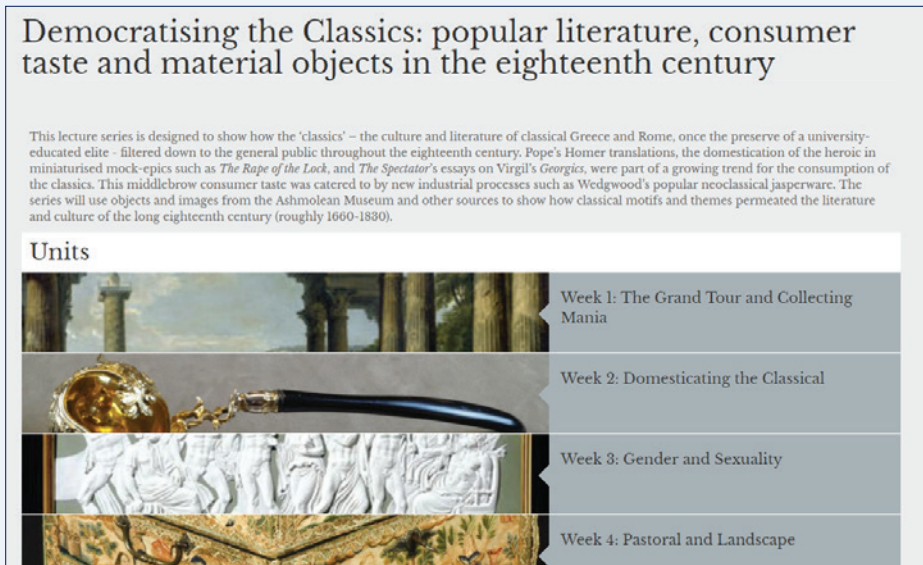


Figure 1: Screenshot of the landing page of the 'Democratising the Classics' paper in Cabinet.

Exploring weekly topics

Prof Gerrard chose Cabinet as the key resource for her lecture. Within Cabinet, she created a paper which comprises a number of units, one for each week. The title of each week is based on the larger topic discussed during the lecture. Prof Gerrard deliberately chose broad themes that were socially inclusive and show how the eighteenth century's use of the classical past has topical relevance to today's debates. A general topic description sets the scene for every week, followed by objects which students can explore in more depth before and after the lecture (Figure 2).

During lectures, Prof Gerrard introduced some of the objects, moving from PowerPoint to Cabinet online using the lecture room screen to show students the different features of Cabinet. She has found it an invaluable way to promote thinking within the lecture that does not require advance student preparation.

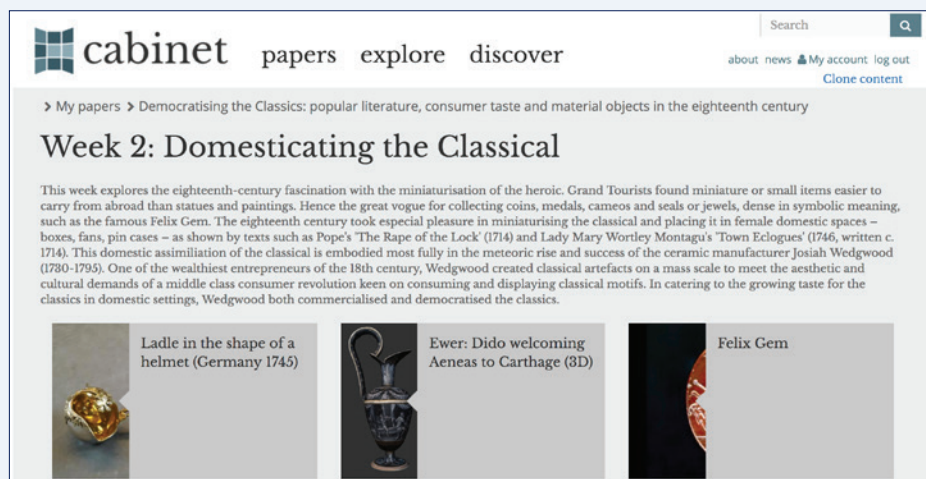


Figure 2: Screenshot of Week 2 of 'Democratising the Classics' in Cabinet.



“The Cabinet platform has proved to be an exciting and challenging new experience which has transformed my teaching practice.”

- Dr Christine Gerrard
Lecturer at Lady Margaret Hall

Making objects accessible in 3D

Cabinet not only enables students to explore 2D artefacts, it also allows them to (virtually) handle 3D reproductions. They can twist and turn 3D models around, look at them from different angles and zoom in and out (Figure 3). By controlling the object, their experience comes close to that of handling an original: it feels like holding and inspecting an actual object.

On top of that, most of the objects chosen by Prof Gerrard are hidden away in store rooms at the Ashmolean and are not on museum display. Many of them have never been seen by the public before, so the course really goes a long way to democratising the Classics by making them more accessible online.



Figure 3: Two screenshots of the 3D model of an Ewer showing Dido welcoming Aeneas to Carthage in Cabinet. © Ashmolean Museum, 3D Photogrammetry by Jamie Cameron.

Careful annotations guide students

Prof Gerrard ensured that all of the items were carefully curated, with explanations of their provenance and significance which students can find in the Commentary field (Figure 4).

Here, Prof Gerrard also prompts them to look at other objects. She juxtaposes objects from both the Long Eighteenth Century and the Classical past, where fruitful, and includes the rationale for these in the description field. Commentary and annotations provoke students to think critically and to connect ideas, arguments, themes, forms and styles they encounter through their studies in this period, whether in college classes and tutorials for the Final Honour School, or on Masters degree classes.



“

Bringing in relevant objects from the Cabinet helped contextualise the texts we discussed - I absolutely loved these lectures!

”

- Student on Prof Gerrard's lecture

Commentary

Accession number: WA 1947.191.249

Collection: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford

Pierre Reymond

Ewer: Dido welcoming Aeneas to Carthage, 1560

Grisaille and coloured enamel, gilt, copper

This ewer - a type of tall jug or pitcher - is an early example of the taste for imitating classical vases and decorating them with classical scenes, a taste which became widely commercialised in the following century by Josiah Wedgwood. The scene depicted shows the widowed Dido, Queen of Carthage, welcoming the Trojan hero Aeneas. This is a happier,

Figure 4: Screenshot of the Commentary field in Cabinet.

Cabinet also enabled Prof Gerrard to add relevant video and audio clips as well as links to external websites, further reading suggestions, and PDFs of her PowerPoint presentations. Cabinet is therefore a great point of access for her students from which they can go on to explore topics further.

Impact

Even though lectures in the English Faculty are largely optional and compete with college classes and tutorials for student attention, attendance has been consistently high. The feedback has been very positive and students have praised Prof Gerrard's use of Cabinet: "Gerrard is fantastic at tying literature into historical context, particularly in terms of material culture - bringing in relevant objects from Cabinet that helped contextualise the texts we discussed."

This use of the platform is an exciting and interdisciplinary way of teaching with objects, making lectures a more interactive and stimulating environment. It also supports independent learning: students can return to Cabinet to reinforce and further explore in their own time what they have learnt in the lectures.

More tips

1. If you have your own images, you can start building materials in Cabinet immediately by enabling 'Cabinet' for your Canvas or WebLearn site. All users you add to your site will have access to these as well, but you can choose which individuals have read-only or editing rights to the content (known as 'access' and 'contribute' in WebLearn).
2. If you want to use objects from Oxford's collections in your teaching, please contact the Cabinet team at the Oxford Internet Institute to discuss this further. Your chosen objects may need to be retrieved by the museums and photographed, so please allow enough lead time for this.
3. It's a good idea to think about alternative objects in case something is unavailable. There may be an image of a similar object online that you could use immediately (with



“

Very interesting and new way of looking at material, a lot of which I had come across before, but this presentation was much more interesting and exciting.

”

– Student on Prof Gerrard's course

appropriate citation). Remember that you can bring in objects from other institutions worldwide, as well as Oxford!

4. 3D imaging is a highly effective way of improving access to objects, but they are more time consuming to produce than conventional photography. It is worth thinking: 'how will a 3D model improve my students' understanding of this object, compared to a 2D image?'. If you would like to discuss options for 3D imaging, please contact the Cabinet team.
5. 3D imaging can work well for a wide range of materials, but may be less successful if the following are present: shiny and/or transparent surfaces (e.g. glass), thin or 'spindly' areas of low surface area, and 'flat' colours with little variation in texture (e.g. plastic items or white porcelain). For advice, please contact the Cabinet team.
6. Allow yourself time to add context to your objects (e.g. descriptions, annotations, links, reading lists, video, audio) in order for you and your students to get the most out of the resources you are building. Cabinet then functions almost as a stand-alone resource and becomes a highly valuable revision tool.
7. Make sure you show students how to log in to Cabinet on the VLE (WebLearn or Canvas) during the lecture and walk them through it.

Next steps

- **Read more about Cabinet.**
- Find out more about how you can use technology to enhance your teaching at www.ctl.ox.ac.uk.
- Contact our team of learning technologists at contact@ctl.ox.ac.uk.

Image credits: Screenshot of 3D model of Box with Flora metamorphosis and pastorals, 3D Photogrammetry by Jamie Cameron; Students using phone by Robin Worrall on Unsplash; Students by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash; William Hogarth The Analysis of Beauty, Plate 1, CCO 1.0; Working on laptop by Alexa Mazzarello on Unsplash

OxTALENT winners

Winner, OxTALENT 2018 award for Innovative Teaching and Learning with Technology. The text and images in this case study have been adapted from Prof Christine Gerrard's entry for the OxTALENT competition.

 www.ctl.ox.ac.uk
 @CTLOxford



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My final year students found Cabinet a valuable revision tool because it has so much stuff in it.



- Prof Christine Gerrard
Lecturer at Lady Margaret Hall