Lock of hair, belonging to Hans Christian Andersen
Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne

Some of the more unusual strands connecting ideas and artefacts in the Grainger Museum Collection are locks of hair once belonging to identities such as Danish author Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875). This particular relic found its way into the museum from the Melchiors, a wealthy Danish merchant family, who were good friends with Andersen during his later years. When, in the last months of his life, Andersen needed constant care, the family nursed him at their country estate. He died there, aged 70, on 4 August 1875. The Australian musician Percy Grainger (1882–1961) and his mother, Rose Grainger (1861–1922), met sisters Harriet and Louise Melchior in London. After learning of Grainger’s deep admiration for the famous writer, the sisters presented him with this lock of Andersen’s hair, which is sewn onto his visiting card.

Rose Grainger adored the children’s fairy tales penned by Hans Christian Andersen; examples of his works, in both English and Danish, are included in the collection. She introduced her son to these stories and Grainger went on to learn the Danish language. Grainger was also fascinated by other aspects of Danish culture, particularly folk songs, which he drew upon for his music compositions.
Teaching ideas
The University of Melbourne’s curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, contact a collection manager.

Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction
Consider the literature and objects associated with Hans Christian Andersen found in the Grainger Museum Collection as a specific field of cultural production. Study these works to understand the role of popular fiction in the social, historical and cultural contexts that produced it.

Writing for Children
Creatively investigate the tensions between Hans Christian Andersen’s literature, society’s notion of childhood, and children themselves, as well as exploring the major themes, techniques, trends and issues of the children’s literature canon.

Early Language and Literacy
Investigate the ways in which children learn language and literacy. Understand the function and form of spoken and written language and the importance of symbolisation in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales.

Translating Language and Culture
Critically evaluate English translations of Danish texts held in the Grainger Museum Collection.

The Ethnography of Music
Examine Danish material in the Grainger Museum for its historical and contemporary models of ethnographic representation and writing, and ethical issues in musical ethnography, to demonstrate understanding of different cultural and musical values.

Musics of the World
Study specific music cultures – for example, Scandinavian, Pacific, and North American – represented in the Grainger Museum for an informed understanding of the sociocultural contexts and the sound structures of different musical cultures.

Music and Health
Explore ways that Grainger’s music and collections can be used to promote physical health and healthy behaviours for a range of people. Find examples that represent music for expression, relaxation, anxiety reduction and communication.

Intersecting objects

Percy Grainger (Australian/American, 1882–1961)
Danish folk-music suite
New York: G. Schirmer
Grainger Museum
University of Melbourne
03.0097
Hans Christian Andersen (Danish, 1805–1895)
Billedbog med billeder af H.C. Andersen [A picturebook with pictures]
Copenhagen: Winkel & Magnussen, 1905
Grainger Museum
University of Melbourne

To learn more, visit the website of the Grainger Museum.

References