“Girlhood (It’s Complicated)” Select Object List

“Girlhood (It’s Complicated)” will feature over 200 objects from the National Museum of American History’s collections, spanning from 1781 to 2019. Below is a select object list, organized by the exhibition section. Several objects on this list have been 3D digitized.

• **Naomi Wadler’s March for Our Lives scarf (2018)**

  *News and Politics (girls on the frontlines of change)*

  ![Naomi Wadler's March for Our Lives scarf](image)

  - At age 11, Naomi Wadler spoke before hundreds of thousands of people at the 2018 March for Our Lives to end gun violence. She gave an eloquent speech on the disproportionate effect of gun violence on black girls and women.
  - Naomi Wadler had one day to write her speech. The scarf was made by her aunt, Leslie Wadler, who knitted it while she watched two movies the night before the event. The “two-movie scarf” became Wadler’s signature.
  - How do girls have political influence?

• **Betsy Bucklin’s Revolutionary War sampler (1781)**

  *Education (being schooled)*

  ![Betsy Bucklin's Revolutionary War sampler](image)

  - This sampler was created in 1781 by 13-year-old Betsy Bucklin to express her political views.
  - The writing shows defiance of Britain and faith in George Washington, then the commander of the Continental Army.
  - Girls in the US have always had political voices, even if they don’t have a vote.
• **Remington Noiseless Typewriter (1925-1930)**

*Education (being schooled)*

With the typewriter, employers opened office work to young white women. Secretarial work became “women’s work” with the perfection of the typewriter in the early 1900s. Because typewriters required dexterity and repetition, many believed that young women were better suited to be secretaries – and that they could be paid less.

Secretarial work promised girls an independent income. Girls took typing classes in the hopes of finding a job with better wages. Yet employers mostly hired unmarried white women.

• **Minnijean Brown’s graduation dress (1959)**

*Education (being schooled)*

Minnijean Brown was one of the “Little Rock Nine,” who desegregated Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. Brown thought she would receive a superior education there, but white students opposed to school integration terrorized her. After just a year, the school was shut down, and she had to leave her family and move to New York to complete her education.

To celebrate graduation high school, Minnijean designed this dress. “It was a perfect fit, and I felt perfectly beautiful in it,” she said.

Who gets to go to school and stay in school?
• DACA butterfly wings (2018)
  Education (being schooled)

In 2012, the Obama administration issued Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which allowed youths to stay in the country if they could document having lived in the United States for five years. DACA was rescinded in 2017, increasing the risk of deportation for thousands of young people.

Monarch butterflies have become a symbol for undocumented Americans, because each year, they migrate from Mexico to North America to survive. Undocumented girls raised in the United States see themselves as Americans; the government disagrees.

These wings, made of painted poster board, were worn by Dreamers from Nebraska on March 5, 2018 (the day DACA was rescinded). Hundreds gathered in DC to make their voices heard.

• Portrait of domestic worker girl with child (ca. 1840)
  Work (hey, where’s my girlhood?)

From slavery to Jim Crow segregation, black girls found themselves serving families and becoming lifelong nursemaidens and domestic workers. Girls as young as three carried babies, scrubbed dirty diapers, and stayed up late to mend clothing. Girls who were enslaved as domestic servants could be the “property” of the younger children they cared for.

These photos were popular because including the little girl showed the family’s wealth.
• **Merrimack textile spinner (ca. 1840)**
  
  Work (hey, where’s my girlhood?)

  - Girls made up an important part of the factory workforce beginning in the 19th century. Young girls often worked as spinners or bobbin girls.
  - Girls and young women ran these machines that mechanized the action of spinning yarn.

• **Radium watches (1910s-1930s)**
  
  Work (hey, where’s my girlhood?)

  - Glow-in-the-dark radium watches were a must-have item in the 1910s-1930s. In factories, young women painted the face dials with radioactive radium. Unaware that the paint was harmful, they put the brush tip on their lips to achieve a fine point.
  - After suffering from radium poisoning and disfiguration, several young women – “Radium Girls” – sued their employers and brought national attention to worker safety. They helped ensure safety regulations for all American workers.

• **Monica Camacho’s bandanas and hoodie (2010s)**
  
  Work (hey, where’s my girlhood?)

  - Girls in agriculture aren’t protected by child labor laws because the 1938 agriculture law argued that farm families needed the help of their children. Currently half a million children harvest a quarter of US crops.
These bandanas and hoodie were worn by agricultural worker Monica Camacho to protect her face while she was out in the fields. The hoodie served a dual purpose — wearing a baggy hoodie protected Monica from both pesticides and dust as well as sexual harassment since no one could tell she was a girl.

- **Gym suit (ca. 1850)**

  Wellness (body talk)

  Since the 19th century, experts have debated exercise for girls. Many thought that exercise would improve girls’ character as well as build stronger bodies, fend off disease, and make healthy future mothers. However, older ideas about too much physical activity being dangerous for girls still held sway.

  As girls exercised, they also worked on dress reform, trading corsets and long skirts for bloomers and looser styles that allowed for greater freedom of movement.

  Object has been 3D digitized.

- **Miss America tiara and scepter (1951)**

  Wellness (body talk)

  Yolanda Betbeze (née Fox) donned this tiara and scepter during her reign as Miss America. She accepted the crown but refused to wear the swimsuit, saying that people should see her talents and not just her body. “I’m a singer, not a pinup,” she said.

  Why do we talk about girls’ bodies so much? How do girls become symbols for community and national aspirations?
- Ryan’s letterman jacket (1980s)
  **Wellness (body talk)**

  - Sometimes gender isn’t revealed at birth.
  - Ryan was born intersex. Growing up, he was called by a name traditionally given to girls. But he adopted his name because he felt he possessed “a girl body and a boy brain.” He never performed activities expected of a girl, which made him an outcast in his social circles. Sports became an important outlet for self-expression, especially softball. One of Ryan’s crowning achievements was his active participation in high school softball. He received a lettered jacket in May 1988.
  - In 2014, after decades of struggling with his gender identity, he legally changed his name to Ryan and transitioned to male.
  - **Object has been 3D digitized.**

- Cindy Whitehead’s skateboard (2013)
  **Wellness (body talk)**

  - Girls have taken skateboarding by storm, defying gender expectations. Cindy Whitehead grew up in Southern California, where she aspired to be a professional skateboarder but found few female role models. At age 15, she was the first girl skateboarder featured in the centerfold of a skateboard magazine. One year later, she became a professional “vert” skateboarder.
  - Cindy Whitehead designed this board and founded the brand “Girl is NOT a 4 Letter Word” to make girls more visible in a male-dominated sport.
• “Anything you can do” needlepoint (2018)
  Wellness (body talk)
  ![Image](image1.png)
  - In recent years, some girls have embraced menstruation as a point of pride. They are changing the conversation about menarche to celebrate girls’ bodies and turn body talk into something normal and fun.
  - Girls have always used traditionally female mediums to express their political views, raising their voices from the limited platform they were given.

• Makeup table (1820)
  Fashion (remix)
  ![Image](image2.png)
  - Dressing tables from the early 1800s hid cosmetics so women and girls could pretend they didn’t use them.
  - Makeup also reinforced racist ideas about whiteness by whitening skin with ingredients like toxic lead powder. The process of getting “made up” has long reflected hidden agendas related to gender and race.

• Shirtdress (ca. 1910)
  Fashion (remix)
  ![Image](image3.png)
In the early 1900s, many girls rejected pinchy corsets in favor of cooler, less restrictive shirtwaists. Shirtwaists were easy to remix. Unlike dresses, a girl could mix and match with different skirts, and wear them without corsets.

“The shirtwaist will be with us more than ever this summer. Women are wearing shirtwaists because they are comfortable, because they can be made to fit any form, and because they are mannish.”—Indianapolis Journal, 1900

- Object has been 3D digitized.

- **Flapper dress (1925)**
  
  Fashion (remix)

- Object has been 3D digitized.

- **Carousel circle skirt (1954)**
  
  Fashion (Remix)

- In the 1950s, most girls wore skirts, the dominant and gender-defining item in every closet. Lois Green made this herself as a teen.

- Object has been 3D digitized.

- **Flour sack dress (1959)**
  
  Fashion (Remix)
The Great Depression saw a mix of Hollywood glamour and DIY fashion. Resourceful girls made do with inexpensive materials such as feed sacks, which they refashioned into dresses and shirts.

- **Object has been 3D digitized.**
- This dress was made to party. The loose fit made dancing easy and more energetic.

- **Remixed blue jeans (1960s-1970s)**
  *Fashion (Remix)*

  - In the late 1960s and 70s, alternative girls traded in skirts for jeans, upsetting decades of feminine fashion.
  - **Object has been 3D digitized.**

- **Dashiki (ca. 1970)**
  *Fashion (Remix)*

  - Wearing unisex or gender-bending clothing, young women incorporated fashion into political movements in the late 1960s and 1970s. Declarations of beauty could be revolutionary and defy stereotypes.
  - **Object has been 3D digitized.**

- **Isabella Aiukli Cornell’s prom dress (2019)**
  *Fashion (Remix)*
Prom is a rite of passage dating to the 1920s, and what girls wear matters. Isabella is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and used her prom dress to draw attention to systemic violence and abuse faced by indigenous women. She chose the color red in solidarity for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s movement.

Object has been 3D digitized.

- **Helen Keller’s touch watch and bas-relief (1865)**  
  *A Girl’s Life (Making an impact)*

  Helen Keller is often depicted as demure, still, and ladylike, but she grew up to be an outspoken advocate against inequality and write fiery speeches about discrimination.

  Keller received this watch in 1892 when she was twelve from a retired diplomat. This “touch watch” allowed its owner to tell time by feeling the pins around the edge. Keller, who kept a busy schedule, treasured the watch for the rest of her life.

- **Dominique Dawes Olympic leotard (1996)**  
  *A Girl’s Life (Breaking barriers)*

  Dominique Dawes set her sights on the Olympics at age 11. She began her Olympic career at age 15, winning four medals in three Olympics.

  She wore this leotard at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, GA, where she was a member of the “Magnificent Seven” team that took home the gold.

  Title IX barred discrimination based on sex and race and challenged beliefs that girls could not play.

  Object has been 3D digitized.