Winterthur objects highlight new children's 'ABC' book

Teapots shaped like people and a 1776 print showing a woman whose hair is 10 feet tall are among the objects from Winterthur Museum that star in the new "ABC: A Winterthur Book for Children."

"Come learn your letters along with me and discover Winterthur from A to Z!" as it begins to showcase some of Winterthur's more than 90,000 objects. The ones in the book were chosen because they are colorful and eye-catching.

"We could write 10 books like this," said author Lois Stoehr, associate curator of education, in a press release. "Winterthur has an amazingly rich collection and our library is a go-to resource for American decorative arts researchers from around the world."

The images and rhymes in the book combine to teach math (count the ovals), technology (see how a taxidermy bird looks under an X-ray) and, of course, history: "Would you believe that boys once wore a dress until age four or more?"

The book is an outgrowth of the popular children's exhibition "K is for Kids," a 2007 show that Stoehr organized. She combined 11 years of experience working at Winterthur with advice from teachers while creating the exhibition to create the rhymes and select the photos.

Objects in the book range from a 1754 lion and leopard needlework to a 1931 spool zoo. Featured objects are primarily American, reflecting the collecting focus of Winterthur founder Henry Francis du Pont, but some objects come from England, Germany and Denmark.

Stoehr sometimes wrote pairs of rhyming couplets after being inspired by the images, and sometimes she wrote the rhymes and looked for fun objects that fit.

"It's kind of quirky," she said. "We worked hard to go for objects that weren't the standard for each letter."

That's why there are insects for I, a patterned plate for P and a reward of merit for R, the last one letting young readers know how much adults in the mid-1800s cared about learning.

"ABC" is $18.95 and can be ordered online at www.winterthurstore.com and purchased on-site at the Winterthur museum store and bookstore.