

Education

Teachers' Ideas Bank

Museum in the classroom

This is a cross curricula activity that can be adapted for different ages and suit a short or long study. A Museum in the Classroom could contribute to helping your students understand the world they live in or provide the focus for sorting and classifying.

You could use the museum to plan a whole term's activities across a range of learning areas. Once you've had a look at the activities for museum in a classroom and within the Ideas Bank consider;

- i. How could you link aspects of these activities to other Learning Activities eg.
Literacy – labelling, descriptions, questions
Maths – classifying, categorising
Technology – design, construction
Information – Power Point presentation, film, photographs

The concept, Museum in a Classroom, was developed by museummagnetschools in Queensland. It has been modified to show the potential of using the Mandurah Community Museum. The basic concept can be adapted to different year levels and the whole process can be completed in a couple of hours or over a longer period depending on what you might want to achieve.

In its simplest form, students engage in the basic museum processes of collecting, preserving, studying and informing as they quickly develop a mini exhibition of school related objects to illustrate the process.

Lesson Outline

In this lesson students will discuss the museum process and apply that to making and displaying a collection.

1. Introduction

What do museum workers do?

Answer: collect, look after, display and provide information about the world.

- *Ask students to answer this question from what they know as a result of visiting a museum or watching a TV program. If they've been to the West Australian Museum for a recent exhibition they may be able to think about what sort of things somebody did to get the exhibition ready eg. Putting together Information (researching, organising, presenting and displaying); Choosing objects to display (locating suitable items - museums have many objects in storage, but sometimes they need to investigate borrowing an object from another museum or private person); storage, security and display of borrowed items must also be considered. It's a lot like putting together a school project.*

Additional Information: The Museums Australia Constitution (2002) defines a 'museum' as an institution with the following characteristics:

A museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute long-term value to communities.

ii. Collecting

What do museums collect?

Answer: animals, rocks, aboriginal artefacts, clothing, cars, historical artefacts

Consider this - The Western Australian Museum has a large collection of toys, most of it is in storage. They've got yo-yos, dolls, board games, toy cars. The curator of history would not collect every new toy that is released, what sort of things do you think they would collect?

Illustrative Example: School Objects

Let's make a collection of objects important to us at school. Look at your desk, in your pocket or think about what's in your bag. What objects are important to us at school?

Prompt students to look for different things to reduce replication of objects in the collection.

Rephrase the question to help elicit different responses.

What's something that we use everyday?

What's something that is in every class?

What's something that is used for a specific purpose?

What's something that we couldn't do without?

What's something that you never leave home without?

iii. Preserving

How do museums look after things?

Answer: Storage – providing the right conditions eg. dust free, constant temperature and humidity, away from direct sunlight or lighting, protect from being knocked, bent, bumped or broken, pest control, special care is required for cleaning objects and for storing those objects that deteriorate with exposure to oxygen.

Use examples of different objects to help prompt thinking eg. Certificate, war medal, teddy bear, preserved sea snake in alcohol and glass container.

How long do they keep them?

Answer: As long as they are useful for the purpose of the museum and relevant to the collection.

The Mandurah Museum had a number of objects that have been de-accessioned because they were not considered important to the aim of the museum eg. 5 Kodak Box Brownies. Some items are invaluable and are kept forever.

Which things would be difficult to preserve?

Answer: Living things and materials that deteriorate quickly.

Illustrative Example: School Objects

How will we protect our collection of objects? What do we need to know in order to preserve them?

Discuss and plan strategies to protect the objects from loss, theft, or damage during the exhibition.

iv. Studying

What sort of research is done at a museum?

Answer: It depends on the type of museum that it is. A state or national museum will conduct scientific, historical and cultural research. The Mandurah Community Museum undertakes local history research.

What can we find out by looking closely at our school objects?

- Use the Object Analysis Sheet to record what you know and what you need to find out. Go through this process with one of the objects as whole class. You may want to divide the class into groups depending on how many objects need describing.

v. Informing

How do museums share their knowledge?

Answer: Exhibits, display or interpretive boards, labels, brochures, discovery centres, talks, tours, school programs.

How can we present our objects and information about them?

In our collection we have objects that we think are important to schooling. Look at the objects ... how could we sort them? Can you see any that go together? What titles could we give the different groups?

Now that we sorted the objects into groups, how could we display the objects so that it looks like a museum exhibition? Students work together to decide how to present the objects.

- *Okay, so we have the collection of objects sorted according to different themes. What would help someone understand our collection – think about what sort of information you would need if you saw a collection of school objects from 100 years ago.*

*Writing labels - Use the Object Analysis Sheet completed a moment ago to write a label. Labels need a title and should be about 25 words. Keep in mind that you are writing for someone who doesn't know what the collection is for or what the objects are. * Early 20th century school objects are available for loan from the museum.*

- *Next ... the classroom is arranged so that the objects and labels can be displayed.*

Discuss a title for the exhibition.

Invite another class to look at the exhibition.

vi. Conclusion

Review the process and content covered. Ask students how they would improve their exhibition if they had more time and resources. How would a museum do it? Discuss possible topics for future exhibitions.

Adaptations

In the early years students could sort a collection of objects which show the different areas of a museum eg. Social history, natural sciences, mystery objects. They could suggest labels such as what they think the object is and who made it, or describe the specimen.

In middle and upper years students could learn about the museum process so as to learn another way of presenting information for project purposes. Alternatively students may use the process to explore a topic.

Example 1 Toys

Toys are a rich source of information about the culture that created them. An exhibition of toys could explore themes of:

- cultural diversity
- changes over time
- design, materials and manufacture
- application of diverse forms of energy

Students could:

1. Make a collection of modern and old toys.
2. Discuss what museums collect and why some things are chosen to represent a particular time eg. New and different, popular, new materials.
3. Choose objects by selecting representative examples to display cultural diversity, changes over time and a range of materials, manufacture and forms of energy
4. Students could use the Object Analysis Sheet to determine what they do know about an object and what they could find out.
5. Analyse and research toys in detail using the internet (museum online collections); interviews (parents, grandparents), or books.
6. Discuss and plan strategies to protect objects from loss, theft or damage during the exhibition.
7. Establish themes for exhibition and explore communication strategies. How can you present your objects and information about them? Compile information and objects to support each theme.
8. Write & publish object labels
9. Final design & construction of exhibition space - Arrange objects and labels.
10. Promote & manage display.
11. Evaluate success of the event - Ask students how they would improve their exhibition if they had more time and resources.
12. Reflect on the project: "By creating this exhibition, I have learnt..."

Example 2

Objects have a story to tell - Family History

Use the museum process as part of a study on family history to illustrate concepts in Time, Continuity and Change and Culture. Click on the link for an example

<http://www.mms.qld.edu.au/7h-family-history/index.html>

1. Introduce students to the idea of family history and how an object can tell a story about a person's history. You may have something from your own family history to talk about. Alternatively, loan an object from the museum to talk about. Ask the students to guess what the object is before telling the story.
2. Ask students to bring in an object that says something about their family history. Brainstorm some questions students could ask their family in order to find out about whether their family has some special objects. The object might be: luggage, clothes, photographs, mementos, keepsakes, letters, drafts, books, newspaper and magazine cuttings, tools, recipes, sketches, handcrafts, postcards, personal papers or passports. If there is no one in their immediate family with something, then there might be someone in the extended family. Students unable to bring an object in could interview a relative to find out why there are no objects.
3. If possible, each student brings his/her object in so that they can tell the class about its significance. If it is not possible to bring the object in then ask them to photograph it from a number of different angles.
4. Students research their object by interviewing anyone connected to the object. They will need to write a list of questions before they interview. It is best to record the interview if possible. Find out about the period in history that the object comes from by searching the internet, the library, family members or someone of a similar age to the object.
5. Visit the Mandurah Community Museum to find out about important objects that tell a story of someone in Mandurah. Also find out how objects are cared for. They could ask the Curator or the Museum Education Officer about the best way to care for their object.

6. Create an exhibition for display at your school or look into exhibiting at the Mandurah Community Museum.
 - Discuss some themes for the exhibition on eg. time, purpose (keepsakes, memories, practical, work), motivation for migration.
 - Write & publish object labels
 - Final design & construction of exhibition space - Arrange objects and labels.
 - Promote display.
 - Discuss and plan strategies to protect objects from loss, theft or damage during the exhibition.
 - Evaluate success of the event - Ask students how they would improve their exhibition if they had more time and resources.
 - Reflect on the project: "By creating this exhibition, I have learnt..."