

Build Your Own Museum

An activity for all ages



Purpose

To introduce students to the process of creating a three-dimensional thematic exhibition.

Objectives

- » Learn how to choose and group a selection of objects together in order to tell a story
- » Understand how objects can relate to each other in three-dimensional space
- » Learn basic exhibition design concepts and ideas

Materials

- » Any size box (like a shoebox), or large display cabinet or window space if creating a more permanent museum
- » Selection of objects based on a theme chosen by the students
- » Cardboard, glue, tape, scissors, crayons, paper and an assortment of supplies
- » Double-sided tape and/or sticky-tac for mounting objects so they don't move

Motivation

This project introduces students to the process of communicating an idea or a story using objects found or brought in from home, and arranging them in a space to enhance our understanding of the objects. In K-3, each student can create their own miniature museum using any size box (shoebox) as the exhibition space. Students can build an exhibition around a collection they already have (such as a collection of rocks, or a collection of red buttons, for example). If a student does not already have a collection, ask them to create one based on 4 or 5 objects. A collection can be anything that shares a similar element - colour, size, function, or a similar story (whether real or imagined).

Teachers of grades 4-12 can choose whether this project is done individually (ie: each student responsible for their own museum); or in small groups working together using a larger space (a file box or bigger); or even the entire class working together to develop a more permanent museum within the school or community centre. (Perhaps there is an empty display cabinet in a hallway that can be used, or a window ledge that is suitable for a museum/exhibition venue).

Project

1

Begin with a **brainstorm session** to allow students to come up with suitable exhibition ideas. Have them list all the ideas and evaluate each by the ease of finding objects that can be used in the exhibition. Or, have them share an object they would really like to display, and brainstorm exhibit ideas and stories that could work with that object.

For group projects, have students also brainstorm ideas that use objects that can be made or found around school, and that allow everyone to contribute (ie: things found in the hallway after recess; or an exhibit of every writing utensil used by every member of the class on a particular day, for example).



2

Once students have chosen their theme and collected their objects, have them begin the **design process**. Encourage students to consider the depth in their displays, including moving objects in the foreground or background, or having objects displayed at different heights in the space in order to use all available area (horizontal and vertical).



3

Find or make blocks or plinths to **display objects at various heights**, or create a shelf in your space in order to create two layers of surface display. Part of the design process means playing around with what works best before adhering anything permanently in the space.

4

Some students may prefer to **draw or map out their exhibition design** ideas before attempting to build the exhibit. Although this is preferred, other students may instead like to play with different ideas and figure it out as they go. Any method is fine, as long as it works for the student curators. For large groups working together on an exhibition space, it is encouraged to draw and map out exhibit design strategies so everyone has input and a clear idea before "installation" day.

5 Ask students to think about “**grouping**” when they are brainstorming display ideas. Should all the red objects, or objects of similar height be displayed together or apart? Or perhaps objects with the same story can be displayed together. Consider the eye’s focal point within the museum space. What would visitors look at first? Build your display around that focal point, and display the best object within that area. Have students play around with different placement of objects, and consider how the objects relate to each other in specific formations.

6 **Does your museum need a frame?** If using a shoe box, consider using the shoe box lid as the frame and have students cut out the centre of the lid, leaving a one-inch (or more) border around the box lid. When the lid is placed back on the box, viewers will “peer” into the box in order to view the exhibit. If they wish, have students make the frame and consider viewing angles before finalizing the placement of any of the objects.

7 During the design process, students should also **write a small label** for their museum. This can be simple or more detailed, depending on age.

8 When complete, students can **share their mini-museum exhibitions** with classmates.

