

CRAFT IN AMERICA

A TREASURE IN THE SEA EDUCATION GUIDE

STUDIO PRODUCTION

Curating and Research

Use your teacher collection to demonstrate curating (selecting, arranging) and research. (You may want to make labels ahead of time to share at the presentation end of this demo.)

Example: Using bottle caps, invite students to examine them. Discuss the terms criteria (standards, plural) and criterion (singular) and how to develop criteria for a collection. Say, I like the metal bottle caps more than the plastic ones. So metal will be one criterion for my collection. Bottle caps that have some design on them are more interesting to me, so that will also be a criterion. Ask several students to help research bottle caps online and, as a class, try out various search terms. These can be added to the lists on the board.

- What are some search terms we could use? Bottle caps, metal bottle caps, collecting metal bottle caps, valuable bottle caps, history of metal bottle caps..." Allow students to share facts they find, and ask if they have any more ideas for criteria for the collection. A final overall theme for the collection, after embedding criteria, might be: "Metal bottle caps from 1950s soda pop bottles."

Explain that curators not only collect or acquire objects for a collection, but also make decisions about how the collection will be displayed. Ask the students:

- What do curators need to think about as they arrange objects for public viewing? Curators who arrange objects for viewing must keep in mind how visitors to the exhibition will encounter each object. They need to think about which object in the collection should be seen first, second, and so on. Curators consider how two objects that are next to each other (or juxtaposed) "speak" to one another. Curators also create labels for objects in a display. Labels can be short, with simple descriptive information—what the object is, if it has a title, if it was created by someone, its origin, or when it was created. Labels also can be more informative, containing ideas about the object's importance, its history, or its meaning, for example. Longer labels such as these often invite the viewer to think about the object in certain ways; for example, "Notice the delicate edges of the teacup and the vibrant colors on its inside," or "The anger on the face of the man in black reminds us that this is not a happy scene." Show and explain to students the labels you created for the collection.

If you've gathered small boxes, you can explain how pedestals work to highlight or separate objects, and use one to elevate a bottle cap. Invite student participation by letting them arrange the objects and labels, guiding them to think about what makes a successfully curated and organized display.

Activity: Mini Museum Challenge

Curating, Research, and Presenting to a Public

Organize students in small groups that will each create a mini museum. Tell students this game-like challenge (because it will be fast) is to find a category of items in the room (such as markers, pencils, erasers, etc.) or among their personal items (such as gum packages, makeup, keys, etc.) that will become a mini museum collection. After they gather the items, circulate to help the groups create criteria to narrow down, or curate, what stays in the collection. Give students some time to find and record several facts about the collection through online research.

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For example, for a pencil collection, students could research who invented the pencil and when, how pencils are designed and manufactured, what kinds of pencils people might collect, and so on. Hand out index cards for the groups to make labels about the collection for presenting it to others. Remind students that their labels may be short or longer, depending on the information they wish to share with the viewer. Demonstrate that the cards can lay flat or be folded into a tent to stand. Information added to cards may include a title card for the entire collection; and labels for each pencil including a description, an interesting fact, and perhaps “donor” credit. Agree upon a time limit, set a timer, and make sure all mini museums are completed at that time.

Allow students to tour each group’s collection. After they have had time to view the collections, discuss with students what they liked about the mini museums they encountered. Ask the students:

- What, if anything, surprised you in completing this challenge?
- What did you enjoy most?
- Least?
- What are the “take-aways” from this challenge as you begin to create your own mini museum?

Collecting Objects and Planning Displays

Worksheet 2: You, the Expert

Explain that students will now use what they have learned about curating a collection as they create their own final mini museum with objects of their own choosing. Because they will be using images of objects (and not actual objects) in their mini museum, they are able to think “out of the box” as they select what they want to collect and display. This might be a good time to brainstorm a list of the kinds of objects they might choose to collect. Distribute Worksheet 2. The worksheet provides space for listing the objects they find online for their collection, and space to take notes about facts they find to enhance their collection.

Remind students that researching their collection can be a way to enjoy it even more. Cheech Marin started learning about art by reading art books from his local library. He is an expert on Chicano art because he continually learns by looking closely, talking to artists, and gathering information. He says about the piñata standing in the traditional landscape in one painting, “The juxtaposition of those two images ... he looks like he belongs there.” Cheech Marin knows that “juxtapose” means placing something next to something else, and in art, it is usually a clue about meaning. He recognizes the traditional landscape painting depicted behind the piñata. Because he researches and studies his collection of art, he “gets” what the painting represents: The piñata as a Chicano individual living in, and making space for themselves, in an Anglo space. Challenge students to uncover interesting facts as they engage in research about their chosen objects.

Circulate while students choose and research objects for their collection, and as they plan for their display. Help students print out their images. Show them how to trim the images and the cardboard backings for the images to the same size as the index cards. (The index cards make a handy pattern for this.) Demonstrate ways they can mount the images on the cardboard: They can use small dots of glue, or use the tape gun or other double sided tape. Or make a glue and water solution (equal parts white glue and water mixed in a jar.) Using a paintbrush, apply the solution to the back of the image. Place the glued side on the cardboard and carefully smooth out any wrinkles. Let it dry.



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Planning for Public Display

Worksheet 3: People have to see this!

Planning a gallery opening within a class period gives students the opportunity to practice real world skills of interacting with “the public”, an invited staff member, and each other, in a more organized and formal way. The worksheet guides students in planning and preparing the presentation of their collection. Go over the worksheet with students as a class, and then allow them to work together to read, think about, and add their answers in spaces provided.

Help students finalize a plan for the opening. This often means useful discussions about what is permissible, including answering questions about inviting friends outside of the class, or if refreshments will be allowed. It can be an opportunity for students to practice the process of making decisions and of compromise.

Explain that an opening at a gallery or museum is a celebration of the first day of a new exhibit. Individuals or the public are invited to see the exhibit for the first time. There may be beverages or snacks; special guests may be invited. Openings happen at museums (which do not sell the objects/art) and at galleries, which are smaller, private businesses (which will usually offer the objects/art for sale.)

CLOSING STRATEGIES

Reflection

After the opening, invite students to share their experience with presenting their collection to others. Here are some useful prompts:

- Whose collection did you enjoy viewing?
- Did any label information stand out and catch your attention?
- Besides your collection, what other collection might you like to own?
- Whose collection do you think might be the most valuable? Why do you think that?
- Were any collections meaningful in some way?
- What did you learn from talking with others about your collection or theirs?
- Can you think of other ways you are a curator in daily life?
- How might this experience influence the way you encounter museum exhibits in the future?