

Museum Stories

Everything in a museum should tell a story. Each object – called an artifact – should tell us something about what it does, the type of person who used it and what their life might have been like. Even though many museum labels only give the name of the object and who donated it, a good label tells us something about the artifact and what it meant to those who used it.

Some museums don't use labels. Most historic house museums, for example, let the artifacts speak for themselves. Visitors can usually figure out what something is by relating it to the objects surrounding it – its context.

Project Details

Project	Students will visit a museum (such as the Trail End State Historic Site, the Sheridan County History Museum, or the Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum).
Tasks	Students will discuss the stories that are told by the items they see in the museum. Using a "hands-on" artifact, students will answer the same basic questions that curators ask about each artifact on display. They will be asked to write a label for the artifact, later to be shared with the museum curator.
Outcome	Students will gain a more complete understanding of what a museum tries to do, and how it uses artifacts to tell stories.
Standards	LA3.3.1, LA4.3.1, LA3.2.2, LA4.2.2

Instructions

- Pass the artifact around so every student has an opportunity to examine it. (NOTE: Call the museum in advance and ask if they have a "hands-on" artifact you can use for this exercise. If they do not, you may wish to provide your own artifact.)
- On a separate piece of paper, have each student answer the following questions:
 - What is the name of the artifact?
 - What was it used for?
 - Who might have used it?
 - Where might it have been used?
 - When was it made?
 - Was it hand-made or manufactured? If manufactured, what was the company?
 - Why was this item saved by the person who used it?
 - Why might this artifact be displayed in this museum?
 - What story does this artifact tell?
- Have the students draw a picture of the artifact.
- Below the picture, have students write a short label (no more than twenty-five words) that best describes the object. The name of the object must be included in the label.
- Share the drawings and labels with the museum curator. They may provide alternative ways of viewing the artifact which the curator hadn't thought of!