



National Park Service  
Teaching with **MUSEUM** Collections  
Management Program  
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum>

How to Write a National Park Service Teaching with Museum Collections Lesson Plan  
July 2005

The National Park Service Teaching with Museum Collections provides lesson plans for teachers to use National Park Service museum collections in student-centered educational activities. The collections tell the story of America; its peoples, cultures, varied habitats, significant events, and ideas that continue to inspire the world. Teaching with Museum Collections emphasizes the links between the 'real things,' the collections, and the sites where those collections were found, collected, or used. National Park Service collections include cultural objects, natural history specimens, archival documents and photographs. Lesson plans link to national education standards.

A. Header

Include the following:

- Lesson plan title
- Developer[s] Name, Title, School Name and Location
- Grade Level
- Number of Sessions and Length of lesson

Indicate the time requirements, such as a single 45-minute session or lesson that covers one activity, or five 55-minute sessions over a five-day period.

B. Overview of this Collection-Based Lesson Plan

Write a short overview of the lesson plan that includes:

- Park name.

Enter the full park name, such as Bandelier National Monument or Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.

- Description

State the theme of the lesson, and briefly describe what is covered in this lesson plan. Explain how lesson ties to students' prior knowledge in order to make it immediately relevant. Relate the theme to the park's resources, museum exhibits and web features.

- Essential question.

Include an 'essential question' to guide student inquiry and to stimulate critical thinking about the lesson theme, such as "How did the artists who were commissioned to produce artwork for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the New Deal create a cultural legacy?"

C. Museum Collections Used in this Lesson Plan

- List the objects, specimens, documents, photographs from the park museum collection that will be used in this lesson plan. Captions must include object name, catalog number,



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material, and measurements. Provide additional information such as place of manufacture, who used the item, and how it was used, as well as cultural significance if available.

- ❑ Primary documentary sources including historic photographs, document transcripts such as journals, diaries, letters, receipts, and lists, oral histories, sketches, diagrams, and maps from the park's museum collections. Use images in the public domain from the Library of Congress or National Archives and Records Administration web sites if possible.

Include:

- thumbnails and large format images of all the museum objects used in this lesson plan.
- URL addresses of the park and the park's museum web exhibit, including the Museum Management Program website at [www.cr.nps.gov/museum](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum) for downloading collection images from the web.

#### D. National Educational Standards

Enter the applicable national educational standard by number and title. For example, under the National Standards for US and World History:

Chapter 3, US History Standards for Grades 5 - 12

Era: 4: Expansion and Reform [1800-1861]

Standard 3: The extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800

Standard 4A: The student understands the abolitionist movement

National Park Service Teaching with Museum Collection lessons are often multidisciplinary; therefore, include standards for all relevant disciplines as appropriate. The standards are available on the web at sites such as <http://cnets.iste.org/currstands>. Tie extension activities to the applicable standards.

#### E. Student Learning Objectives

Identify student learning objectives for the lesson plan. Write the objectives in terms of what students will have mastered when the lesson is complete, such as; "After these lessons, students will be able to:

- ❑ Critically analyze objects from .....
- ❑ Use the analysis to develop an understanding of .....
- ❑ Communicate their ideas and hypotheses through an oral presentation of.....;
- ❑ Create a classroom museum exhibit on ...

#### F. Background and Historical Context



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Put the topic of the lesson plan into historical context for teachers and students. Provide sufficient relevant historical and social information on the park's history and prehistory, themes, significant individuals, groups, events, movements, and time period. Include excerpts from, and references to NPS park publications: brochures, maps, park interpretive plan documents, and material where possible. Use material that are in NPS publications or that are in the public domain. Or make sure that you have written permission to include this material on the web.

#### G. Materials Used in this Lesson Plan

List the materials that the teacher can use to successfully complete this lesson plan. This includes:

- Similar items. Be creative and find objects locally that are similar to the museum objects identified in section C to use in the classroom. They should look similar to the museum object or fill the same function. They are essential to the collection-based lesson plan. Unlike the real museum object, these items can be safely handled by the students. They can also be added to your classroom museum. Instructions for obtaining similar, substitute objects, and/or places where similar objects may be acquired or purchased are provided.
- Other materials:
  - Documents and photographs. Identify and locate photographs, journals, diaries, letters, receipts, and lists, oral histories, sketches, diagrams, and maps from sources other than the park museum collections. :Locate materials that are in the public domain, from institutions such as Library of Congress or National Archives and Records Administration web sites.
  - Forms and Charts: List each chart or diagram to be used in the class, such as "How to Read an Object" or The Web diagram.
  - Writing materials including special paper varieties, bindings for journals, and special format books.
  - Art-making materials including varieties of paper, paints, markers, oil pastels, adhesives, and 3-D sculptural materials.
  - Science and math materials.
  - Technology: All lessons should include computers with internet connection and printers to access the Web.

#### H. Vocabulary

Provide a word list and definitions for the teachers use. Create a word and concept list with students as lesson unfolds. Post the list on large chart in the classroom. Write definitions with student input as words come into use during the lesson



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## I. Teacher Tips

Tell teachers what they will need for this lesson plan. Encourage and incorporate the following into the lesson, such as

- Download and laminate color prints of the museum objects used in the lesson plan
- Use online collections; objects, documents, maps, and photographs to further student inquiry and to address student learning objectives.

## J. Lesson Implementation Procedures

- Provide a series of activities using museum collections and similar objects. Generally, each activity takes a session. Make sure that each activity is independent from the other activities list.
- The activities should facilitate learning about the person, group, event or movement that is the focus of this lesson plan. Personalize the lesson, and relate it to topics of local interest, including family, friends, school, town, region, people, buildings, places, and events. Activities are hands-on and experiential. They should develop powers of observation, deduction, analysis, and creativity about the subject of the lesson plan.
- Activities are done individually, in groups or as a class. Include step-by-step instructions for teachers to implement the activities. Number and title each activity. Include an introductory warm up activity using a park museum object [s] that represents the major themes.
- Start with an activity such as “How to Read an Object.” It will allow you to have students really focus on the objects while ‘telescoping,’ or bring in to close range, the people, period, culture or events that you are teaching.
- Incorporate
  - Hands-on activities using similar objects.
  - Three-dimensional materials that students can handle; and use to build their own version of an object; or draw-from different perspectives
  - Readings and discussion of historical documents.
  - Analysis and critique of online catalog cards [secondary source materials] to show how written information adds to inquiry/knowledge base.
  - Observation and analysis of historic photos of the objects in use and discussion of how to interpret historic photographs.
  - Oral histories
- Sample Activity 1: Introduction and Warm Up “How to read an object”



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Tell students they will be using objects from a National Park Service site as a source of learning and information. Explain that they will learn to look very closely at an object or set of objects to deduce historical, cultural and social information and to draw inferences about people, events, and life then and now. Ask questions that draw on observational skills, and develop activities that exercise powers of deduction, inference, and creativity based on this introductory lesson.

Do the following with the students:

- Pose an overarching or essential question that will guide student interactive learning and research. Post the question on a large banner at the front of the classroom. Identify an object. Incorporate the selected museum object into the question.
- Divide class into small groups; have students use inquiry method to discuss history, material, size, date, function, maker/manufacturer, place of origin, function and use, cultural significance of the selected object. Use a "How to Read an Object" activity [to be provided] to engage students and introduce them to the idea of learning through museum collections.
- Have groups compare their responses.
- Record their preliminary answers to the "banner" question on chart paper. Then ask students what additional questions they want to pursue after handling objects, specimens and photographs.
- Encourage students to handle similar objects and examine photographs.
- Have students caption all museum objects identified for this lesson plan. The captions should include park name, catalog number, item name, materials, measurements, date, and significant individuals.
- Have students review the park site and web exhibit and related material that the lesson plan is based on if computers are readily available. Otherwise, print out the web exhibit for student review. Ask them to view the objects, specimens, and photographs and read documents.

- Activity 2:
- Activity 3:
- Activity 4:
- Activity 5
- Activity 6: Creating a Classroom Museum.

Develop a classroom museum or exhibit on the topic you've taught as it can involve a very broad range of challenging tasks. Students can research a topic, select and research objects for exhibit, write captions and thematic labels, and design and install the exhibit.

Have students do oral histories, interview family members, write up their findings, take photographs or do sketches, and find historic photographs for inclusion. Related projects include developing marketing and public relations strategy, newspaper, radio and TV releases, as well as docents or tour guides.



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❑ Wrap Up Activity and Discussion

K. Evaluation/Assessment for Measurable Results

- ❑ Develop and identify assessment tools.
- ❑ Identify specific and measurable products, including quizzes/tests, creative projects, writing, artwork, and multimedia productions that students will produce. This allows you to assess how much they've learnt.
- ❑ Provide students with rubric or scoring tools so that they will understand expectations before they begin. Use the rubric to evaluate student products and discuss assessment with student.

Products include:

- ❑ Multimedia productions such as audio, musical tapes and videos
- ❑ Art: painting, printmaking, sculpture, hand-built related objects
- ❑ Language arts: original poetry, plays, short stories, handmade illustrated books, advertising posters, debates, storytelling
- ❑ History/social science: living museum characters
- ❑ Classroom museum exhibits including similar objects, replicas, copies of primary sources documents, historic photographs, maps, with student-written interpretive labels, as well as talks for student docents.
- ❑ Written press releases, brochures and posters for the exhibit
- ❑ Text and graphics for TV and computer spots

L. Extension and Enrichment Activities

Develop a menu of extension activities to further student exploration of the essential question. These activities may be undertaken away from the classroom, such as conducting visiting the local museum or historical society.

M. Resources

Maintain an updated of the references such as books, materials and sources you use in developing the lesson to include in the resources section: These include the following:

- ❑ Bibliography
- ❑ Annotated related web sites with url addresses
- ❑ Related organizations
- ❑ Overheads or power point presentation
- ❑ Catalog cards on museum objects used in the lesson plan



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- ❑ Charts such as “How to Read an Object” [to be launched at [www.cr.nps.gov/museum](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum)].

#### N. Site Visit

This includes a visit to the park or a similar site, such as a local county museum or historical society. Provide instructions on how to organize an actual park or local museum or historical society.

- ❑ Pre-visit:

Before the visit, have students visit the institution’s website for an overview or provide brochures and other written/visual materials about the site. Have each student come up with 2-3 questions to guide the visit. Work with park interpretive and museum staff to arrange the visit with challenging activities.

- ❑ Site visit:

At the site, have students select at least two objects to analyze. Provide “How to Read an Object” sheets. It also includes an object sketch sheet (white space to make a detailed sketch of the objects). For younger students, develop a “scavenger hunt” object list to encourage close observation skills.

- ❑ Post-visit: See extension activity list for ideas for post-visit student presentation ideas.
- ❑ Virtual visit: Assign an activity that requires a virtual tour of the park web site, and other virtual exhibits of other National Park Service sites and museums on the same topic.