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# Curate Your Own History: The Museum Exhibit Challenge

## Materials Needed

- Computer with internet access
- Notebook and pen/pencil for brainstorming
- **For a Physical Exhibit (Option A):** A large cardboard box or shoebox, craft supplies (construction paper, glue, scissors, clay, small objects for artifacts), markers or paint.
- **For a Digital Exhibit (Option B):** Access to presentation software like Google Slides, Canva, or PowerPoint.

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## Lesson Overview & Learning Objectives

History isn't just about memorizing dates; it's about telling the stories of the past. In this lesson, you will become a museum curator. Your job is to design a compelling museum exhibit about a historical event, person, or period of your choice. You'll move beyond just learning facts and focus on how to present history in a way that is engaging, informative, and creative.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Select a focused historical topic and conduct independent research using reliable online sources.
- Analyze and choose "artifacts" (objects, images, documents) that best tell the story of your topic.
- Synthesize your research into clear, concise, and engaging descriptions (like the placards you see in a museum).
- Design and create a cohesive museum exhibit (either physical or digital) that presents a clear historical narrative.

## Part 1: The Spark - What Makes a Great Exhibit? (15 Minutes)

Let's start by thinking like a visitor. A great museum exhibit doesn't just show you old things; it makes you feel something or understand a new perspective.

1. **Explore an Exhibit:** Take a 10-minute virtual tour of a museum exhibit. You can explore options through Google Arts & Culture or the websites of major museums like The Smithsonian or The British Museum.
2. **Discuss & Analyze:** As you explore, think about these questions:
    - What is the main story the exhibit is trying to tell?
    - What kinds of objects are they using?
    - Look at the text descriptions (placards). Are they long or short? What information do they include?
    - What part of the exhibit was most interesting to you, and why?

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# Part 2: The Curator's Quest - Choose Your Story (60-90 Minutes)

Now it's your turn to be the expert. Your first task is to choose a topic and gather your information. Remember, a specific topic is often more interesting than a broad one (e.g., "The Life of a Roman Gladiator" is better than "The Roman Empire").

1. **Brainstorm & Select a Topic:** Pick a historical topic that genuinely interests you. It could be anything from the construction of the pyramids to the life of a spy during the Cold War, or the history of video games. Write it down.
2. **Ask Key Questions:** Before you dive into research, list 3-5 big questions you want your exhibit to answer. For example, if your topic is "The Space Race," your questions might be:
   - *Why were the USA and the USSR competing?*
   - *What were the key technological breakthroughs?*
   - *Who were some of the forgotten heroes of the missions?*
3. **Conduct Your Research:** Use the internet to find answers to your questions. Look for interesting facts, key dates, important people, and compelling stories. Try to find at least 5 "artifacts" you could feature. These can be photos, maps, quotes from letters, diagrams of technology, or images of objects. Good places to start your research are reputable online encyclopedias, museum websites, and educational history sites (like those from PBS or BBC).

# Part 3: Designing the Exhibit - Bring Your Story to Life (90-120 Minutes)

This is the creative heart of the project. You'll take your research and turn it into a visual story. Choose the format that sounds most fun to you.

## Option A: The Physical "Shoebox" Exhibit

Create a miniature 3D model of your museum exhibit.

- **Build Your Space:** Use a shoebox or a larger cardboard box as your "gallery." You can paint it or cover it with paper.
- **Create Your Artifacts:** Recreate your 5 chosen artifacts in miniature. You can draw them, print out small images, or build them out of clay, foil, or other craft supplies.
- **Write the Placards:** For each artifact, write a short description (2-3 sentences) on a small piece of paper. Explain what the object is and why it's important to your story.
- **Add a Title:** Create a main title for your exhibit that is catchy and informative.
- **Arrange Your Exhibit:** Place your artifacts and placards inside the box in a logical order that tells your story from beginning to end.

## Option B: The Digital Exhibit

Use presentation software to create a professional-looking virtual exhibit.

- **Title Slide:** Your first slide is the entrance to your exhibit. Give it a compelling title and a powerful image.
- **Introduction Slide:** Your second slide should briefly introduce the story you are about to tell and what visitors will learn.
- **Artifact Slides:** Dedicate one slide to each of your 5 artifacts. On each slide, include a high-

quality image of the artifact and a "placard" text box next to it with your 2-3 sentence description.
  - **Conclusion Slide:** Your final slide should summarize the main takeaway from your exhibit. What is the one thing you want visitors to remember?
  - **Design Matters:** Use a clean, consistent font and color scheme to make your exhibit look professional.

## Part 4: The Grand Opening - Share Your Work (20 Minutes)

Your exhibit is complete! Now it's time to guide someone through it. Present your physical or digital exhibit as if you were the museum curator giving a tour.

- Explain why you chose your topic.
- Walk through the exhibit, explaining each artifact and how it contributes to the overall story.
- Share the most surprising or interesting thing you learned during your research.

## Assessment & Reflection

This project isn't about getting facts "right" or "wrong." It's about the process of historical inquiry and creative presentation. We'll assess your exhibit based on:

- **Historical Narrative:** Does the exhibit tell a clear and compelling story?
- **Artifact Choice:** Are the chosen artifacts relevant and interesting?
- **Clarity & Research:** Are the descriptions clear, informative, and based on your research?
- **Creativity & Effort:** Did you put thought and creativity into the design and presentation of your exhibit?

**Reflection Question:** If you had an unlimited budget and a real museum space, what is one interactive element you would add to your exhibit to make it even more engaging?

## Differentiation & Extension

- **Need More Support?** Start with a pre-selected list of topics or use a provided digital template to help structure your exhibit. Sentence starters can be used for the placards (e.g., "This object is a... It was important because...").
- **Ready for a Challenge?** Add an "audio guide" element by writing a short script for each artifact and recording yourself reading it. Or, include an artifact that tells a controversial or less-known side of your story and explain why it's important to include that perspective.

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