



STUDENT HANDOUT

Exploring Culture: The Museum

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Questions:

1. Why do you think museums are important to a community? (*making inferences*)
2. What kind of museum would you most like to visit? (*connecting*)

Slide 1

What are museums?

Museums are special places that collect and display many different things. In a museum, you can walk through an Egyptian tomb, examine a spaceship flown by astronauts, or view sculptures created thousands of years ago. Museums can take you where you've always wanted to go. They can also take you places that you didn't even know existed.

Slide 1

These visitors to a nature museum learn about various animals.



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Types of Museums

Art museums are devoted to presenting and defining art.

History museums give visitors a glimpse of the past.

Natural history museums trace the physical history of the Earth, its plants, animals, and people and their cultures.

Science museums educate the public about science and technology.

Special interest museums focus on only one subject, such as baseball, airplanes, or the circus.



In addition to paintings and sculptures, an art museum might also display photography, jewelry, or films.

► **Slides
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The Smithsonian: A National Treasure House

The Smithsonian Institution is the largest group of museums, art galleries, and research centers in the world. It was created by an act of Congress in 1846 according to the written will of James Smithson, an English scientist. Although Smithson never even visited the United States, he left his entire fortune to the United States government to establish an institution “for the increase and diffusion [spread] of knowledge.” These words are still part of the Smithsonian’s mission statement, or declaration of purpose. Today, the Smithsonian is a storehouse of America’s cultural, social, scientific, and artistic heritage. There are 16 Smithsonian museums, as well as a zoo. Most of the museums are located in Washington, D.C.

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The Smithsonian Castle, which opened in 1855, was the original Smithsonian museum.

“I then bequeath the whole of my property . . .
to the United States of America, to found at
Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian
Institution, an Establishment for the increase and
diffusion of knowledge . . .”

—James Smithson (1765-1829)

► **Slide 5**



Questions:

1. Look at the pictures below of the Milwaukee Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art. What are the differences between the two buildings? Are there any similarities? (*comparing and contrasting*)
2. What do museum planners think about when designing a new building? (*main idea/supporting details, scanning*)

Slide 1

◀ How are museum buildings designed?

Museum buildings can be found in many different sizes and styles. Often the design of a museum is connected to the collections found inside. For example, a museum that displays modern art may have a modern design.

Slide 2

The Milwaukee Museum of Art has a modern design.



Slide 2



The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., has a classical design.

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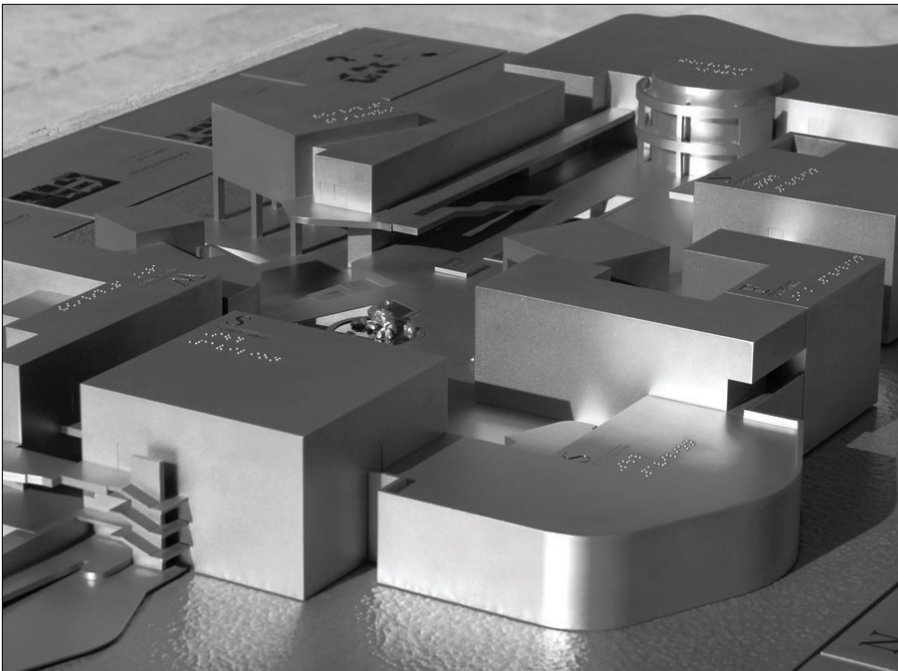
Accessible Museums

Without careful planning, people with disabilities may not be able to access museum buildings, exhibits, and events. Many museums today are creating buildings, furniture, and exhibits that incorporate “universal design.” This is an approach to design that allows for the environment to be accessible to everyone, regardless of age or ability.

Entrance ramps accommodate people who use wheelchairs.



► Slide 3



This small model of the Getty Museum in California is labeled in Braille. Visitors with visual impairments can touch the model to learn how to get around the museum.

► Slide 3



Questions:

1. Why might museum employees specialize in various jobs? (*making inferences*)
2. Why might museum employees work closely together? (*making inferences, connecting*)

Slide 1

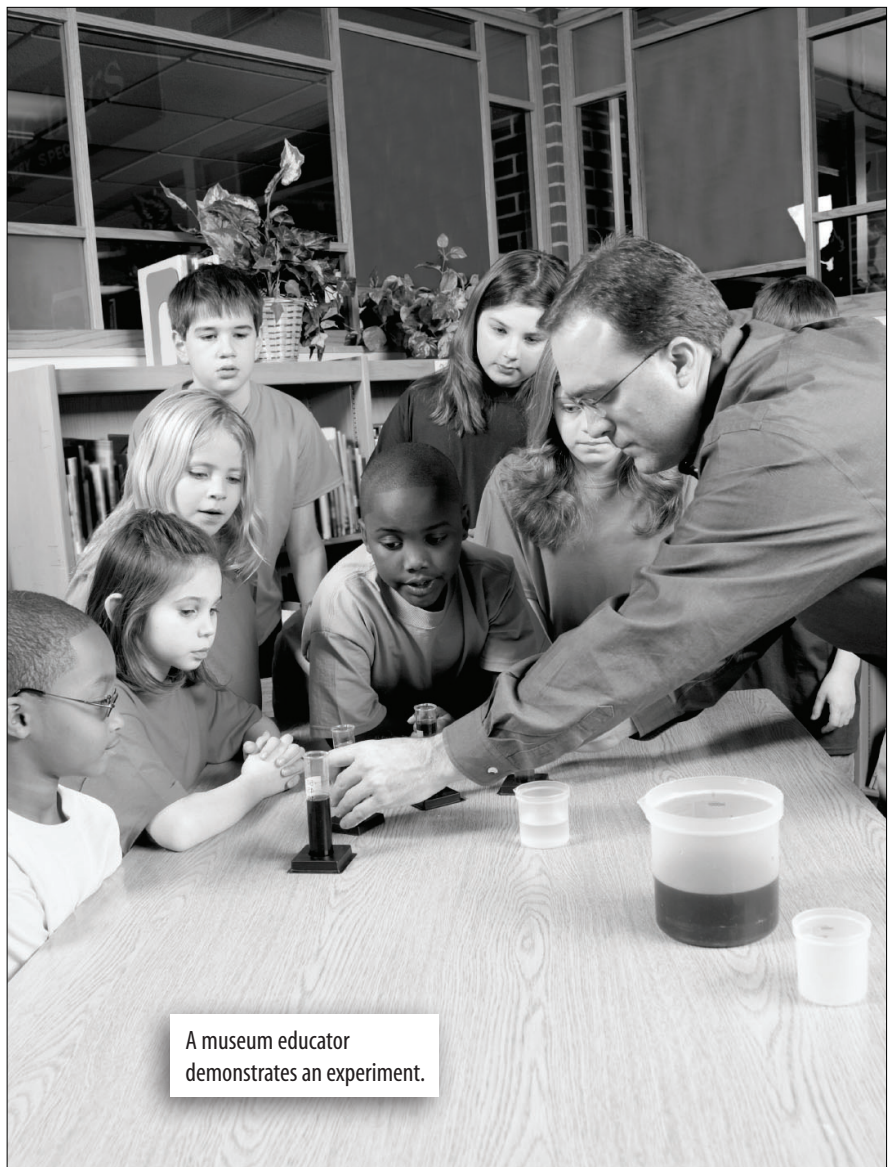
Who works in a museum?

Most museum visitors see only the museum workers who have contact with the public, such as guards, cashiers, and gift-shop salespeople. However, behind the scenes many other employees work hard to keep the museum in business.

Slide 2

Educator

An educator develops and runs programs to teach visitors about the museum. If a museum has classrooms, a library, or resource centers, an educator is responsible for those spaces. An educator may also organize a volunteer program.



A museum educator demonstrates an experiment.

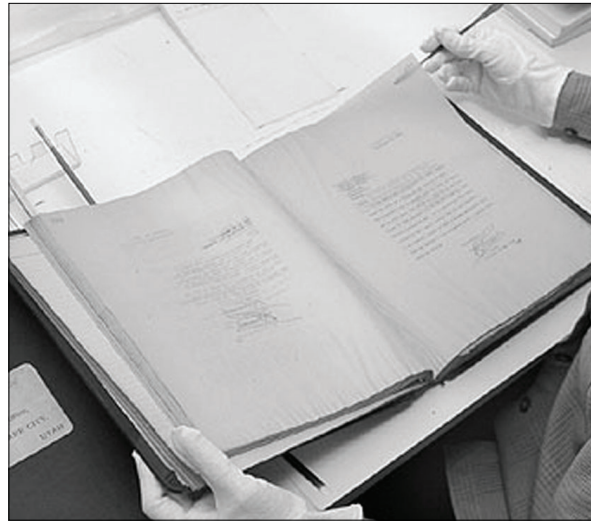


Slides
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Curator

A curator collects and studies the museum's collections. A curator also organizes the exhibitions.



Conservator

A conservator cares for objects in exhibits and storage rooms. A conservator analyzes and repairs objects in the museum's collection. For example, a conservator may be in charge of maintaining the proper temperature and humidity in the museum.

Slides
5, 6



Exhibit Designer

An exhibit designer creates the exhibit plan based on the ideas of other museum employees. An exhibit designer uses art and design skills to propose the layout, colors, and labels in an exhibit. An exhibit designer also makes models of the exhibit for review before construction.



Preparator

A preparator carries out the plans of the exhibit designer. A preparator is skilled in the handling and mounting of valuable objects. These preparators stand below the completed installation of the T-Rex.



Questions:

1. What is the first step in creating a museum exhibit? (*scanning, understanding visuals*)
2. What skills are needed to plan and mount an exhibit? (*making inferences*)

Slides 1, 2

How are museum exhibits created?

New museum exhibits take a lot of time to plan and create. First, a subject needs to be chosen. An art museum might decide to mount an exhibit on African art. A history museum might create an exhibit to tell about an important part of American history, such as the Underground Railroad.

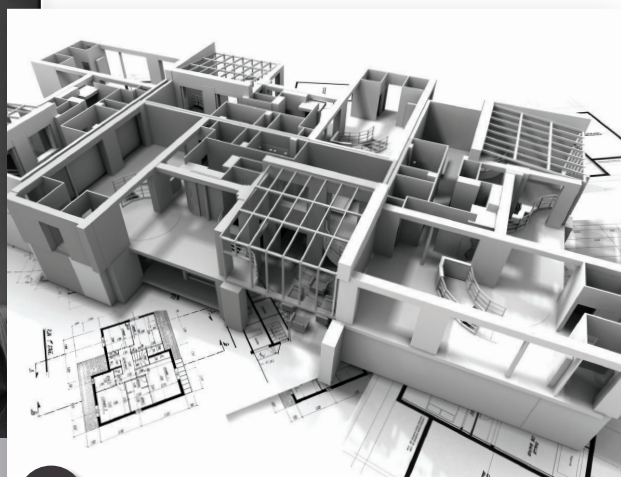
Once a theme is chosen, many people, from curators and exhibit designers to carpenters and painters, contribute their skills and knowledge. All their hard work pays off when a new exhibit opens to the public.

Slides 2, 3



1

Planning



2

Design



3

Construction

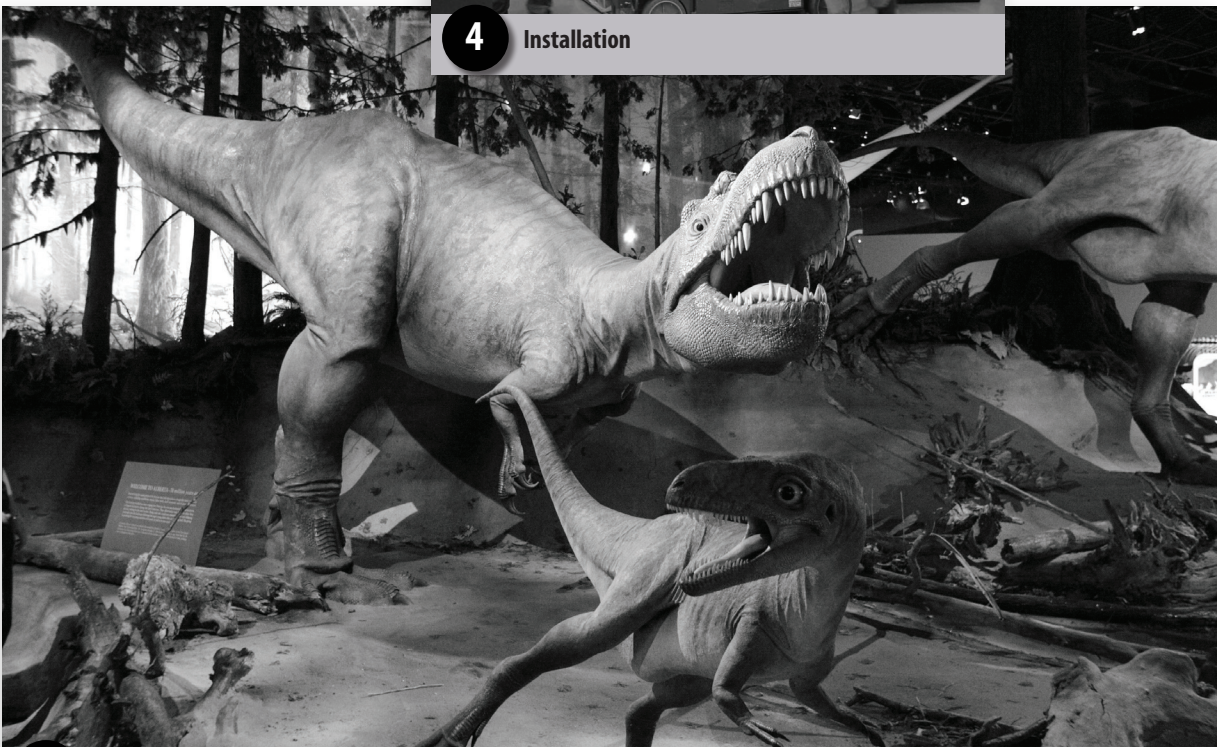


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► Slide 4

4 Installation



5 Completed Exhibit

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Questions:

1. What are the three basic ways museum exhibits are organized?
(*main idea/supporting details*)
2. Suppose you were organizing an exhibit about toys from the past. Which theme would you choose for organizing this exhibit, chronological, environmental, or topical? Explain.
(*comparing and contrasting, connecting*)

Slide 1

◀ How are museum exhibits organized?

Most museum exhibits are organized using one or more of three basic themes:

topical, environmental, or chronological. An exhibit with a topical theme contains objects that are arranged in groups by topic. An exhibit with an environmental theme tries to create a scene exactly as it was or is in real life. An exhibit with a chronological theme contains objects or scenes in order by time period.

Slide 2

◀ Topical Exhibit

This exhibit about Navajo culture focuses on Kachina Dolls.



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Environmental Exhibit

This is a re-creation of the Assembly Room in Independence Hall as it was in 1776.

► **Slide 3**



Chronological Theme Exhibit

This exhibit about the history of jazz music is organized around a chronological theme.

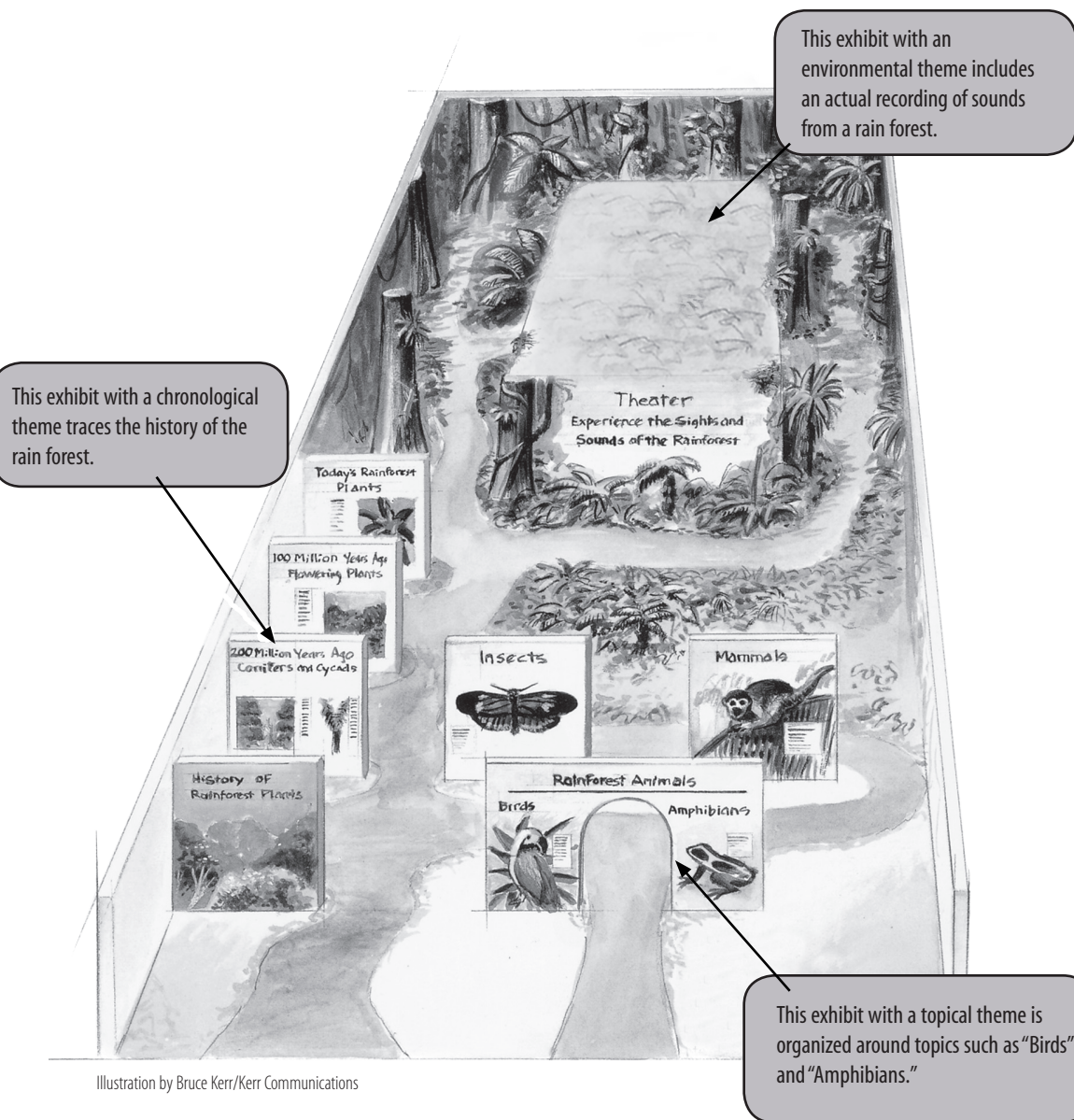
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Rain Forest Exhibits

Slide 5



Questions:

1. What are some of the ways museums represent culture? (*main idea/supporting details*)
2. What is an interactive exhibit? (*scanning*)

How do museums represent culture?

We can learn a great deal about the culture of a group of people by looking at how they meet their basic human needs, such as the needs for food, clothing, and shelter. There are many different ways a museum can represent elements of culture, such as clothing, in an exhibit.

► Slide 1



Actual items are displayed in museum cases. These museum cases display women's clothing, baskets and tools from the Ahwaneechee, a Native American tribe.

► Slide 1

These actors model and play medieval string instruments in a "living diorama."



► Slide 2



Slide 3

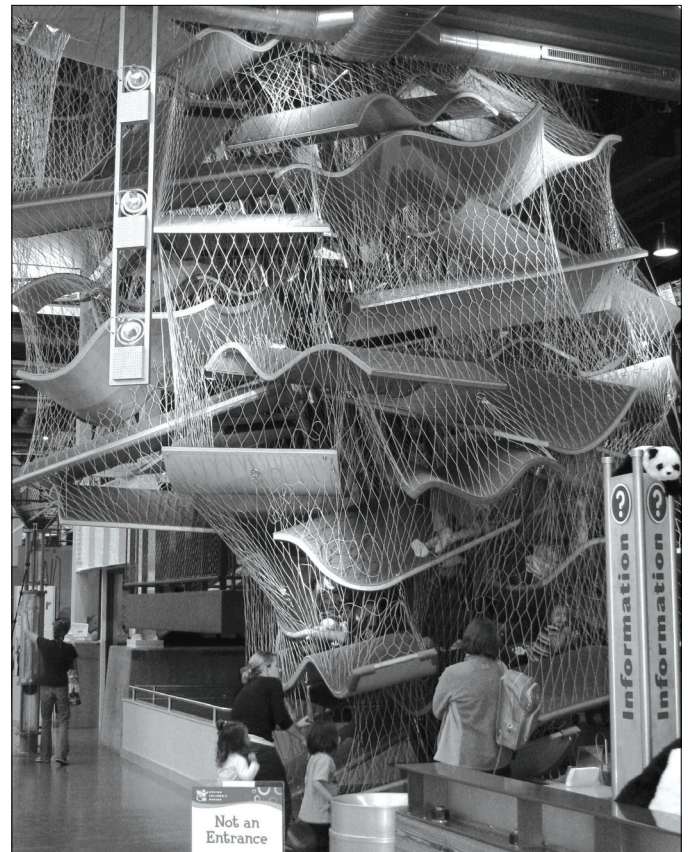


To understand the past, museums show original art to help people understand the clothing of the past. For example, this Japanese print from 1830, provides clues about clothing that was worn long ago.

Slide 4

Do Touch!

Children's museums are created for children to learn and play. Most exhibits in children's museums are interactive, which means that the visitors are allowed to touch, hold, and even climb on the objects in the exhibit. Many traditional museums, such as art museums and history museums, are now developing interactive exhibits that attract young visitors.



This 3-story climbing structure at the children's museum in Boston allows children to crawl, climb, and weave their way from the top to bottom.

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Questions:

What might be the advantages and disadvantages of dedicating an entire museum to one cultural group? (*making inferences*)

What are some other ways that museums represent culture?

Sometimes an entire museum is devoted to celebrating one cultural group. For example, in the United States there are more than eighty museums that are dedicated to the exploration of African American art and history. Many of these museums are members of an organization called the Association of African American Museums.

► Slide 1



The creations of African American artists, like this quilt by Faith Ringgold, are featured in exhibits at many African American museums.

► Slide 1

► Slide 2

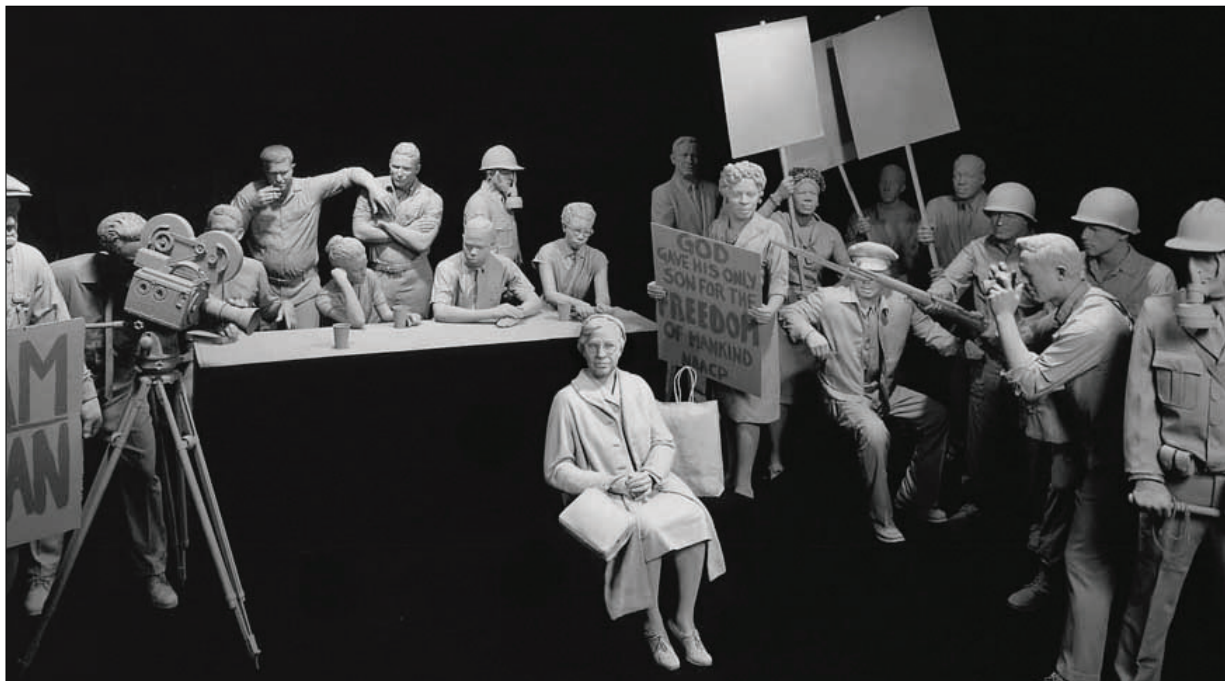
Visitors to the African American Civil War Museum in Washington, D.C., can see a uniform that was worn by a soldier in the Civil War.



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Slide 3



This exhibit about civil rights is on display at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee.

Slide 4

A Museum with a Mission

The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History was founded in 1965 in Detroit, Michigan. According to its mission statement, the Charles H. Wright Museum presents exhibits “that explore the diversity of African American history and culture.” The museum houses a variety of permanent and visiting exhibits including “A is for Africa,” which introduces young children to African places, events, ideas, and food.



The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

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Questions:

1. How might the Smithsonian find common ground regarding the *Enola Gay* controversy? (*main idea/ supporting details, connecting*)
2. Do you think the Florida Anatomical Board was right to object to the exhibit? Explain. (*connecting*)

What are museum controversies?

Museums do more than just collect and display objects. Museums play an important role in shaping our history and culture. This role gives museums a great deal of responsibility. Museums need to be careful about what they choose to display and how they present objects and information.

Museums have rights and responsibilities in creating exhibits. They have the right to create the exhibit as they choose. We call this “freedom of expression.” They also have a responsibility to create exhibits that fairly and accurately represent the focus of the exhibit.

There are times when community members disagree about how a museum has presented an exhibit. The staff at a museum then needs to make a decision about whether or not to change the exhibit.

A good relationship between a museum and the public depends on curators and other museum employees responding to feedback from the community. Sometimes these disagreements require that the two groups, the museum and the public, come together to try to find common ground, a position that satisfies both groups. As our understanding of culture, history, and the planet continually change, so must our museums.

► Slides
1, 2



Slide 3



The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum includes a display featuring the *Enola Gay*, the airplane that dropped the atomic bomb on Japan in 1945. This display is a continuing source of controversy at the Smithsonian. Some people feel the exhibit should emphasize the deadly consequences of nuclear weapons, while others feel the exhibit should focus on the heroic efforts of the U.S. military to end World War II.

Slide 4



The crew of the *Enola Gay*

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Bodies: The Exhibition

► Slide 5

“Bodies: The Exhibition” is a traveling exhibit intended to teach visitors about the inner workings of the human body. Actual human bodies, preserved with special plastic, are displayed in lifelike poses. When the exhibit was scheduled to open at the Museum of Science and Industry in Tampa, Florida, the state’s Anatomical Board voted against showing the exhibition. The members of the Anatomical Board felt that it wasn’t right to display the bodies of people who did not give their permission for their bodies to be used in this way. The bodies used for the exhibition were unclaimed and unidentified bodies from China.

The Florida Anatomical Board did not have the power to stop the exhibition from appearing at Tampa’s Museum of Science and Industry. But it did raise some important questions about what museums choose to display in their exhibits.



“Bodies: The Exhibition” was on display at the Museum of Science and Industry in Tampa, Florida, for several months in 2005 and 2006.

► Slide 5

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Questions:

Why are grand openings important to museums?

(main idea/supporting details, connecting)

Slide 1

What happens when a new museum opens?

When a new museum opens its doors for the first time, it usually holds a celebration called a grand opening. When an existing museum constructs a new building, adds more space to an old building, or creates a new exhibit, it also holds a grand opening.

Grand openings are special events. People come to view the new exhibits and to hear speeches given by museum employees. A museum uses grand openings to reach out to the community and interest people in becoming members of the museum.

Slide 2



The High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, was originally founded in 1905. This new, modern building opened in 1983. The High Museum uses colorful banners to announce the newest exhibits.



The Field Museum opens a celebratory exhibition to commemorate the 10th anniversary of their T-Rex display.

► Slide 3



► Slide 4

Visitors to the Navy Museum in Washington D.C., listen to an educator as she describes the daily life of a sailor.

Tips on Visiting a Museum

► Slide 4

Plan ahead. If possible, look at the museum's Web site and decide which exhibits you would most like to see.

Be safe. Follow all posted museum rules, such as no running in the exhibits.

Know when to look and when to touch. Some museum exhibits are interactive, which means visitors are allowed to touch, hold, or move objects in the exhibit. Some are not. When in doubt, ask a museum employee if it's okay to touch an exhibit.

Be an active learner. If a museum volunteer or educator is available, ask questions about the exhibits. Take notes and draw sketches of the objects that interest you. If the museum allows it, take photos of what you see.

Share what you learned. After your visit, talk about what you saw at the museum with your friends and family.