

Museum in the Classroom

Overview

Bring the Canadian History Hall to your classroom! This lesson gives you tools to create a mini-museum in your classroom. Using the objects and resources from the History Box and supplementary online materials, students will build exhibitions about Canadian history.

Grade Levels

Grades 4 to 12; Elementary Cycles 2 and 3, and Secondary 1 to 5 in Quebec

Historical Thinking Concepts

- **Evaluating Evidence:** What can we tell about how people lived by examining the clues they left behind? What questions remain?
- **Historical Significance:** How do we decide which and whose stories to tell? What evidence do we use? What evidence do we leave out?
- **Historical Perspectives:** How can we better understand the people of the past? How do different people experience the same events?

Estimated Time

1 to 4 class periods

Curriculum Connections

Social studies, history, language, media arts

Objectives

- Use critical thinking and historical-inquiry skills to investigate various topics in Canadian history
- Consider how primary sources can be interpreted to learn about the past
- Understand the role of exhibition teams in designing museum displays
- Work cooperatively to build exhibitions

Materials Required

From the History Box:

- All artifacts
- All artifact labels
- All artifact backgrounders

From the Teachers' Zone website or the USB flash drive in the History Box:

- Contextual photographs
- Informational videos
- Artist information
- Photocopies of worksheets

Additional supplies:

- Art materials – crayons, coloured pencils, coloured markers, scissors, glue, tape, etc.

Handling the Objects

Most of the of the objects in the History Box are reproductions made recently, based on actual items from that time found in our collections. Other items have been made by Indigenous artists and other craftspeople specifically as teaching tools for this kit.

You and your students are free to touch and examine all the objects and try on the clothing.

Remember, however, that the objects, whether authentic artifacts or reproductions, are valuable and breakable. Please handle them with care.

During COVID, touching or sharing items may not be advised. Please review our Safe Handling Guidelines.

Virtual Teaching Tips

If you're teaching in a virtual setting, look for this symbol  to find suggested adjustments to the lesson plan.

Please Note:

1. This lesson provides options for customization and alternatives for different grade levels. The level of complexity depends on time, resources and curriculum. Feel free to modify or mix and match activities to suit the needs of your class.
2. Please do not cut, glue or alter any objects in the History Box. Feel free, however, to scan, print or photocopy any of the materials. All content can also be found at historymuseum.ca/teachers-zone/ or on the USB flash drive supplied with the History Box.

Part A: Introduction

Start with a conversation about museums. If appropriate, ask students to describe their favourite museums. What do they like about going there?

At the Canadian Museum of History, our mission is to enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity. We do this in our main galleries, including the Canadian History Hall, and through special exhibitions and programs. Today, your students will become exhibition developers.

A museum exhibition communicates an idea or message. It uses objects, images, stories and interactive experiences to connect with visitors.

As a class, discuss the process involved in developing a museum exhibition.

- **Exhibitions can be physical or virtual.** Will your exhibition take up physical space? Or will it be an online experience? It's important to think about the setting first. Once you've decided, make sure to keep this in mind as you explore the other parts of exhibition development below.
- **Exhibition development relies on teamwork.** An exhibition is usually created by a team of people whose members have their own areas of expertise and specific role. In large institutions, teams may be quite large. In small museums, one person may take on multiple jobs. For this lesson, we've identified key roles involved in exhibition development. You may choose to assign roles, allow students to choose, or suggest they share roles as a team.

- **Historian or curator** – Selects objects and images, and writes exhibition text.
 - **Designer** – Decides how the exhibition will look, including colours, fonts and lighting used.
 - **Marketer** – Promotes and advertises the exhibition.
 - **Builder** – Makes exhibition structures, such as display panels. In a virtual setting the builder might help the designer create the exhibition website.
 - **Conservator or object specialist** – Responsible for the safe handling and display of exhibition objects. May also create mounts or stands for objects, graphics and text.
 - **Educator or tour guide** – Greets visitors and guides them through the exhibition. May also design activities to encourage learning. In a virtual setting they would create online activities or virtual tours.
- **Exhibitions are created with a target audience in mind.** This influences all planning decisions. Will the exhibition be for children? Members of the community? Tourists who know very little about your town or topic? Are they visiting your physical space or online exhibit? Think about the needs and abilities of your audience when planning your exhibitions.
 - **Exhibitions have a main message.** For this lesson, you can use a pre-determined message or develop your own. See suggested options in Appendix C. The main message is the exhibition team’s starting point. This “big idea” helps shape the exhibition: whose stories to tell, which artifacts to choose, what the visitor experience should feel like, etc. The “big idea” also helps the team decide what to leave out.
 - **Exhibition teams make choices about what to include.** Artifacts and images, when considered within their historical period, can help us understand the past. They provide clues about people’s experiences. A historian looks at these clues – including written documents such as diaries, visual documents such as art and photographs, and material culture such as clothing and equipment – to figure out what people did in the past and how they did it. The historian decides which clues matter and which do not, depending on the exhibition’s message, and what would be most interesting to visitors.

- **A well-designed exhibition is a pleasure to visit.** Think about the needs of your visitors. How and where you display information is almost as important as what you choose to share. Make sure that nothing is placed too high or too low. Text and images should be big enough to be seen from a distance. Ideas should be organized and described in short, simple sentences and paragraphs. Too much information can overload visitors.
- **Interactive elements and special programs are a great way to engage visitors.** Think creatively about additional ways to connect with visitors. Could you make a quiz or invent a game? Could visitors maybe try on clothing or (safely!) touch an object? Would a guided tour work? Could you add sound effects? Everyone learns differently. Your exhibition will be even more successful if you use a variety of ways of presenting your ideas and content.

A virtual exhibition needs to be designed as well. Webpages need to be well organized. It should be clear to the visitor how to navigate from one section to the next. Text should be short and simple. Use multimedia such as video and audio to engage your visitor.

Part B: Research and Exhibition Planning

Option 1: Create an exhibition organized around the objects in the History Box (suggested for elementary students).

This option does not require students to have studied the whole of Canadian history but allows students to appreciate change over time and the variety of objects that can tell multiple stories of Canada's history. To begin, choose one of the exhibition messages below. This "main message" will guide the rest of your exhibition development process.

Message Option 1: There is no one history of Canada; there are many different perspectives and stories.

Message Option 2: Canadian history artifacts are made of many different materials, which usually correspond to different geographic areas.

Message Option 3: Over the course of Canadian history, art and cultural expression have been very diverse and important.

Divide students into groups of three or four and distribute copies of Worksheet 1 (Option 1 – Exhibition Planning).

Ask each group to choose three to five items to help tell the exhibition message:

- Objects from the History Box
- Contextual Images (online or on usb)

Have students complete the worksheet.

Please Note:

1. Artifacts may be interpreted in a variety of ways. If more than one group would like to use the same object, they may share or take turns.
2. In museum collections, almost every artifact has a “provenance” – a record of its origins, ownership and history. Objects in the History Box, however, are reproductions or authentic pieces of art. The reproductions are based off real objects in our collections that do have a provenance.



Virtual Teaching:

- If students cannot physically handle objects, direct them to historymuseum.ca/teachers-zone/ to see digitized objects and contextual images.
- Send students digitized copies of Worksheet 1 – Option 1 Exhibition Planning.
- Using a breakout room function on your video call platform can assist group work.

Option 2: Create a thematically organized exhibition exploring the richness of Canadian history. (suggested for high school students).

Distribute copies of Worksheet 2 (Option 2 – Exhibition Planning).

As a class, generate a list of main messages / big ideas for the exhibitions the students will create or choose some from our list of suggestions (see Appendix C).

Divide students into groups of three or four and assign a different main message to each group, or allow them to choose.

Instruct students to explore the following resources with their message in mind:

- Objects (with corresponding labels and backgrounders)
- Contextual Images (online or on usb)
- Audio visual content (online)
- Optional: other sources available in your classroom (Internet research, reference books, etc.)

From those resources, groups should choose five items for their exhibition. There should be a mix of:

- artifacts
- visual content (e.g., period photographs of the place, archival sources, works of art and photographs of the individuals featured in the personal stories)

Please Note:

1. Artifacts may be interpreted in a variety of ways. If more than one group would like to use the same object, they may share or take turns.
2. In museum collections, almost every artifact has a “provenance” – a record of its origins, ownership and history. Objects in the History Box, however, are reproductions or authentic pieces of art. The reproductions are based off real objects in our collections that do have a provenance.



Virtual Teaching:

- If students cannot physically handle objects, direct them to historymuseum.ca/teachers-zone/ to see digitized objects and contextual images.
- Send students digitized copies of Worksheet 1 – Option 2 Exhibition Planning.
- Using a breakout room function on your video call platform can assist group work.

Part C: Exhibition Design

Once groups have selected source materials, they can create their exhibitions.

Distribute Appendix A (Exhibition Labels).

Students will work together to organize their artifacts, images and archival sources.

Ask them to:

- make a sketch of the exhibition layout;
- consider how artifacts, images and text will be displayed.

Have students write labels for their exhibition (see Appendix A for suggestions). Remind them that less is more when writing exhibition text. Visitors have a lot to take in: artifacts, images, text. You want them to be able to get the important information quickly and easily. This is a great opportunity to talk to your students about the editing process.



Virtual Teaching:

- If students are creating an online exhibit, they can sketch webpage layouts instead of exhibition layouts. If time allows, students can even create their online exhibitions using free platforms such as wix.com.
- Send students digitized copies of Appendix A (Exhibition labels).

Part D: Presentation

This step can be simple (presentations to the class) or elaborate (invite other classes and guests to attend the presentations and tour the exhibitions).

Each group should be prepared to discuss their exhibition and answer questions about the objects and other sources they used.

Suggestions for Assessment

Did students design their exhibitions with their target audience(s) in mind? Did they effectively communicate the main message? Were their reasons for choosing various resources clear and well thought-out? Did they share ideas and respect the contributions of their team members? Did they demonstrate good writing skills? Did they produce an effective exhibition?

Extension Activities

- Think local – Consider adding content about your parents, grandparents or town.
- Plan an exhibition opening – Create posters, make invitations for special guests, prepare for guided tours. Show off your great work.
- Create short scripts based on personal stories and perform them.

Worksheets

1. Option 2 (Thematic) – Exhibition Planning
2. Option 2 (Thematic) – Exhibition Planning Blackline Master

Appendices

- Appendix A: Exhibition Labels
- Appendix B: Suggested Exhibition Messages

Option 1 – Exhibition Planning

Identify the role of each exhibition team member.

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Complete the sections below to plan your exhibition.

A. Identify Your Target Audience(s)

What is the approximate age range of your visitors?

How much do they already know about the subject of your exhibition? A lot or nothing at all?

List any special requirements they may have.

For example: Can they read English easily? Do they have limited time to visit?

Are they visiting your exhibition online or on-site?

B. List the three to five supporting materials you've chosen to tell your story.

1:

2:

3:

4:

5:

C. Develop Your Exhibition Text

Exhibition Title (1-5 words):

A strong exhibition title is short. It attracts a visitor's attention and interest.

Exhibition Text (maximum 50 words):

Stick to what is most interesting and important. What information will be interesting to your visitors? Think of the experiences of the person you chose. What do they teach us about Canada or what life was like at this time?

Option 1 – Exhibition Planning – Continued . . .

Artifact or Image Labels (maximum 25 words):

It is important to provide essential information on the object, image and archival source you chose. What is it? Where does it come from?

Artifact:

Image:

Archival source:

D. Design Your Exhibition

Make a sketch of your display or webpage. Where will you put the images, text and objects? Think about the colours and materials you would like to use.

Option 2 – Exhibition Planning

Identify the role of each exhibition team member.

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Name: _____ Job Title: _____

Complete the sections below to plan your exhibition.

A. Exhibition Message

Remember that the exhibition message is your “big idea”.
It will guide the content you choose for your exhibition.

B. Identify Your Target Audience(s)

What is the approximate age range of your visitors?

How much do they already know about the subject of your exhibition? A lot or nothing at all?

List any special requirements they may have.

For example: Can they read English easily? Do they have limited time to visit?

Are they visiting your exhibition online or on-site?

C. Research

Consider the objects, images, archival sources and other materials you may have available in your classroom or the community.

Choose five items to display in your exhibition and list them below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

D. Develop Your Exhibition Text

Exhibition Title (1-5 words):

A strong exhibition title is short. It attracts a visitor's attention and interest.

Exhibition Text (maximum 50 words):

Stick to what is most interesting and important. What information will be interesting to your visitors? Think of the experiences of the person you chose. What do they teach us about what life was like in Canada or at this time?

Artifact or Image Labels (maximum 25 words):

It is important to provide essential information on the object, image and archival source you chose. What is it? Where does it come from?

Artifact:

Image:

Archival source:

E. Design Your Exhibition

Make a sketch of your display. Where will you put the images, text and objects?
Think about the colours and materials you would like to use.

Appendix A: Exhibition Labels

Use the label templates below or design your own labels. Add the labels to your exhibition.

Appendix B: Suggested Exhibition Messages

Choose exhibition messages from the list below or create your own.

- First Peoples in Canadian History: Cultures and Traditions
- Home Made: Arts and Crafts in Canada
- Canadian Past Times
- Work and Play
- Women in Canada
- Conflict and Resolution
- Skills and Trades
- Animal Transformations: How Animals have been used throughout History
- Immigration and New Arrivals
- Waterways and Livelihoods
- Symbols of Canada
- Science and Technology

