

The Smithsonian Institution and Museums Today: Learning About Museums

Objective: Students will recognize the Smithsonian Institution and be able to explain what a museum does.

Time: About one hour, depending on activities, may be divided into two parts.

Skills: Reading comprehension and/or listening, drawing and creative writing.

Content area: Language Arts-Listening comprehension, Language Arts- Reading comprehension, Social Studies- United States history, Arts- Visual Arts

Materials:

- ◆ Story provided below (Make copies if students will read on their own.)
- ◆ Drawing paper
- ◆ Pencils
- ◆ Crayons
- ◆ Magazines
- ◆ Scissors
- ◆ Poster board

Standards:

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

4D: Marshal needed information of the time and place in order to construct a story, explanation, or historical narrative.

Introduction:

Museums are places where visitors can see many different objects and learn about them. People who work at museums help visitors learn from the objects, called artifacts. The museum experts preserve or take care of the artifacts owned by the museum so that they will last a long time. Some museums are all about science. Some show paintings and sculptures. What kinds of objects do you think you might see at the National Museum of American History?

Directions:

1. Read the passage on the next page with your class.
2. Lead a discussion based on the questions that follow.

The Star-Spangled Banner Project

What is the Smithsonian Institution?

James Smithson was born in Great Britain, in 1765. He was a very good scientist. Mr. Smithson believed that education and learning new things was very important. When he died in 1829, he gave all his money to the United States of America. He asked that the American government set up a new institution called the “Smithsonian Institution,” in Washington, DC. In 1846, after many years, the institution was founded and it included a museum.

Now the Smithsonian has grown to include 19 different museums and galleries, and the National Zoo. There are art, science, and many other kinds of museums. They belong to all Americans. One of the most popular museums is the National Museum of American History. That's where experts are preserving the Star-Spangled Banner.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever been to a museum? What type of museum was it? Students should share their museum experiences with the class.
2. Why are museums important?
3. Why do they preserve things?
4. What is the job of people who work in museums?
5. What would you include in a museum if you could create one yourself?

Activities:

The following may be used as an assignment, in which a student completes one or more of the activities at home or during class time.

1. Have students draw or cut out pictures of what they'd like to see in a museum.
2. Have students draw a picture of a museum they would like to create. Using poster board or oaktag, they can make a larger picture of their museum and label the things they draw.
3. Students may write a story about a museum they have visited or would like to visit.

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Challenge:

1. If the class has internet access, look up the National Museum of American History Web site. Here are two places to learn more about the collections:
 - ◆ <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/index.cfm> Browse the different types of collections found at the museum. See if the museum collection includes any of the objects that students guessed.
 - ◆ <http://historywired.si.edu/> Interact with the Web site to see which objects are most popular. Also narrow your search by looking for a specific topic or a specific range on the time line.
2. Small groups may create exhibitions together. This exhibition could connect to the content students are learning in language arts, mathematics, or other subjects.

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For the History Channel

Editor

Libby O’Connell, Ph.D.
V.P. Historical Alliances

Business Manager

Beth Ann Marian, M.Ed.

Business Coordinator

Lourdes Gamez

Created By

Libby O’Connell, Ph.D.
Beth Ann Marian, M.Ed.
Kevin Blake
Jodi Greenwald

Research

Jamie Eschric
Jodi Greenwald
Kevin Blake

Creative Design

Madeline Gleason
Wendy Toffel

For The National Museum of American History

Director, Education and Visitor Services

Nancy McCoy

Director, Star-Spangled Banner Project

Ron Becker

Director, Hands-On Science Center

Theresa Esterlund

Chief Conservator

Suzanne Thomassen-Krauss

Education Specialists

Amy Bartow-Melia
Burt Glassman
Tim Grove

Curator, Star-Spangled Banner
Conservation Exhibition

Lonn Taylor

Chief of Education, Lemelson Center

Michael Judd

Teacher Advisors

Gloria Allen, Bunker Hill Elementary, Washington, D.C.
Veronica Bryant, Cameron Elementary, Fairfax Co., VA
Rhonda Dillard, Francis Scott Key Middle School, Montgomery Co., MD
Henry Edwards, Burgundy Farm Country Day, Alexandria, VA
Susan Hurscalderone, Blessed Sacrament, Chevy Chase, MD
Mike Rutherford, Manassas County Public Schools, VA
Robert Sindall, Cold Springs Elementary, Montgomery Co., MD
Vikki Wismer, Flintstone Elementary, Prince Georges Co., MD