



Classroom Activities—Additional Materials and Resources, Museums focus

Use this section for inspiration and to find worksheets and model projects that can be adapted to your classroom. Click on an item for a hyperlink to that page.

Activities designed for use in and with museums (for fieldtrips):

These are pages with different kinds of prompts to deepen engagement with museum spaces. Try each at different exhibitions to see how this affects your experience of the artifacts and content.

- [Exhibit Response Journal](#)
- [See, Think, Wonder](#)
- [Museum Observation Field Journal](#)
- [Insider and Outsider Reflection](#)

Activities designed for teaching with artifacts (in classrooms and off-site visits):

- [Multisensory Interviews](#)
- [Learning Application: Three Class Exercises for Writing with Artifacts](#)
- [Museum of Me](#)

Links to other activities that connect to Museums and Culturally-Responsive Learning

[Smithsonian Learning Lab](https://learninglab.si.edu) (<https://learninglab.si.edu>)

Teach effectively by creating your own interactive learning experiences-or adopt exemplars made by teachers and Smithsonian experts.

[Exploring Portraits, Dress, and Identity in Asian Art](https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/exploring-portraits-dress-and-identity-in-asian-art)
(<https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/exploring-portraits-dress-and-identity-in-asian-art>)

What can art objects from distant times and places express about the identity of the people and the cultures depicted in them?

[Exploring Dress, Culture, and Identity in American Indian Objects and Dress](https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/exploring-dress-culture-and-identity-in-american-indian-objects-and-dress)
(<https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/exploring-dress-culture-and-identity-in-american-indian-objects-and-dress>)

How would you feel if someone (outside your identity group) used your identity design references in a clothing line? What might change how you feel about this use?

[Dress to Express](https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/dress-to-express) (<https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/dress-to-express>)

Our clothes are important cultural elements. We use them for many reasons. They are practical, fun symbols of our identity. Let's find some surprises while exploring how we Dress to Express.

[Collecting!](https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/collecting) (<https://locallearningnetwork.org/resource/collecting>)

Curators organize collections for public exhibits, showcasing what they have learned about objects. By thinking like a curator, how would you organize one of your collections for a home museum?

Exhibit Response Journal

I began to think of . . . _____

I noticed . . . _____

I love the way . . . _____

I wonder why . . . _____

I know the feeling . . . _____

I was surprised . . . _____

I learned . . . _____

ARTIFACT INQUIRY

Name _____

Date _____

To investigate the story behind an object from another person's point of view, choose partners and take turns acting as both interviewer and interviewee. Select an interesting artifact that your partner is wearing or carrying or have the partner select something to share. Observe it closely as you complete this form. Switch, it is your partner's turn to observe. Afterward, share observations. Note what assumptions were made, what was correct, what was incorrect, what surprised you, what the questions tell you.

I see (describe)

I think (infer)

I wonder (question)

Consider a museum an important text that deserves careful reading. Before visiting a museum, inventory your assumptions about what you expect, even if you are familiar with the institution. Think about where it is, how it sits on the landscape, its relationship to the natural and built environments. Use categories below to guide your close observation of various aspects of the museum experience. Make notes, sketches, and photos, if allowed, to create keep a field journal of your visit.

Audience—For whom is the museum intended, how is the museum advertised, what is its importance to the city, the region, the nation? Is the mission statement posted? What are the education programs and whom do they serve? Who are the visitors—age, gender, ethnicity, tourists, locals? How are visitors dressed? What languages do you hear?

Names—Whose names appear in and on the art and objects in exhibits, among the donors, on the building, the board of directors, the staff, the docents, the volunteers? Is there an obvious hierarchy? Are there any clues to the occupational folklore of staff or docents?

Funding—Do public (local, state, federal government) as well as private (foundations, funders, the public) funds support the museum? Who funds individual exhibits? How does the museum generate income?

Voice—Who's the curator, what are the art and objects saying, what are the artists saying? Are voices left out? If so, whose? How might they be included? Should they be included?

Aesthetics—How do the physical arrangements of the facility express the mission of the museum? How do various sections of the facility differ in terms of layout, décor, public access? Take time to observe a small section of the facility—sketch it, note traffic patterns, who comes and goes. What's the soundscape? What do you find pleasing in this museum and why? What is unappealing to you here and why?

Cultural Representation—Are all artworks strictly fine/academic or did you find elements of folk/traditional culture in the exhibits? What references to popular culture do you find?

Social Issues—What social issues does the museum address and how? Does the museum stance on social issues influence public opinion, policy, or funding? If so, how?

Soon after your visit, take time to free write about the experience. Your writing is just for you, so write freely and quickly. Return to your assumptions, think about what surprised you, what pleased you, what made you uncomfortable. Refer to your notes, sketches, and photos. Summarize your experience by writing an exhibit label greeting a future visitor. You may illustrate the label and give it a title.

Insider and Outsider Reflection

Before experiencing a museum or other learning experience that includes cultural representation and identity, it is important to think deeply about our own perspectives that may inform our responses and analysis. Use this worksheet to inventory some assumptions you may have about the exhibition, guest speaker, or cultural artifacts that you will be experiencing today.

Ways in Which I Am an Insider	Why? What evidence would suggest that I am an insider ?	Ways in Which I Am an Outsider	Why? What evidence would suggest that I am an outsider ?

Adapted from: Louisiana Voices Folklife in Education Project
www.louisianavoices.org

Multisensory Interviews

Classroom Connection: Sample Lesson Plan—Collaborative and Multisensory Interviewing

This sample lesson plan is used within a larger class project ([City Lore: What We Bring](#)) to create an anthology of picture books that retell the migration stories of community members.

2nd-5th Grades ~ 45 Minutes

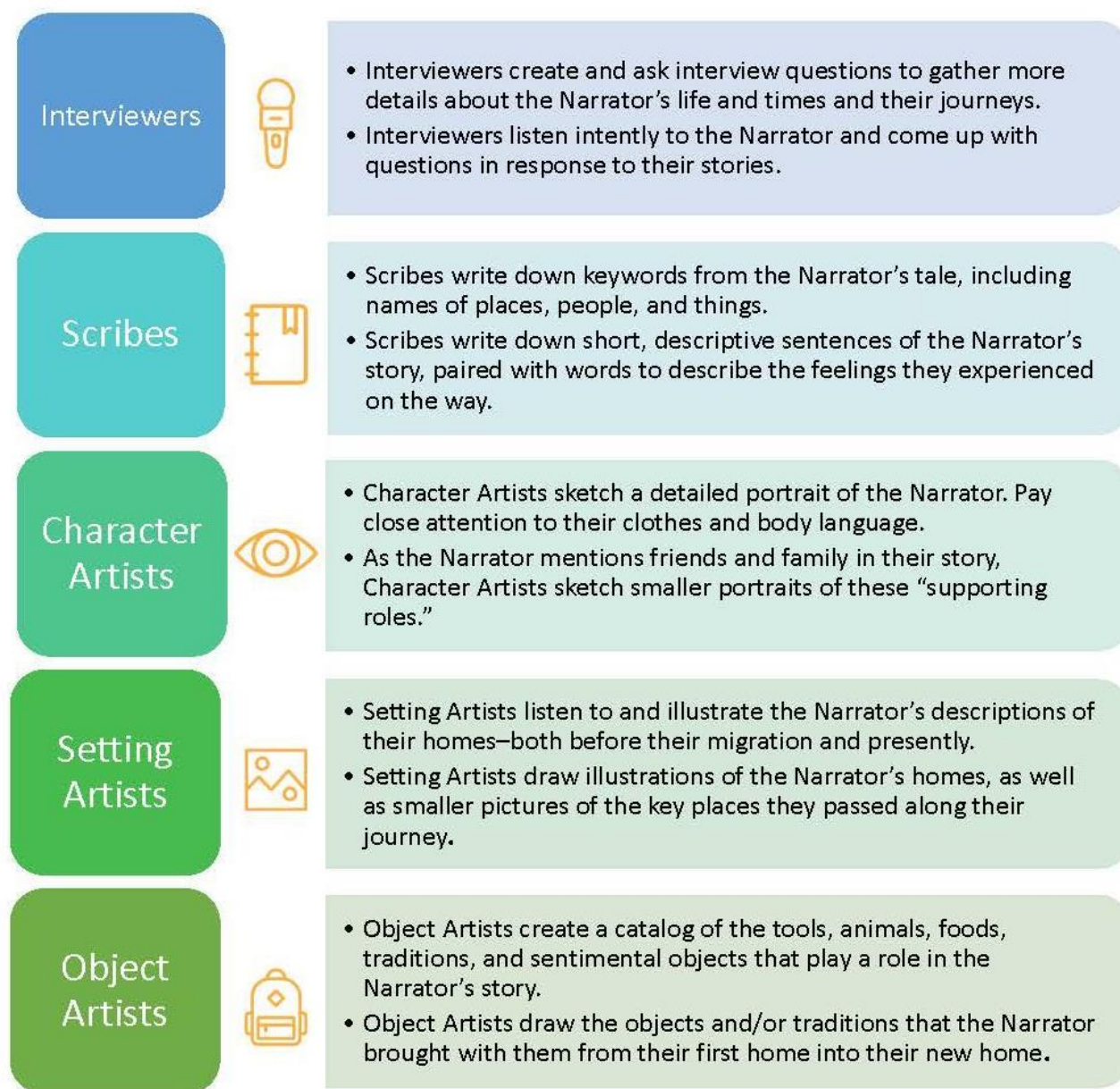
Goal	To introduce the concept of active listening and teach the components of autobiographical storytelling through creating sequential images paired with narrative.
Materials	Large drawing paper Colored pencils Pencils
Lesson	<p>Interview Roles</p> <p>Explain to the class that we will be visited by a guest speaker who is going to share their personal stories about their migration to New York City. To gather as much information and imagery as possible, the class will be assigned one of five roles (see worksheet with information on each role below):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Interviewers2. Character Artists3. Setting Artists4. Object Artists5. Scribes
	<p>Preparation</p> <p>Students receive their assigned roles and prepare their desks, materials, and minds for the Narrator's arrival. Interviewers should also prepare a list of questions they would like to ask the Narrator.</p>
	<p>Collaborative Interview</p> <p>The Narrator will spend the first 5-10 minutes sharing some background information and an introduction to their family, their home, and their migration.</p> <p>After the Narrator has finished their introduction, Interviewers may begin asking further questions to gather more details from their migration story. As the Narrator speaks, Artists and Scribes should be carefully listening and drawing and/or writing down details from their story. The interview process will carry on until the end of the period.</p>
	<p>Reference Board</p> <p>Next class, students will cut out their questions, sketches, and drawings to paste on a reference board for the class to use. Reference boards will serve as reminders for the class picture books, which they will work on starting next week.</p>

Multisensory Interviews and Student Roles

The following activity is a method of conducting group interviews that is intended to:

1. Engage all interviewing participants in active listening and build a notion of collective responsibility;
2. Harness the unique artistic, literary, and communicative strengths of each student; and
3. Generate a collection of reference materials for fuller, more descriptive storytelling.

This methodology was developed by teaching artist Karl Orozco and adapted for City Lore's "What We Bring" program. Although these roles were originally created to gather migration stories from interview subjects, they can be adapted to suit a variety of project goals.



Learning Application: Three Class Exercises for Writing with Artifacts

by Rossina Zamora Liu and Bonnie Stone Sunstein

II. Collaborative Artifact Exchange

(Adapted from Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*, 4th ed., 2012, Box 20.)

To investigate the story behind an object from another person's point of view, choose partners and act as both interviewer and informant. Select an interesting artifact that the partner is wearing or carrying (keychain, piece of jewelry, clothing item) or have the partner select. These background strategies echo the entire research process:

1. Observation Notes Take quiet time to inspect, describe, measure, draw, and take notes on the artifact your informant has given you. Pay attention to its form and speculate about its function. Where do you think it comes from? What is it used for?

2. Personal Notes What does it remind you of? What do you already know about things similar to it? How does it connect to your own experiences? What are your hunches about the artifact? In other words, what assumptions do you have about it? (For example, you may be taking notes on someone's ring and find yourself speculating about how much it costs and whether the owner is wealthy). It is important here to identify your assumptions and not mask them.

And then, with your partner/research participant.

3. Interview the research participant Ask questions and take notes on the story behind the artifact. What people are involved in it? Why is it important to him or her? How does the owner use it? Value it? What's its cultural background? After recording your partner's responses, read your observational notes to each other to verify or clarify the information.

After the interview, begin to analyze and write up research on the "other's" chosen artifact.

4. Theorize Think of a metaphor that describes the object. How does the artifact reflect something you know about the participant? Could you find background material about the artifact? Where would you go on the Internet? In your partner's community? Where would you look? How does the artifact relate to a larger history or culture?

5. Write In several paragraphs about the observations, the interview, and your theories, create a written account of the artifact and its relationship to your informant. Give a draft to your partner for his or her response.

6. Exchange Write a response to your interviewer's written account, detailing what was interesting and surprising. At this point, the participant can point out what the interviewer didn't notice, say, or ask that might be important to a further understanding of the artifact. You will want to exchange your responses again, the interviewer explaining what she learned from the first exchange.

7. Reflect Write about what you learned about yourself as an interviewer. What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? What assumptions or preconceptions did you find that you had which interfered with your interviewing skills? How might you change this?

III. Write a Review of Writing that Highlights an Artifact

It's fun and instructive to read others' writing about artifacts, and the writing can vary as much as the topic. But always it's about how the reader/narrator (you) engaged with what and how it "speaks" to you. For this assignment, find an essay (or a website, film, or book excerpt) that talks about an artifact and its history. Read the essay, notice the written and imaged portions, ask some questions, and take some notes. As you read, you'll want to "read as a writer"; that is, notice how the writer creates an image with description, information, and history. You might ask such questions as:

1. Does it blur boundaries, or sit squarely inside a style or genre (website, article/essay, collection, script). Why did the author choose this style to present the artifact this way?
2. What kinds of information gathering does the presentation show, and how does the writer mask it to create a smooth read? How many sources did the author need to consult? What kinds of sources? What surprises you about the way the author organizes the presentation?
3. Does it offer you any new opportunities as a reader? How does it mix words, sounds, and images? Or does it offer a full description in words alone?
4. What knowledge do you already need to have to be a reader of this presentation?
5. What's the story it tells? How does that story expand itself to a larger theme about a culture?
6. How (and what) does the writer use as a "toolkit" (focus, voice, point of view, narrative arc, rhythm and pacing, metaphor, simile, analogy)?
7. Where, and in what form, was this presentation first published? Why do you suppose the writer chose that publication method?
8. For whom is this written? Does the writer identify the audience?
9. What sentences/images really grab you? Write out a few.
10. What would you revise about how this presentation highlights an artifact and its history?
11. What made you choose this presentation to review?

Write a one- or two-page review of the essay, not necessarily a sales pitch, but perhaps a pitch for your abilities to recommend (or not) this presentation to other writers. Be funny or cynical or intellectual, snobbish or self-effacing, pushy or demure. Just review it so we know a lot about this presentation, its writer, the artifact it's meant to highlight, and its effect on your expert readership.

Liu, Rossina Zamora and Bonnie Stone Sunstein. 2016. Writing as Alchemy: Turning Objects into Stories, Stories into Objects. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 3:60-76. <https://jfepublications.org/article/writing-as-alchemy-turning-objects-into-stories-stories-into-objects>

Additional Reading

Other readings we recommend that help frame some key issues for connecting museums and archives with culturally-connected curriculum are linked below (for digital version use QR code with CCC worksheets and resources) and at <https://JFEpublications.org>

[Introduction: Intersections: Folklore and Museum Education](#)

By Paddy Bowman and Lisa Rathje

Intersections: Folklore and Museum Education highlights the significance of objects as cultural texts that can, through context and dialogue, open doors to learning that promote literacy and social studies, not to mention interpersonal skills and intergenerational learning. Another intersection relevant to current issues and the times we live in is the juncture of education, museums, and social justice.

[Riding with James: More Than a Map](#)

By Ashley Minner

This article includes Classroom Connections.

“Baltimore is totally haunted,” Ashley Minner writes. “Every absence points to a presence.” Using maps, family stories, and place-based research, Minner explores her American Indian community in Baltimore to counter erasure from the landscape and from public memory.

[The Black Diaspora Quilt History Project: A Resource for Inclusive Preservation, Research, and Teaching](#)

By Marsha MacDowell and Olivia Furman

The Black Diaspora Quilt History Project aims to preserve a body of data of this important traditional expressive art in its myriad forms and to make that data freely accessible for teaching and research.

[Expressing and Reading Identity through Photographs](#)

By Lisa Falk

Photographs, like identity, hold multiple truths and illusions. Teaching visual literacy creates nuanced readings of meaning for, and about, the photographer, the subject, and the consumer.

[A Future from the Past](#)

By David Swenson, Rebecca Engelman, and Troyd Geist

This article includes Classroom Connections

Calling upon Frances Densmore’s collection of more than 2,500 American Indian songs she recorded between 1907 and 1941, a project repatriating and reintroducing Lakota and Dakota songs to the Standing Rock Reservation is empowering individuals to reclaim their culture regardless of institutional, financial, educational, or political access or hurdles.

My object is special
because:

At home, we keep my object
here:

**Special Objects contribute to the Art of
Home.** A story about my object is:

My object name:

Write a museum label for
your object:

List specific patterns,
colors, and visual coding
that connects the story to
item: