

## Museums & Preservation

### Lesson & Activity

Instructions: Read through the definitions and concepts provided below. Use this information to conduct an assessment of an object in your home and create an exhibition label.

Age Adjustments: This activity was created for middle school aged learners.

-Have younger learners draw pictures of their objects and describe it. What does it look like? What is it made from? What story can it tell?

-Have older learners create an exhibit with a central theme using multiple objects.

-Create condition reports for all objects and a numbering system

-Map out a storage plan for the objects- what is stored together?

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What is a museum?

"A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which **acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment.**"

What is preservation?

**Preservation:** to protect a thing or a group of things from destruction and/or deterioration (wearing down over time).

What do we preserve?

Museums have **mission statements** that help determine what they will preserve based on the museum's community, goals, and values. Some museums are thematic and only collect objects related to a specific person or event, some are regional and collect local history, and others are more general. Whether broad or specific, all museums collect objects in order to tell stories.

What do we protect against? (See 10 Agents of Deterioration Reference Guide)

How do we protect our objects?

- Careful handling and gloves
- Environmental controls
- Special "archival" materials: boxes, folders, etc.
- Careful cleaning
- Pest monitoring
- Emergency Procedures: for fires, floods, etc.
- Security
- Record Keeping

### Activity: Preserve and Interpret an Object

1. Pick an object in your home. A toy, a tool, a piece of furniture, anything!
2. Carefully examine the object in good lighting with clean, dry hands.
3. Complete a Condition Report about the object with as much detail as possible
  - a. Museums have numbering systems for their objects to keep track of them- come up with a system that works for you (optional).
4. Come up with a preservation plan.
  - a. Refer to the 10 Agents of Deterioration Reference Guide- what is your object vulnerable to?
  - b. What kind of changes can we make to improve the storage environment?
    - i. Look at the vulnerable environments on the Reference Guide- what is best for your object?
5. Research:
  - a. What is the story behind this kind of object? (Ex: What did older versions look like? Who invented the original? How long have people been using them? Has their use changed over time?)
  - b. What is unique about THIS object? (Ex: Who did/does it belong to? How and when is it used? Why?)
6. Interpret:
  - a. What kind of story could be told using this object?
  - b. What kind of exhibit could it be included in? Be creative!
    - i. Write a short exhibit label for this object: tell what it is, and the story it tells.

10 Agents of Deterioration  
Reference Guide

1. **Physical Forces:** Includes damage from moving, use, etc. that physically damages the object.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: ceramics, glass, paper
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Open shelves, areas with lots of movement and gatherings of people, places with poor lighting, objects stored on the floor or otherwise unprotected.
2. **Fire:** Burning and smoke stain and permanently damage objects and can destroy them completely.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: paper, textiles, film,
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Hot/dry environments, storage near kitchens, fireplaces, or heaters, and locations without smoke detectors/ fire suppression systems.
3. **Water:** Water can make dyes and colors bleed, distort wood and paper objects, and dissolve some materials.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: paper, furniture, textiles
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Storage near kitchens, plumbing, etc. Low elevation areas prone to flooding, hurricane and tropical storm areas.
4. **Light:** Natural and artificial light can fade colors, embrittle paper, and weaken fabrics, especially Ultraviolet (UV) light.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: Paper, textiles, photographs
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Rooms with windows, excessive lighting/light too close to objects
5. **Pests:** Insects and rodents can feed on organic material components and produce waste which is damaging to objects.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: Organic materials (animal skins/leather, paper, wool, cotton, etc.), furniture, textiles
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Environments with food, dirty/dusty places (dust can be food for insects), outdoor exhibits
6. **Incorrect Temperature:** Environments that are too hot increase the rate of chemical reactions and deterioration. Too hot or cold environments also effect the humidity (see #7).
  - a. Vulnerable objects: Organic materials, photographs
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Environments without temperature/climate control such as attics, barns, etc.
7. **Incorrect Relative Humidity:** Humidity, like water, can distort wood and paper objects and bleed colors. Incorrect RH can also promote mold growth and rust.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: Organic materials, furniture, textiles, paper, metals

- b. Vulnerable environments: Environments without temperature/climate control such as attics, barns, etc.
- 8. **Pollutants:** Includes those in the environment (smog, dust, etc.) and compounds that are emitted by other objects (certain plastics and materials **off-gas** chemicals as they age/deteriorate)
  - a. Vulnerable objects: paper, furniture, textiles
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Dirty/dusty environments, overcrowded storage areas, outdoor exhibitions, improper storage materials (not “archival”)
- 9. **Thieves & Vandals:** People can steal and damage art and historic objects.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: All object types
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Unsecured buildings, outdoor exhibitions/sculpture gardens/monuments
- 10. **Disassociation:** Losing documentation of an object or losing an object or information about an object due to improper record keeping. Physically the object is not damaged, but it cannot be used or properly cared for without documentation.
  - a. Vulnerable objects: All object types
  - b. Vulnerable environments: Disorganized storage rooms and poor record keeping.

Condition Report

**Accession/Identification Number:**

**Object Name:**

**Date:**

**Dimensions:**

**Basic Description:**

**Overall Condition:**

☐ Excellent

☐ Good

☐ Fair

☐ Poor

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**Materials:** (check all that apply, specify type if known)

☐ Metal:

☐ Plastic:

☐ Textile:

☐ Other:

☐ Paper:

☐ Wood:

☐ Stone:

☐ Glass:

☐ Ceramic:

☐ Rubber:

**Decoration/Finish:** (check all that apply, specify type if known)

☐ Stain:

☐ Enamel:

☐ Glaze:

☐ Other:

☐ Pencil/Graphite:

☐ Plating:

☐ Paint:

☐ Pen/Marker:

☐ Gilding:

**Condition:****Physical/Structural Damage**

<input type="checkbox"/> Minor	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant	<input type="checkbox"/> Extreme
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- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Missing Part     | <input type="checkbox"/> Buckling/Warping | <input type="checkbox"/> Dent            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hole             | <input type="checkbox"/> Tears/Folds      | <input type="checkbox"/> Pest Damage     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mold/Mildew      | <input type="checkbox"/> Cracks/Chips     | <input type="checkbox"/> Embrittlement   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corrosion (Rust) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water Damage     | <input type="checkbox"/> Previous Repair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:           |   |  |

**Surface Damage**

<input type="checkbox"/> Minor	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant	<input type="checkbox"/> Extreme
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- |  |                                  |   |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abrasion        | <input type="checkbox"/> Dust    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fading/Discoloring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stain/Foxing    | <input type="checkbox"/> Flaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Bleeding           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Previous Repair | <input type="checkbox"/> Worn    |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other:          |                                  |   |

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**Treatment Priority:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Low	<input type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> High
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**Handling, Storage, and Display Notes/Concerns:****Preservation Plan:**