

# Museum Exhibit Design: Group Activity

This is a **comprehensive, polished, classroom-ready group activity** for **Museum Exhibit Design**, perfect for ANY historical, cultural, or literary topic—biographies, wars, revolutions, cultural movements, social reforms, Indigenous histories, eras, or even novels. This is built to mirror how real museums design exhibits:

research → curation → artifact selection → label writing → spatial design → public presentation.

**Students create an immersive museum exhibit with panels, artifacts, labels, and a unifying theme.**

This multi-step project develops historical thinking, design literacy, collaboration, creative synthesis, and interpretive writing.

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## I. Activity Purpose

Students learn how museums:

- Curate stories and themes
- Select evidence and artifacts
- Write labels and interpretive text
- Organize narrative flow
- Represent multiple voices and perspectives
- Consider audience experience
- Balance accuracy with accessibility

This transforms research into a tangible, engaging public-facing product.

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## II. Group Setup

**Group Size:** 4–6 students\*\*

**Roles (rotating optional):**

1. **Lead Curator** – manages theme + storyline, makes final decisions
2. **Historian/Researcher** – gathers facts, sources, quotes
3. **Artifact Specialist** – designs/chooses artifacts + replicas
4. **Text & Labels Writer** – writes titles, exhibit text, captions
5. **Exhibit Designer** – handles layout, visuals, color, spatial choices

6. **Docent/Presenter** – prepares the public tour

Groups can double-up roles or trade mid-way.

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### **III. Materials Needed**

- Poster boards, butcher paper, or trifold display boards
  - Printed images, replica artifacts, or handmade creations
  - Construction materials (clay, cardboard, fabric, 3D prints)
  - Markers, paint, stencils
  - Templates:
    - Exhibit panel layout
    - Artifact label writing guide
    - “Visitor flow” floor map sketch
    - Primary source captions
  - Optional digital tools: Canva, Google Slides, Adobe Express
  - Rubrics and reflection sheets
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### **IV. Exhibit Types Students Can Create**

Choose ANY of these humanities-based topics:

#### **Biographies**

- Harriet Tubman
- Genghis Khan
- Marie Curie
- Frederick Douglass
- Frida Kahlo

#### **Wars & Revolutions**

- American Revolution
- French Revolution
- Haitian Revolution
- WWI or WWII Home Front
- Vietnam War Protest Movement

#### **Cultural Movements**

- Harlem Renaissance
- Renaissance Humanism
- Romanticism
- Chicano Movement
- Polynesian Navigation Traditions

### **Social Reforms**

- Women's suffrage
- Civil Rights Movement
- Labor movements
- Environmental movement
- Abolitionism

### **Flexible Options:**

Ancient empires • Indigenous nations • Immigration histories • Scientific milestones • Literary movements.

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## **V. Step-by-Step Process (70–120 Minutes or Multi-Day)**

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### **Step 1 — Select Exhibit Focus & Theme (10 minutes)**

Groups choose a topic AND a theme that unifies the whole exhibit.

#### **Examples of themes:**

- “Voices of Resistance”
- “Innovation in Times of Crisis”
- “Power, Identity, and Culture”
- “Journeys and Migrations”
- “From Oppression to Opportunity”

Curator leads this step; Record theme in Exhibit Proposal Sheet.

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### **Step 2 — Research and Evidence Gathering (15–20 minutes)**

Students collect:

- Key events
- People
- Places
- Primary sources
- Artifacts
- Quotes
- Images
- Maps
- Cultural items

Historian organizes notes; Artifact Specialist identifies what objects represent the story best.

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### **Step 3 — Exhibit Structure Planning (10–15 minutes)**

Groups choose **3–5 sections** for their exhibit.

**Example exhibit sections:**

- Origins / Background
- Crisis / Turning Point
- Innovation / Change
- Voices from the Movement
- Global Impact
- Legacy & Memory

They map visitor flow:

- What does a visitor see first?
- Where will the most important object go?
- How does the story progress spatially?

Exhibit Designer drafts a floor plan on the “Visitor Flow Map.”

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### **Step 4 — Panel Writing (15 minutes)**

Panels include:

- **Large Heading** (“The Road to Revolution”)
- **Interpretive Text (100–200 words)**

- **Primary source excerpts**
- **Images or diagrams**
- **Color theme + layout**

The Text Writer leads, but decisions are group-based.

### **Panel Writing Questions:**

- What big idea does this panel explain?
  - How does this relate to our theme?
  - What evidence must visitors know?
  - What emotion or understanding should they walk away with?
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## **Step 5 — Artifact Creation or Selection (15–25 minutes)**

Artifacts may be:

- Replicas made from clay, cardboard, or craft materials
- Primary source reproductions
- 3D printed objects
- Paper “artifacts” (tickets, propaganda, diary entries)
- Clothing, tools, symbols
- Maps or charts
- Digital objects or images

Artifact Specialist creates/builds or selects these items.

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## **Step 6 — Artifact Label Writing (10 minutes)**

Students write **museum-style labels** using a template:

### **Artifact Label Template**

**Title**

**Date (real or approximate)**

**Origin**

**Material / Description**

**Interpretive Text (40–60 words):**

- What is it?
- Who used it?

- Why is it important?
- What story does it tell?

**Connections:**

- Link back to the exhibit theme
- Connect to the related panel story

Labels should be concise, evidence-based, and accessible.

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## **Step 7 — Assemble the Exhibit (15–20 minutes)**

Students construct the display:

- Panels arranged in order
- Artifacts placed strategically
- Clear labeling
- Thematic design elements (colors, borders, motifs)
- Inclusion of sound, QR codes, or interactive features (optional)

The exhibit should look like a museum gallery, not a poster collage.

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## **Step 8 — Docent Tours (10–20 minutes)**

Groups rotate and present their exhibit as docents.

Tours must include:

- Theme overview
- Section-by-section explanation
- Artifact stories
- Visitor questions
- Insight into choices and curation decisions

This builds speaking and interpretation skills.

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## **Step 9 — Reflection (5 minutes)**

Students reflect on:

- How do museums shape the story we remember?
  - What perspectives were missing or silenced, and how did we address them?
  - What was the hardest decision your group made?
  - How did this project change your understanding of the topic?
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## **VI. Optional Extensions**

### **1. Curatorial Ethics Debate**

Should museums return artifacts?  
Who has the right to interpret history?  
How do museums avoid stereotypes?

### **2. “Living Museum” Event**

Students dress as historical figures or docents and respond to audience questions.

### **3. QR Code Audio Guide**

Students record short audio explanations linked to their exhibit.

### **4. Design Competition**

Judges (teachers, community members) award categories:  
Best Design • Best Theme • Most Accurate • Most Creative • Best Artifact

### **5. Virtual Museum**

Students build exhibits in:  
Google Slides • Canva • Artsteps • ThingLink • Wakelet • ArcGIS StoryMaps

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## **VII. Assessment Options**

### **A. Exhibit Rubric**

- Clear theme
- Historical accuracy
- Logical layout
- Quality of research

- Cohesiveness between panels & artifacts
- Interpretive writing clarity
- Creativity & visual design
- Collaboration

## **B. Docent Presentation Rubric**

- Clarity
- Engagement
- Accurate explanation
- Ability to answer questions
- References to evidence

## **C. Reflection Rubric**

- Depth of thinking
- Connections to real museums + public history
- Understanding of perspectives

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# **VIII. Ready-to-Use Exhibit Themes**

- *“Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times”*
- *“Revolutions That Changed the World”*
- *“Journeys: Migration, Displacement, Home”*
- *“Art & Resistance: Creativity in Times of Crisis”*
- *“Voices of Change: Leaders & Movements”*
- *“Empires, Borders, and Identity”*
- *“Childhood Through the Ages”*