



**how does a museum work?
educator resource guide**

Introduction

How Does a Museum Work? is a video that introduces roles of various museum professionals. Detailed activities posted with the video are designed to address challenging Arizona Visual Arts standards.

AUDIENCES

The *How Does a Museum Work?* video is appropriate for grades 4 – 12 and adults.

TWO SETS OF ACTIVITIES

The first set of activity ideas is designed to be used in conjunction with viewing the video prior to visiting a museum, followed by discussion of evidence of museum professionals' work visible within an exhibition.

The second set of activities is designed to follow a museum visit and engage participants in performing the skills of museum professionals to create their own exhibition of either readily available images or objects or participants' own artworks.

ARIZONA AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

Both sets of activities relate the curating, presentation, education, and other museum professional roles to Arizona and National Visual Arts anchor standards. Below museum roles are color coded by the four art processes upon which those standards are based: [Creating](#), [Presenting](#), [Responding](#), and [Connecting](#).

CURATION

[Presenting #4: Analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation](#)

[Presenting #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work](#)

[Responding #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work](#)

[Responding #8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work](#)

[Responding #9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work](#)

PRESENTATION

[Presenting #5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation](#)

EDUCATION

[Responding #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work](#)

[Responding #8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work](#)

[Connecting #11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding](#)

OTHER MUSEUM ROLES

Many people work together to make an exhibition possible. The museum director is responsible for administering all the activities of a museum, which includes insuring that the museum has sufficient funds, for example, by building a network of donors and writing or encouraging others to write grant applications. Friendly security officers keep a watchful eye on visitors who may pose a threat to the condition of the artworks on display in an exhibition and can also direct visitors to various locations in the museum. The person collecting payment for admission is often the first to welcome visitors and can also help visitors find merchandise in the museum store.



Pre-Visit Video Activity

Plan to use the video to introduce your participants to the roles of museum professionals prior to visiting a museum. Follow along with the “Sequence of Museum Professionals in Video with Vocabulary” as you preview the video.

Choose an exhibition that participants can visit and where they can look for evidence of museum professionals’ work.

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will be able to explain what curators do.
 - Co-curators of an exhibition (1:10–3:42)
 - Curatorial coordinator/assistant (10:00–10:23)
2. Participants will be able to describe techniques for presenting artworks.
 - Exhibition manager (3:42–5:44)
 - Preparator (5:44–6:08)
 - Graphic designer (9:24–10:00)
3. Participants will be able to identify ways museum educators can engage visitors with an exhibition.
 - Museum educator (8:12–9:24)
4. Participants will be able to describe how museum directors, registrars, public safety officers, and retail staff make exhibitions possible and contribute to visitors’ experience.
 - Director (10:23–12:25)
 - Registrar (6:08–7:42)
 - Public safety officer (7:42–8:12)
 - Assistant manager of retail services (0:34–1:10)

SHOWING VIDEO

Begin by previewing the entire, *How Does a Museum Work?*, which showcases some of the many people who worked with the *Wild Thing: Adventures with the Permanent Collection* exhibition at Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA). Select a viewing sequence appropriate for your viewers:

- Entire video
- Selected segments only
- Introduction with entire video followed by selected segments
- Introduction to selected segments followed by review with entire video

VIEWING OPTIONS

- Show all or selected segments of *How Does a Museum Work?* video in your classroom (or other convenient location) before a museum field trip.

- Ask participants to view the video on their own before meeting at an exhibition, perhaps asking them to pay particular attention to selected segments.
- Ask participants, as individuals or as a group, to view the video before visiting a museum. Then ask participants to look for evidence of the work of museum professional in an exhibition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING VIDEO

1. CURATION: What do curators do?
 - Curators get ideas or themes for exhibitions.
 - How long did the SMOCA co-curators plan the *Wild Thing* exhibition?
 - What artworks gave them their idea for *Wild Thing*?
 - Curators organize exhibitions around a theme.
 - Why did the SMOCA co-curators think the theme (“Contemporary artists are interested in animals and people’s relationships with animals”) was important?
 - How did they organize the exhibition in parts?
 - How do curatorial coordinators/assistants help curators?
2. PRESENTATION: What tools and processes do collection managers, preparators, and graphic designers use to present artworks in an exhibition?
 - Exhibition managers are responsible for handling the artwork and preparing it to be installed in a gallery.
 - What are some of the tools and processes the SMOCA exhibition manager used?
 - Preparators carry out some of the processes of moving and installing artworks.
 - What process was the SMOCA preparator doing?
 - Graphic designers work with curators and artists to design the “look” of exhibitions.
 - What were some of the decisions the SMOCA graphic designer made?
3. EDUCATION: What activities do museum educators plan so visitors can engage with and learn from an exhibition?
 - Museum educators are responsible for engaging visitors in learning in an exhibition.
 - What programs does the SMOCA museum educator provide? What activity did she develop specifically for the *Wild Thing* exhibition?
4. OTHER MUSEUM ROLES: What do directors, registrars, public safety officers, and others do in museums?

- The museum director is responsible for fulfilling the mission of the museum through all the museum's departments.
 - What are some the activities the director of SMOCA oversees?
- Registrars keep track of all the artworks in the museum.
 - What happened to a sculpture that the SMOCA registrar has documented?
- Public safety officers monitor exhibitions to keep both visitors and artworks safe.
 - What important rule did the SMOCA public safety office confirm?

Now, visit a museum of your choice!

Post-Visit Exhibition Activity

After introducing participants to the roles of museum professionals and then visiting a museum to find evidence of museum professionals' work in an exhibition, follow up by giving your participants an opportunity to perform the skills of museum professionals themselves.

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will be able to curate an exhibition.
2. Participants will be able to use techniques for presenting artworks (or other objects or images).
3. Participants will be able to plan ways to engage viewers with an exhibition.
4. Participants will be able to collaborate to make an exhibition happen.

TYPES OF EXHIBITIONS

The number of sessions will vary depending on the type of exhibition your participants create. For example, 1) participants can create an exhibit of any category of readily available objects or images—for example, socks, toys, something from the junk drawer, old family photos, etc.—or 2) participants can create an exhibit of art they make themselves.

In the first session, begin with the whole group acting as a curatorial team, discussing possible exhibition themes and brainstorming either 1) type of images or objects to exhibit or 2) type of artworks to make. Themes can be developed by reflecting on function; style; culture; broad issues like sustainability, social justice, and innovation; or other big ideas.

If participants will be exhibiting objects or images, ask them to bring to the next session at least one object or image from the category they selected in the first session. If participants are making their own art, you may wish to restrict choices of media.

Assign participants to the following departments:

1. Curators
2. Presenters
3. Educators
4. Other museum professionals

If exhibiting everyday objects or images, ask each department to identify one or more of its members to take cell phone photos of each of the assembled objects or images to use as references while they work.

If exhibiting participants' own work, plan time for 1) generating art ideas based on the theme selected by the class as a whole, 2) developing those ideas, 3) in-process feedback and collaboration, and 4) completing the final artwork.

Provide each department with its assigned departmental challenge below:

1. CURATION DEPARTMENT: Imagine that you are curating an exhibition.
 - How will you begin to curate your exhibition?
 - The SMOCA co-curators' theme was about animals and how people relate to animals. How can you refine the theme the whole group selected in the first session?
 - SMOCA's permanent collection of artworks inspired the co-curators. If you are working with everyday objects or images, how do your fellow participants' selections reinforce, extend, or transform your theme? If you are working with your fellow participants' in-progress or completed artworks, how do those artworks reinforce, extend, or transform your theme?
 - How will you organize the objects/images or artworks around your theme?
 - The SMOCA co-curators' exhibition shows how contemporary artists continue an ancient theme in art history (an interest in animals and nature).
 - The SMOCA co-curators divided the two-dimensional works into two groups (animals and animals in relation to people) on two facing walls (artworks arranged on top of each other rather than in a row at one level) with three-dimensional artworks in between. How can you organize the objects or images participants selected or your fellow participants' completed artworks? (Similar objects/images or artworks together? In a sequence that tells a story? Other?)
 - With whom might you collaborate?
2. PRESENTATION DEPARTMENT: Imagine it is your responsibility to present objects/images or artworks in an exhibition:
 - How would you prepare and install objects/images or artworks?
 - The SMOCA exhibition manager handled artworks with white cotton gloves, attached D-rings to the back of a picture frame, measured exactly where to locate screws on the wall, and used a level to make sure the artwork hung exactly right. How can you prepare and install your participants' objects/images or artworks to present them at their best? What tools and materials will you use? D-hooks? Velcro? Screws or hammers and nails? Duct tape? Foam core board? Corrugated cardboard? Matboard? X-acto knife? Blocks for pedestals? Other?

- The SMOCA graphic designer worked with the co-curators to select colors, design text labels, and the font for the entrance title wall of the exhibition. What wall color will complement your objects/images or artworks? What information will you include on labels for each work? What font will complement the theme of your exhibition?
 - With whom might you collaborate?
3. EDUCATION DEPARTMENT: Imagine you are responsible for education in your exhibition.
- What activity might you plan to engage visitors with the objects/images or artworks?
 - SMOCA's museum educator trained docents and tour guides, planned programs for students and families, and designed an activity sheet for locating images of birds for the *Wild Thing* exhibition. How could you help visitors learn in your exhibition? (Scavenger Hunt? List of discussion questions? Follow-up art-making activity? Other?)
 - Who might you collaborate with?
4. OTHER ROLES AND DEPARTMENTS: Imagine you need support to make your exhibition happen and keep the objects/images or artworks safe.
- Who might you approach to support your exhibition?
 - The director of SMOCA supports the museum's exhibitions and programs through marketing, promotion, and raising money through memberships, grants, and donors. Who could you approach to find a place or to provide supplies for your exhibition? (Teacher? Administrator? Parents? Others?)
 - How can you keep the objects/images or artworks in the exhibition safe?
 - The SMOCA registrar keeps records of all the artwork in museum. How can you keep track of objects/images or artworks in your exhibition? Artist's name? Date? Culture? Materials? Condition? Other?
 - The SMOCA public safety officers are in galleries to ensure the safety of artworks and visitors. What can you do to protect the objects/images or artworks in your exhibition? (Install in locked display case? Install in monitored location, such as classroom, media center, etc.? Post "Do not touch" signs by fragile objects or images? Other?)

How Does a Museum Work?
**Sequence of Museum Professionals in Video
 with Vocabulary**

MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL	VIDEO COUNTER	VOCABULARY
Narrator	0:00–0:34	exhibition
Assistant Manager of Retail Services	0:34–1:10	patron
Co-Curators of an Exhibition	1:10–3:42	exhibitions manager, registrar, permanent collection, imagery, contemporary art, continuity, theme
Exhibition Manager	3:42–5:44	gallery, install, salon wall, frame, D-rings, level, balance, content
Preparator	5:44–6:08	preparator
Registrar	6:08–7:42	conservation, condition report
Public Safety Officer	7:42–8:12	public safety officer
Museum Educator	8:12–9:24	museum educator, docent, gallery activity, program, intrinsic
Graphic Designer	9:24–10:00	label, graphic designer, curator, artist, font treatment, title wall
Curatorial Coordinator/Assistant	10:00–10:23	curatorial assistant
Museum Director	10:23–12:25	museum director, mission, marketing department, development department, donor