



## A Cabinet of Curiosities - The Making of an Exhibition

Suggested Grades: 9-12

*At the time of Confederation public museums were a relatively new thing but individuals and private organizations had collected objects in their homes and halls. Collecting all sorts of interesting and curious things was a favourite activity in Queen Victoria's time, and these were kept in special display cases call 'Cabinets of Curiosities'. To curate an exhibition means to select, research and put together a group of objects that have a relation to each other and [tell a story](#).*

- 1) Work individually or in groups of 3-5 'curators'
- 2) Choose a theme
- 3) Choose 10-15 related artifacts from [NovaMuse.ca](http://NovaMuse.ca)
- 4) Follow the instructions below & have fun creating your own cabinet of curiosities!

### Project Instructions

**1. Take a look at your 'cabinet of curiosities' images and the collection records that are with the images on NovaMuse.ca Think about:**

- what the objects might have in common
- what story these objects might tell or what issue they could explore as a group
- what objects might not fit at all
- what objects you might need to add to your own trove

The key to a successful exhibition is having a **clear and focussed theme**, thesis or storyline that gives the objects reason to being shown together

- it can be as straightforward as an exhibition of recent works by a particular artist or objects used for farming in a particular area
- A more complex exhibition will look at the work of a number of artists of a particular period or working on related subjects or in related styles, or it may be about the agriculture industry in a particular region
- Often exhibitions will generate from an idea, a social or cultural issue or an aesthetic question

Now establish your theme and describe your exhibition – Don't forget to name it!

**2. Make your list of objects for the exhibition**

You have objects from your collection to use, but you can also borrow objects from other people in this class!

**3. Now the fun part – think about how you are going to arrange your exhibition.** An object does not exist in isolation in an exhibition. It relates to those works around it as well as to the room itself (its colour, shape, etc). Think about the most powerful way to organize the objects so that they both tell

the story and tell their own story. How is an object going to relate to its neighbours? The best way to do this is to start drawing your exhibition plan – make a floorplan or a linear drawing of the wall. When many curators design exhibition installations they make small cutouts or print small copies of the images of the objects to arrange and move around. Sometimes they will also make a 3D model of the gallery space in which to organize the images. (it's a lot like playing with a dollhouse as a child!) For your final project submission you will need to present your exhibition with your images arranged as you would in a museum.

If your class has a cyber café or similar place for sharing and posting projects and assignments, post your draft exhibition to the cyber café for feedback from your class mates. (Whenever you are developing an exhibition it is a good idea to get feedback from others along the way – it helps you refine your idea and know whether you are conveying the message you had hoped.)

**4. The final stage of planning an exhibition is writing the materials that will help museum visitors learn about the story and objects and understand why you have put them together.** This is done through your choice of title, large 'text panels,' and 'object labels'. The text panel is at the beginning of the exhibition and gives the theme of the exhibition, introduces the story and gives context for the exhibition (such as the time period, the location, what was going on at the same time, who key people were, etc.) A great deal of research has been done about what the most effective labels are and what people will take the time to read, or have the attention span to absorb. These studies look at the length (word count) of various types of labels, the best type face and colour for the text so that it is readable and the reading level that is most appropriate (you can test reading level in the review section of an MS Word document).

For this part of the project:

- 1. Decide on a title for your exhibition** – something that will interest potential visitors. Titles should be no more than five words. There can also be a sub-title that gives more information.
- 2. Write the introduction text panel.** The text should be no more than 250-300 words, and no paragraph should be more than 50 -60 words. The text has to be formatted so that it is easy and fast to read so you don't want to have a big, solid block of text or long sentences.
- 3. Write labels for the objects that identify them and discuss their relation to the theme.** The labels can include interesting or curious characteristics, stories or anecdotes related to the object. You can also ask questions on a label – something that will make the reader think about the topic or object. These labels should not be more than 90 words generally.



*Interpretation Paneling  
Army Museum, Halifax*

Now – put it all together for presentation on-line, on paper or as a model.