



# Curating a school museum

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Teachers' handbook

Produced as part of the Mobile Museum project to facilitate schools in object-based learning, museum curation, and understanding the importance of plants and fungi.

The Mobile Museum is a collaborative project between the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and Royal Holloway, University of London; supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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**Mobile Museum**  
Economic botany in circulation

Royal Botanic Gardens  
**Kew**



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# Introduction

This handbook offers guidance and inspiration to teachers for the development of a school museum, usually as a temporary exhibit. A museum can be as simple as a set of objects displayed on a table-top, or it can be more elaborate. The most important thing to bear in mind is how these objects and the development of the museum itself can be used to enliven and enrich the learning experience for pupils both inside and outside the classroom.

# The school museum learning experience

The idea of a school museum might seem novel, but the use of objects for learning and display was a familiar feature of the Victorian classroom.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, played an interesting role in the history of school museums. From the mid-nineteenth century the concept of “economic botany” - that is, the study of useful plants - gained popularity. The world’s first Museum of Economic Botany, designed to showcase economically important and curious plant-based objects, was opened at Kew in 1847. With its vast collection of artefacts, schools called upon Kew to send them resources for object-based lessons and for their own museums.

Today, one objective of Kew’s Mobile Museum project is to re-enliven the idea of learning from plant-based objects and the creation of school museums. Through this initiative, Kew Learning is working with two London-based primary schools to develop their own museums, with the aim of meeting cross-curricular objectives and facilitating engagement with parents / carers and the wider community.



This handbook is designed to assist teachers from our two partner schools, and others considering the idea, to establish their own school museums or simply to experiment with object-based learning in the classroom.

Given the nature of the Mobile Museum project, this handbook focuses on plant-based objects. However - depending on the individual needs of each school/ classroom - zoological and mineralogical objects can be just as relevant for learning and museum displays. Think of this handbook not as a manual but as an aid to inspire your own interpretation of the twenty-first century school museum.

# **A history of object lessons and school museums in Britain**

The popularisation of the school museum was part and parcel of the rise of object-based teaching in late nineteenth century Britain. At this time, the term 'object lessons' described a mode of teaching which used the child's senses as part of an experience-led approach to learning.

9/29  
 ROYAL GARDENS  
 21 SEP. 94  
 K.E.W.  
 St. Peters School  
 Middleton  
 Manchester  
 343 20/9/94  
 The Principal would feel  
 very grateful if you  
 could oblige her by sending  
 Botanic specimens for illu-  
 stration in our schools -  
 Very sincerely Yours  
 J. M. Placid P. Teacher

11A College Avenue  
 Hackney  
 London.  
 24-3  
 ROYAL GARDENS  
 25 MAR. 94  
 K.E.W.  
 Dear Sir.  
 Would you kindly  
 oblige with a few  
 Botanic specimens  
 for a school museum  
 I remain  
 Yours  
 About 45  
 specimens  
 Miscellaneous  
 duplicates  
 3/4/94  
 W.G.  
 J.H.

ROYAL GARDENS  
 12 JAN. 1904  
 K.E.W.  
 St. Paul's Schools  
 Seacombe,  
 Liverpool.  
 Dear Sir, (468) answer Jan 13/1904  
 Would you be  
 good enough to send me  
 stated in "The Garden"  
 parcel of fibres seeds,  
 for future study  
 Thanking you  
 for participation,  
 Yours faithfully,  
 W. Hughes,  
 Head Teacher.  
 misc. dup. sent Feb. 10/04

answered  
 21/9/94  
 (239) 40 miscellaneous dup.  
 10 5.00 sent  
 The Mistress of St. Herbert's  
 School, Union Hall, Chester.  
 be much obliged if the Curator  
 will send her a few specimens  
 of seeds fibres etc. for the  
 School Museum.  
 20.9.94

# The rise of the school museum

School museums have a long and dynamic history. Their popularisation can be traced back to the mid-1890s when the British government began to promote the use of museums in elementary schools, as part of their drive to introduce object lessons into the curriculum.

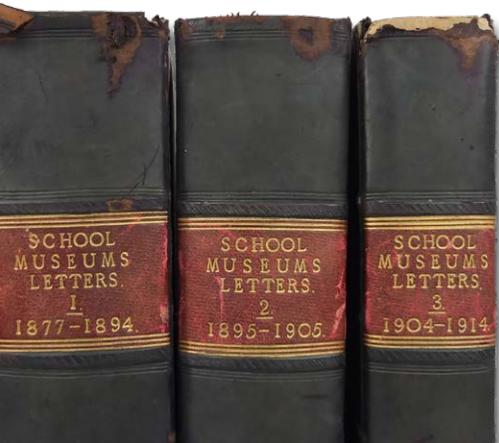
There were both ideological and practical motivations to this. It was in part a reflection of enthusiasm about the teaching power of museums more generally, at a time when free museums were opening across the country. Yet school museums were also a very practical kind of storage and display solution for teachers.

School museums were usually housed in glass-fronted cupboards. Some were organised by the type of collection (e.g. mineralogical, botanical, zoological), while others experimented with different display approaches.

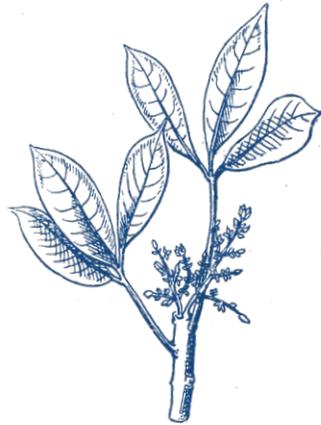
Plants were a popular type of museum specimen because in their raw, processed, and manufactured states they could be used to achieve diverse curricular goals. At a time when education budgets were very limited these kinds of adaptable materials were very important for the cash-strapped and space-limited classroom.

In theory, object lessons were supposed to be guided by the sensory impressions of pupils, and to start with the familiar or local characteristics of an object before tying it to the outside world. A lesson on tea, for example, would discuss family breakfast routines before moving on to more complex principles surrounding plant cultivation or the trading routes of the British Empire.

To achieve these ends, many teachers used lesson plans published in the educational press. If they did not have the necessary objects, they might use pictures instead. Many enhanced the visual impact of their museums by using posters and toys. Sometimes these museums were the initiative of the local school board, but often teachers started collections themselves.



There are occasionally mentions of pupils acting as curators, but it seems that the general tendency was for teachers themselves to organise the museum. However, pupils seem to have been very enthusiastic collectors, and there are numerous cases of their families and communities also getting involved with helping them to collect objects.

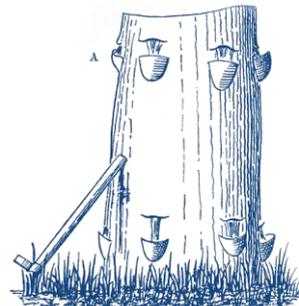


*India-rubber Plant.*

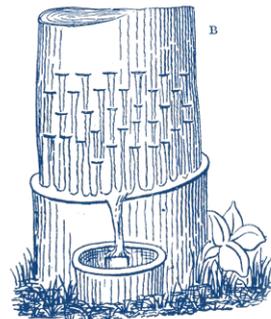
### Teachers sourced their museum objects in the following ways

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1. From their own collections.
2. From other teachers
3. From pupils
4. Pupil families
5. The community at large
6. From companies  
(e.g. mustard seeds from Colmans)
7. Museums and art galleries  
(permanent donations or loans)
8. Buying ready made collections from educational suppliers



*Method of Collecting the Sap. Copied by permission from Second Report of the Industrial Arts.*



*Another way of collecting the Sap. from Spens' Encyclopedia.*

*Illustrations: Processing rubber*

*Source: Common Things and Elementary Science in the Form of Object Lessons. Joseph Hassell (1883).*

# School museums in the age of empire

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## Table-top displays for 'Empire Day' at Gloucester Road School, Peckham (c. 1909-1914)

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In the colonial era, displays of plants and their products were presented uncritically as resources of empire. Today plants can provide a way of engaging with contemporary issues in multicultural Britain, including ethical and environmental challenges such as fair trade and climate change.

*Images sourced from: Archives of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew*



India



West Indies



Canada



South Africa

# Understanding the importance of plants and fungi

We all depend on plants and fungi for food, medicine, clothing, shelter and - quite literally - for the air that we breathe. Take a closer look and you'll see that so many objects used in our daily lives are made from plants or fungi; from tea to penicillin, shampoo to popcorn. Furthermore, many species - such as the lotus flower, baobab tree or henna plant - are culturally significant.

However, this wealth of diversity is threatened by climate change, habitat loss and over-harvesting. By improving our understanding and appreciation of plants and fungi, we can learn how to protect them and use them more sustainably.

# What's in a name?

Taxonomy is the practice of classifying, naming and grouping living organisms; based on their similarities and differences. Plants, fungi and animals each belong to a separate kingdom, within which there are further divisions, including 'family', 'genus' and 'species'.

Each species is assigned a two-part scientific name. The first is its genus (the first letter is always capitalised) and the second is its species (lowercase). Here is an example:

**Common name:** Carrot

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**Kingdom:** Plantae  
**Family:** Apiaceae  
**Genus:** *Daucus*  
**Species:** *Daucus carota*

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This two-part naming system is often attributed to the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus who standardised it in the eighteenth century. However, it is now recognised that Greek, Arabic and other scientists were experimenting with similar classification systems in earlier centuries.

Scientific names are internationally recognised, allowing us to universally classify plants and fungi according to their characteristics. However, local non-scientific names are also extremely important for describing plant and fungal life, and are an indicator of local ecological knowledge and cultural diversity.



*A page on the wild carrot, from the Juliana Anicia Codex; a Greek Byzantine manuscript dating from 500AD which describes over 400 species of animals and plants and was later elaborated on in Arabic.*

*Image source: Wikimedia Commons*

# Why are plants and fungi important?

## Plant power

Around 400,000 plant species are currently known to exist, but scientists are still discovering hundreds of new species each year. Here is a summary of the staggering range of ways in which plants sustain and invigorate our livelihoods ...

### 1 Food

Plants supply food to nearly all living things, including us humans. Crop plants such as wheat, maize, bananas and beans make up a huge portion of our diet, and in many cultures wild plants such as leafy greens and berries are also an important vitamin source. Even the animals we eat are fed on plants.

### 2 Medicine

At least 28,187 species of plants have been recorded as having a medicinal use. Across the world plants have been used for the prevention of illness and in traditional herbal healing for centuries. Plant extracts are also used in modern Western medicine, for skin treatments, painkillers, cancer-fighting drugs and more.



*Images: Top - Musical instrument made of teak and bamboo, from Myanmar (Economic Botany Collection, Kew)*

*Middle - Andean tuber crops (Gendall)*

*Bottom - Fungi (Kew)*

### 3 Materials

Fibres, dyes, woods, oils, resins and other materials can be extracted from plants to be used in construction, clothing, machinery, furniture, handicrafts such as basket-making, and much more.

### 4 Culture

Plants used in certain traditional dishes, religious ceremonies and local crafts (such as basket making and musical instruments) can have strong cultural meaning. Plant species which are typical of certain geographic regions often become identified with the cultures of the people who live there.

### 5 Environment

Plants provide essential ecosystem services. They oxygenate the air we breathe, recycle water and nutrients, provide habitats for animals and support the wealth of biodiversity needed to sustain life.

### 6 Wellbeing

Being surrounded by plants, both outdoors and indoors, can improve wellbeing by reducing stress and boosting mood levels.

## Forgotten fungi

Fungi are essential to life on Earth. However - often hidden in the soil or inside the bodies of plants and animals - they rarely get the attention they deserve. Many are so tiny they can't be seen with the naked eye.

Scientists estimate that there could be up to 3.8 million fungal species. However, so far they have only named 144,000 of them.

Surprisingly, fungi are more closely related to humans than they are to plants!

Fungi are found in many foods and can be very nutritious. They also provide lifesaving medicines and biotechnology (there is even a fungus that can digest plastic!). But beware, some are poisonous and deadly.

Fungi are vital to keeping other plants alive. 90% of plant species depend on fungi to access essential nutrients through their roots.

The world's largest organism is not a blue whale, it's a fungus! Nicknamed 'Humongous Fungus', it covers 2,385 acres of Malheur National Forest, Oregon.

## FLOWERS

**Definition** Reproductive parts (pre-fertilisation)

**AKA** Inflorescence (multiple flowers together)

**Parts** Petals, stamen, stigma

**Uses** Decorative, food/flavouring, essential oils

**E.g.** Roses, broccoli, saffron (stamen)

## STEMS

**Definition** Supportive structure

**AKA** Trunk, branch, rhizome

**Parts** Wood, bark, pith

**Uses** Timber, fibre, fuel, crafts, musical instruments

**E.g.** Pine, rattan, bamboo, sugar cane, ginger (underground stem), asparagus.

# PLANTS PARTS

## FRUITS (+ SEEDS)

**Definition** Reproductive parts (post-fertilisation of the flower), essential for dispersal and proliferation.

**AKA** Vegetable, nut, pod, berry

**Parts** Seeds, flesh

**Uses** Food, oil, dye, fibre, containers, jewellery

**E.g.** Tomato, marrow, peanut, vanilla, cashew, banana, coconut (flesh + fibre), cotton

## LEAVES

**Definition** Organs attached to stem, for photosynthesis and transpiration.

**AKA** Foliage, fronds

**Uses** Food/flavouring, medicine, fibre, weaving, handicrafts, essential oils

**E.g.** Cabbage, mint, aloe vera, palm fronds.

## ROOTS

**Definition** Supporting / attaching structures that uptake water and nutrients

**AKA** Tuber

**Uses** Food, flavouring, medicines, erosion control

**E.g.** Carrots, potato, licorice, ginseng

## SAP

**Definition** Fluid flowing inside plant structures

**AKA** Resin, milk, latex, gum

**Uses** Food, medicine, insulation, adhesive

**E.g.** Rubber, sugar, maple syrup, natural chewing gum, frankincense

# & FUNGI / USES

## FUNGI (MUSHROOMS)

**Definition** Large fruiting body of a fungus

**AKA** Toadstool

**Uses** Food, medicines, poison

**E.g.** portobello mushroom, oyster mushroom, death cap

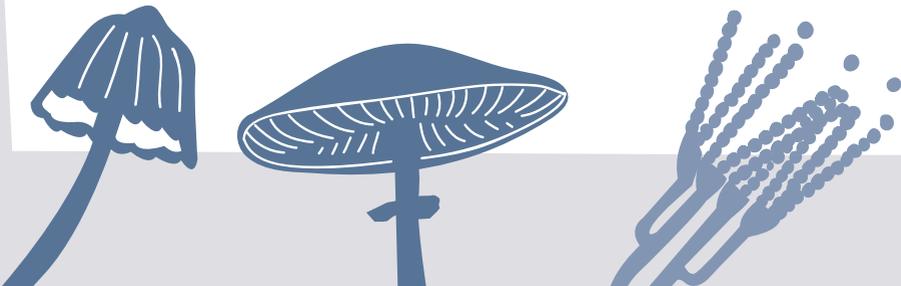
## MICRO FUNGI

**Definition** Fungi which do not produce large fruiting bodies

**AKA** Mould

**Uses** Food, medicine (some also cause diseases in plants)

**E.g.** Quorn, penicillin, yeast (for breadmaking, beer, wine, cheesemaking)



# Economic botany: then and now

As shown by the phenomenon of the school museum, museums displaying the wonders of the natural world were particularly popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

During that era the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew played a key role in popularising a particular kind of collection - that which focused on the use of plants by people, an area of investigation loosely termed “economic botany”. In fact, it was at Kew that the world’s first ever Museum of Economic Botany was opened, in 1847.

**Kew’s first director Sir William Hooker envisaged a museum full of “all kinds of useful and curious vegetable products.”**

The collection grew rapidly with contributions from all over the world. British officials, botanical explorers and other enthusiasts were encouraged to collect specimens, with the principal aim of promoting the economic development of the British Empire.



The Kew Museum became a hub for the collection and redistribution of economic botany specimens. These were received by schools for object lessons, by local scientists and manufacturers and by other museums in Britain, as well as overseas institutions. Between 1847 and 1990, Kew sent an estimated 60,000 specimens and artefacts to over 30 botanic gardens, 100 museums, 150 universities and colleges and 700 schools worldwide.

The display principle which characterised economic botany collections was known as the “illustrative series”, where a raw plant material would be shown with the finished or processed product - for example, a lump of raw rubber exhibited alongside a pair of waterproof rubber shoes.

Plant-based collections fell out of favour in the mid 20th century, as synthetic products became more economically important, and the Kew museum closed its doors. However, the collections are still maintained and today are used for research carried out by botanists, historians, geographers, ecologists, archeologists and anthropologists.

These collections, often referred to as “biocultural” since they illustrate the connection between the biological and cultural spheres of life, can be used to help research new medicines, foods, materials for manufacture and more. Cultural objects such as baskets and traditional clothing can also act as references for craft-based skills and for reconnecting communities with lost cultural heritage.



*Images:*

*Top left: The original Kew Museum in 1960, now Kew's School of Horticulture.*

*Bottom left: The present day Economic Botany Collection at Kew.*

*Top right: Nineteenth century models of apples, made of wax and plaster (from Australia, held in the Kew collection).*

*Bottom right: Ancient Egyptian wreath made from leaves and stems (Economic Botany Collection, Kew).*

# Learning from objects: an open-ended approach

Using an open-ended approach to object-based learning is highly relevant for the twenty-first century classroom. Investigating objects in ways that encourage pupils to collaborate, discuss, speculate and imagine helps enable them to develop strong analytical, creative and communication skills.

## Why use objects for learning?

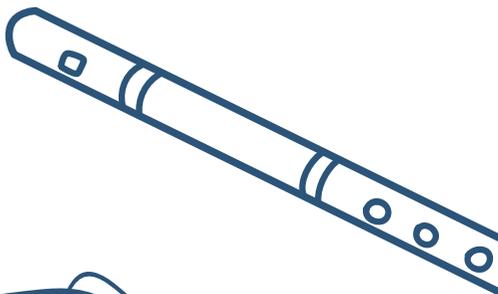
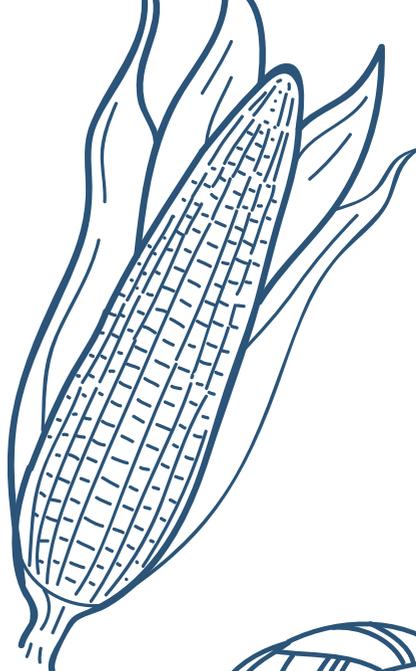
The primary aim of object-based learning should be to learn *from* rather than *about* objects. In this capacity, objects are used to ask questions, facilitate observations, probe prior knowledge, make connections and generate discussion.

### Some advantages of object-based learning are that it can:

- Encourage cross-curricula learning
- Support inquiry-based learning
- Stimulate critical thinking and creativity
- Invite meaning-making
- Build the confidence of the learner (you don't need to be an "expert")
- Facilitate group and one-to-one interactions
- Develop pupils' interactive skills

### In the context of cultural objects it can be used to:

- Engage parents & local community
- Support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- Celebrate multilingualism



## Getting to know objects through play

Through play, your pupils can get to know and find meaning in their school museum objects. Familiarisation creates a sense of ownership and will improve pupils' confidence and enjoyment as curators and explainers. Why not give these games a go?



## OBJECT FAMILIES

Working in groups, ask pupils to arrange objects into sets or 'families'. They may arrange according to any criteria they choose. Ask them to feed back to the class on why they made those choices. You could introduce the idea of intersecting themes, with objects belonging to one or more families.

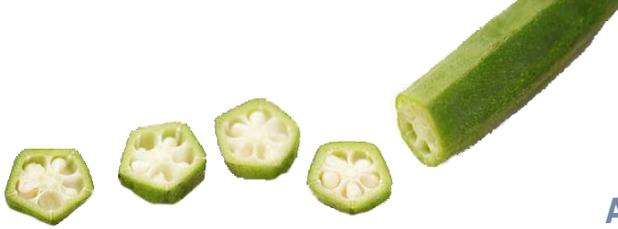


## WHOSE OBJECT?

Ask pupils to select an object and imagine who might have crafted, cultivated or owned it, and why. This will strengthen their perception of the connections between people and plants. Writing stories or drawing pictures of these imagined people makes an engaging activity.

## WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

A good game for helping develop sense of perception. Placing a mystery object in a bag, ask them to reach inside and describe or draw what they feel. This game works best if they are discouraged from guessing straight away!



## GUESS THE OBJECT

Working in groups, first have pupils describe an object in detail. What does it look like? Feel like? Smell like? Then ask pupils to compare and contrast the object with prior experience or similar things. Finally, based on these observations, they should speculate about what the object might be. Note - there are no right or wrong conclusions!

## MEMORY GAME

Brilliant for getting to know the collection as a whole: Ask pupils to look at the group of objects for a set period of time - say, 2 minutes. Then cover the objects up with a cloth and have them write down as many as they can remember.



## ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

Great for creativity and observation skills: Get pupils to draw, paint, photograph or model objects (using clay / plasticene / Lego / recycled materials / etc.). Realist or abstract, anything goes!



### Games inspired by:

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Julian Vayne (2010). Wonderful Things: Learning With Museum Objects. Available at: <http://sharemuseumseast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Learning-With-Museum-Objects.pdf>

# Curating a twenty-first century school museum

The section which follows contains tools to help you plan and realise a museum in your own school. But remember, this is just a guide. There is no right or wrong way to go about curating a school museum. The process can be highly creative and will be unique to each and every school, based on meeting the specific needs and aspirations of its staff, pupils, pupils' families and the extended school community.

Today a school museum will often take the form of a temporary exhibition, lasting anything from a day to a month. But if space allows, objects can be introduced to the classroom for longer.

# Part 1: Scoping and sourcing

## Engaging parents and the wider community

Think about the different kinds of people who could visit the school museum. It is an opportunity to engage with the families and guardians of pupils as well as with the wider community.

Successful displays allow space for pupils and diverse visitor groups to learn together and from one another.

Different visitors to your exhibition will come with different expectations. Anticipating these expectations whilst also leaving room for people to interpret the exhibition freely might sound daunting. However, a little research at this stage should go a long way.

### Homework Idea No. 1

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Encourage pupils to ask their parents / carers and other people in the community what they would like to see from the museum.

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## Designing an exhibition brief

Once you understand the needs of your audience, you can make an exhibition brief.

### Consider these questions:

- **What will your exhibition communicate?**
- **What do you want people to learn and why?**
- **Who are you hoping to attract and why?**

How you generate ideas for your exhibition is open-ended. Some exhibitions are led by existing collections of objects whilst others start out with a core idea and select their objects accordingly.

### Activity Idea No. 1

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Brainstorm with your class what museums mean to them. Ask them what they most enjoyed about previous visits to museums and what aspects they might like to recreate in their own exhibition.

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## Sourcing objects

Objects for display in your school museum might be borrowed from pupils' own homes, loaned from a community group or purchased from the local market or shops.

All three approaches to sourcing are an opportunity for both pupils and teachers to engage with family, friends and the wider community. Asking questions about these objects and encouraging storytelling is a great way of getting to know both people and plants.

### Homework Idea No. 2

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Encourage your pupils to ask a parent, carer or other family member to tell them about an object they have at home or which is made from plants.

It could be something they use in their day-to-day life, such as cooking ingredients or cosmetics. Or it could be something that is special to them; perhaps given as a gift or remembered from childhood (e.g. a cotton garment or a wooden ornament).



Images:  
Top two - Ridley Rd market, Dalston  
Bottom - Quality Foods, Southall

### Top tips for choosing objects

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Bear in mind that culturally significant objects can encourage meaningful engagement with parents/ carers and the wider community.

Look for variety - keeping in mind different sizes, shapes, colours, textures, and even smells.

### You might try these places...

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- Street / farmers markets
- Supermarkets
- Wholefood / natural stores for seeds, oils, spices
- Florists / flower markets for cotton bolls, eucalytus
- Haberdasheries / fabric shops for fibres and textiles
- Health and beauty shops for natural cosmetics such as argan oil and shea butter

### Information to record when collecting objects

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- Name of collector or donor
- The date it was collected
- Where it came from
- Geographical origin (if known)
- Brief description of the object, including plant(s) it is made from
- Give each object a number (later used to identify it)

### Activity Idea No. 2

---

If possible, take small groups of pupils to the local market or shops to look for plant-based products.

As well as fruits and vegetables, encourage them to look out for processed cooking ingredients, cosmetics, tools, garments etc.

Take along notebooks and record information about what you find. Be sure to take pictures (with permission from shop owners).

## Object list

This is a summary of all objects in your collection - an important go-to resource for checking object information (see example below).

Although not essential, it can also be useful to digitise your collection. This simply means photographing it.

Photographs can be used to enhance your object list or for publicity - in a leaflet, a poster, on your school website or on social media. Objects are best photographed against a plain background.



*Egyptian grass basket (nineteenth century). Kew's Economic Botany Collection, digitised for the online catalogue.*

No.	Object name	Collector	Source	Image	Object needs	After the exhibition
1	Two envelopes made of recycled potato starch	Mona Abraham Year 5	Dalston & Co Stationer's, Kingsland Road, E8. Collected 12/7/19.		None	To be given to Kew Gardens, Economic Botany Collection.
2	Patterned china tea pot	Ruth Powers Year 6	Ruth's home. Purchased around 2011 in Tottenham.		Fragile. Can only be handled by those with training.	To be returned to Laura's home.
3	Ginger root, unpeeled	Amber Dempsey, Year 3	From Stoke Newington Fruit & Veg, Church Street, N16. Collected 2/8/2019.		Can only be handled under supervision.	To be composted.

# Object care

## Storage containers

Before your exhibition launches, objects will need to be safely stored in a secure, dry place. Objects are generally stored in boxes. Cardboard boxes (e.g. shoe boxes) or plastic containers will do fine.

For fragile objects, line the box with tissue paper or bubble wrap. Avoid using newspaper or magazine pages as the ink can damage the objects.

Insects and other pests are drawn to plant material, especially food products, so make sure your boxes have lids and that perishable items are well sealed (try using ziplock sandwich bags, kilner jars or tupperware boxes).

## Linking numbers to objects

Ideally you should give each object a unique number so that it can be identified according to the object list.

Try not to mark the object itself. If possible, tie a tag with the number written on it to your object. If there is nothing to tie it to then stick it with a small piece of tape or mark discreetly with a pencil.

## Storage labels

So that you can find objects easily, make labels to stick on the outside of your storage boxes with a brief description of what's inside.

## Object handling

In a traditional museum setting, objects are usually only handled when necessary and whilst wearing gloves, so as to avoid breakages and the transfer of grease and salts from fingertips which can corrode objects over time.

In the school museum setting it is important to strike a healthy balance between caring for objects and allowing the kind of hands-on experience that is so important for learning. You might simply choose to set some basic rules such as only handling objects over a table so that they are less likely to break if they fall, and washing hands before and after object handling.

# Part 2: Design and display

## Grouping objects

Various systems are used to group museum objects. There is no right or wrong way, and you'll most likely find that these groupings overlap, but here are some common examples ...

### Scientific

Organising objects according to their scientific or 'taxonomic' category. In the case of plant-based collections, this means by plant type. Botanically speaking, objects could be arranged according to plant family (e.g. grasses), plant genus (e.g. wheat), or plant species (e.g. common wheat, spelt wheat, durum wheat).

### Thematic

This organises objects according to their thematic category. For example by uses such as food, clothing, medicine and music; or by concepts such as religion, ritual, memories and wellbeing.

### Geographic

Objects are commonly grouped according to their geographic origin. For example by continent, region, country, state/county or borough.



*Three examples of wheat from Kew's Economic Botany Collection. Both a scientific and thematic grouping.*

## Arranging objects

Groups of objects can be displayed in many different ways. Again, you'll probably notice that more than one of these factors influences how you arrange the objects. Here are just a few examples ...

### Illustrative series

This is a way of displaying related raw and finished products side by side, showing the process from plant to final item and thus making visual links between plants and their uses. For example: Cotton boll - spun cotton thread - t-shirt.

### Narrative

Try arranging your objects in such a way that they tell a story. This approach can be engaging and thought-provoking. It can be very effective for capturing your audience's imagination.

### Visual impact

Visual impact can draw your audience in. You might choose to arrange objects according to what looks good. Experiment with fanning them out, placing them in size order or by colour.



Top image - Illustrative series showing how a violin is made from wood (Economic Botany Collection, Kew).

Bottom image - 'Cabinet of Curiosities' painted by Domenico Remps in the 1690s. The "curiosity cabinet" was a collection of extraordinary objects which attempted to categorise and tell stories about the strange and beautiful wonders of the natural world.

[Image Source: Wikipedia Commons].

## Text panels

### What they do

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- Introduce your exhibition as a whole and the themes it covers.
- Introduce the various sections of your exhibition.

### Tips

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- Use colour to attract attention
- Try adding images, maps, etc.
- Choose a large size, ideally A2+
- Use a large font
- Aim for 100-150 words comprising a title (large font), a first sentence which summarises the main message (in bold), plus 1-2 paragraphs giving more detail.

## Other media

The written word is not the only way to communicate with your visitors. You could create audio (spoken word, music, sound effects) or even video pieces to accompany your exhibition. Photographs and illustrations can also enrich the narrative.

## Labels

### What they do:

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- Describe objects
- Link the object to the rest of your exhibition
- Tell stories
- Engage people

### Tips

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- Keep text brief and conversational
- Try to find a personal connection and try using personal stories and quotations to convey this - e.g. 'this teapot belongs to Ruth's Mum'
- Avoid overly technical language
- Include questions to engage the viewer e.g. 'do you and your family do this too?'



## Shorter display label

This includes basic identifying information about an object. Briefly describe the object in one or two sentences, including where it was made and/or where it was collected, and who donated or loaned it to the school museum.

### **Patterned china teapot**

For brewing tea leaves

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Loaned by Ruth Powers, Year 6

## Longer display label

You can create longer display labels to tell stories and give more detail about your objects and link them to the rest of your exhibition. Try to communicate your topic, theme and message in a way that is succinct and engaging.

### **Patterned china teapot**

For brewing tea leaves

Loaned by Ruth Powers, Year 6

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This teapot was bought by Ruth's mum Margery Powers in Tottenham in 2011. She bought it because it looks like the one her grandmother used to have in her kitchen. Today the family use it to brew loose-leaf teas including green tea and chamomile. "It makes tea-making special", says Margery.



*China teapot*  
Source: *Wikimedia Commons*

# Part 3: Launch and evaluation

## Set up

There are a number of tasks to be completed in advance of the exhibition set-up:

- Programme time for the project
- Elect a pupil team responsible for the task
- With reference to your exhibition plan, ensure that all materials (objects, labels, etc) are going to be ready and available on the day[s]

During set-up, ensure that staff and pupils have adequate space to work in and have a large version of the exhibition plan available, perhaps on the wall, for all to refer to. This may include a sketch of the layout of the objects in the designated space.

And as always, ensure someone is charged with taking photos as a record and for social media.

## Evaluation planning

Conducting an evaluation at the end of an exhibition is a key element of the process (see 'After the exhibition' below) and planning for it is required at the set-up stage.

Feedback forms need to be on hand for all visitors (including the pupils themselves) to express their thoughts and make suggestions.

Effective feedback forms need to be simple to enable a good response rate. For younger children (KS1) and under, forms are best kept visual, as in the example opposite. Forms for pre-schoolers can be completed by the parent in consultation with the child.

Think about other information you might wish to collect e.g. the age of the child, language[s] spoken at home, etc.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Look at the other people - do they like the museum?



Do you like how the things in the museum look?



What is your favourite thing in the museum?

Draw your favourite thing here:

For adults too, forms ought to be no longer in length than one side of A4. Here again think of any additional information about your visitors you may like to gather.

Feedback forms for KS1 and under. KS2 and above can be more textual as in the example below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick

- |  | Yes                      | No                       | Don't know               |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I enjoyed today's visit                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I learned some new interesting things                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I could understand most of the things I saw           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I would recommend a friend to come to this museum     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The visit has made we want to learn more about plants | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What amazed me most in the museum was...

And this is why...

## Launch

Museums often 'launch' their exhibitions by holding a special event (sometimes referred to as a 'private view') to which they invite various stakeholders and the media.

This is a great way of bringing together the museum creators and their extended community and can generate publicity for the project.

Set a date and send invitations (electronic/hard-copy) at least a month in advance.

Resist the temptation to have a series of speeches. There are other ways of creating a sense of inclusion and you don't want to slow down the momentum of your event!

Once the museum has been declared open, there is time for viewing the exhibits and socialising. Consider having volunteer students as museum 'guides' and for giving out handouts.

Ensure someone is responsible for taking photos before, during and after the event. And don't forget to hand every visitor a feedback form!

### Be sure to invite a range of people to the launch

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- Pupils
- Parents and carers
- Wider family
- Other donors / lenders of objects
- Sponsors
- Local press/radio/TV
- Local Education Authority representatives
- Local MP
- Members of local community groups
- Mayor/local councillors
- Local celebrities ... why not!

### Activity Idea No. 3

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As a classroom activity, make invitations for your exhibition, for pupils to take home to family and friends, and to send to community groups and other local representatives.

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### **Something to take home?**

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Many museums produce catalogues. These act as enduring records of the displays for visitors and the museums themselves.

Whilst we don't suggest that you take on such a task, you could consider making a simple handout for visitors to take home with them. This could be an A4 sheet which describes your school museum project and includes images of some objects.

### **A typical museum launch usually involves...**

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Refreshments. No need to be lavish, but offering visitors a soft drink as they arrive makes the occasion feel special. Perhaps pupil volunteers might like to pass round snacks.

A short speech from the head of the institution thanking all those responsible for the museum.

One other (optional) short speech from a dignitary of your choice – this could alternatively be one of the pupils concerned.



## After the exhibition

### Dismantling

When the time comes to dismantle the exhibition, the same preparatory steps need to be taken as for set-up:

- Programme a time and notify lenders when to collect objects.
- Elect a pupil team responsible for the task – this could be a different team to the one used for set-up.
- Ensure that all packing materials (tissue paper, bubble wrap, boxes, etc.) are going to be ready and available on the day.

### Dispatching

**Return to lender** - These objects must be packaged with lender names visible on the outside. Arrange for pick-up by lenders.

**Retain for school use** - You may wish to retain various objects, donated or purchased by the school, for future use. Be sure to label boxes with the contents.

**Disposal of items beyond their sell-by date** - Perishable items such as fruits and vegetables can be disposed of at this stage. Please compost them where possible.

### Evaluation

Information from the feedback forms should be analysed (preferably as a shared exercise) and written up in summary form. Perhaps simple graphs can be produced with older pupils.

The resulting document should be concluded with a section summarising lessons learned - what worked and what didn't work, and what might be done differently next time.





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### **Mobile Museum Project**

[mobilemuseum@kew.org](mailto:mobilemuseum@kew.org)  
[www.royalholloway.ac.uk/mobilemuseum](http://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/mobilemuseum)

### **Kew Learning**

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