



Document Title: Curating an Exhibit

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Spring 2022 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

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Dept & Course # ENGL1168 Course title FWS: Cultural Studies, Action Movies and the Licenses to Kill

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Curating an Exhibit
Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature



Date 5/9/22

Charline Jao

Submission: Knight Award for Writing Exercises

5/9/2022

Exercise Title: Curating an Exhibit

ABSTRACT: In this activity, the metaphor of a museum exhibit allows students to think more critically about how they incorporate sources into an argument. Rather than simply talking about texts on the surface-level, this exercise encourages them to explore more nuanced critical maneuvers and to think about texts in *conversation*. By showing students how their choice of texts allows them to expand, criticize, or refine ideas (rather than just stating them), “Curating an Exhibit” encourages a deeper engagement with primary sources and provides practice for thesis-writing.

KEYWORDS: evidence, sources, comparison, thesis, argument, themes

EXPLANATION: I created this activity to accompany an essay where students center their argument around defining a keyword of their choice (choices include “home,” “resurrection,” “food”) in relation to multiple class readings. Noticing that students have a tendency to identify a theme in their essays and then stop short of a compelling thesis, I wanted to design an activity which encouraged them to think about how their texts defined or redefined ideas. In other words: rather than simply saying a film is about loyalty, shifting the question to be, “how does this film define loyalty? Does it challenge or expand preconceived notions of loyalty?”

In this activity, I break the class into groups and each group is given four objects from a real Victoria and Albert Museum. However, the title and artistic statement of the exhibit have been withheld. Thus, students spend around 20 minutes in their groups figuring out what they think the unifying theme is, crafting both a title and an “artistic statement.” Additionally, to make this activity more relevant to the class, they must add two addition items to the exhibit from our class readings and provide an explanation. Afterward, we go through each group’s answers and I reveal the title.

The title of these exhibits are:

- Disobedient Objects: Items from protest movements or were used in protests
- What Is Luxury?: A series of object which represent different cultural ideas of luxury
- Fashioned From Nature: An exhibit about the way fashion has taken inspiration from nature, which also reflects on the environmental harm that fashion has done
- Mapping the Imagination: Geographical and abstract maps that explore the history and motivations of cartography

In discussion, we examine how these exhibits complicate the boundaries and definitions of their keywords: disobedience, luxury, fashion and nature, and mapping. By asking them to bring in two additional “objects” (a passage, film scene, an item, etc.), we also discuss how their contributions might introduce more interesting questions and ideas to the theme. For example, one group decided to include “a glass of water” in the exhibit “What is Luxury?” when they found themselves angry and frustrated at the opulence of these items, which they characterized as excessive and pointless. This allowed us to have a conversation about how these curatorial choices can be provocations. In another instance, a group chose to include a sonic item: the ululation we heard in the film *The Battle of Algiers*, prompting a discussion about medium and how there are important non-material items in protests that resist integration into a physical museum space.

By moving briefly outside of a formal paper structure and reflecting instead on the museum exhibits, I find that this exercise also breathes some creative life into the discussion. This activity appears after the midpoint of the semester, when they have enough texts to pull from for examples. By touching on relevant topics like fashion and protest, the discussion becomes much more accessible and relevant. The objects are very fascinating themselves, and I’ve found that discussion often naturally will turn to a close reading of objects students find intriguing. However, with the “artistic statement,” students will still be articulating a thesis and practicing their writing.

Activity: Curating an Exhibit

Today, we'll look at a few museum exhibits to help us think about EVIDENCE and SOURCES. Picture this: you're a curator at a museum, and you need to create an exhibit around a central theme. Every object/artwork you choose should relate to the theme, but each object should shine a light on a unique question or aspect of the topic. This is a lot like essay writing! When working with multiple sources, each source should bring something different: Does this object expand, challenge, or establish key elements of the theme? How is bringing several “items” together in conversation often an argument in and of itself?

Each of your groups has been given four objects from a real Victoria and Albert Museum exhibit (for the purposes of this activity, PLEASE do not look it up - it will spoil the fun).

In your groups, follow these steps:

- Look at the various objects and discuss what they have in common - *guess* what the unifying factor is in all of them (the equivalent of your exhibition keywords). Jot down some notes in “What unites these objects?”
- Create an artist statement! Craft 1-2 paragraphs introducing the themes of the work and the questions it provokes.
- Pick two “objects” from or related to our previous readings or class activities (this can be a film scene, a quote from our readings, real or fake ephemera etc.) that fit into the themes of this exhibit. If you’re having trouble thinking of one, then feel free to choose an object from outside our classroom.
- Give your exhibit a title.

Be prepared to share your observations with the group when we return from breakout groups.

Group 1



Artúr van Balen has produced inflatables for protest as a member of former group Eclectic Electric Collective. One such inflatable, a cobblestone was used in a 2012 demonstration in Barcelona. Inflatables serve multiple functions in a protest that can be summarized by the term “tactical frivolity.”



Made by British ceramic and mosaic artist Carrie Reichardt, The Tiki Love Truck protests the US death penalty. It features the death mask of John Joe “Ash” Amador, who had corresponded with her and asked Carrie to be a witness at his execution. Her friend Nick Reynolds went with her and cast the mask, which was woven into the truck and driven in the Art Car Parade in Manchester 10 days after the execution.



In 1993, the Barbie Liberation Organisation switched the voice boxes of around five hundred talking GI Joe and Barbie dolls and returned them to stores. The action, which they called 'shopgiving', was intended to highlight the gender stereotyping of children's toys.



The textiles, which originated from Chile, incorporated covert political messages into their designs. They generated a vital income for women, whilst offering strength and solace in communal arpilleria workshops. One textile, created from fabric scraps that were hand-stitched onto a cotton flour sack, depicts a weeping mother kneeling beneath two helpless hands bound in chains. Titled '¿Dónde Están Nuestros Hijos?' (Where Are Our Children?), the stitched scene communicates the agony endured by 'an anguished mother in pain' whose loved one had been seized by the military.

What unites these objects?

Write down your artistic statement here.

Object 1

Object 2

Title

Group 2

	<p>This seat would have been used for riding elephants in ceremonial processions. It was part of a lavish attire which reinforced social status. Expensive materials and luxurious detailing provide the visual impact required to elicit awe. While the howdah suggests the pleasures of celebration, it was uncomfortable for both the elephant and passengers.</p>
	<p>This crown was possibly the one given to the church of S. Lourenço in Azeitão near Lisbon by the Portuguese royal family. Made in the fashionable Rococo style, the gift was a flamboyant and generous gesture of power and taste as well as of piety. It was most likely intended for a statue of the Virgin Mary in her role as Queen of Heaven.</p>
	<p>Giovanni Corvaja's The Golden Fleece headpiece is part of a series of unprecedented objects inspired by the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts, who try to capture a rare golden-haired ram to present as a gift to their king – a near impossible task. Corvaja spent over ten years perfecting techniques of transforming gold into thread. This headpiece was intricately woven together using 160 kilometres of superfine threads. It took 2,500 hours to make.</p>
	<p>Skimming stones on the surface of water is a simple and cherished pastime. By preselecting 'ideal' stones, covering them in gold leaf and keeping them in individually made pouches, Dominic Wilcox explores ideas of value and luxury associated with a humble pleasure. A found stone becomes exclusive, unique and precious but its ultimate purpose is to be thrown away in a special moment.</p>

What unites these objects?

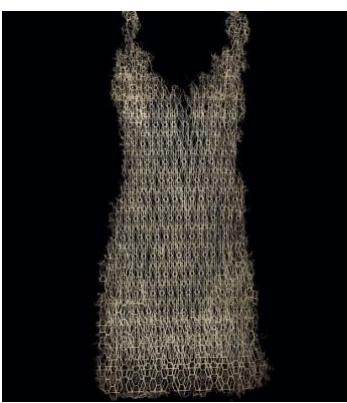
Write down your artistic statement here.

Object 1

Object 2

Title

Group 3

	<p>Each pair of Masaya Kushino's shoes is unique. His 'Bird-witched' collection was inspired by the bird paintings of the Japanese artist Ito Jakuchu (1716–1800). The dyed feathers were arranged to simulate Jakuchu's subtle depiction of plumage. The sculptor Atsushi Nakamura crafted the claw heels. 'Bird-witched' shoes</p>
	<p>The raw materials for this extravagant 'mantua' (pictured) came from around the globe. They include raw silk from Italy, Spain and the Middle East; flax grown in northern Europe; and precious metals, probably from the Potosí mines in present-day Bolivia, which were under Spanish control from the 1500s. The ermine fur was imported from North America or Russia. The silk was most likely woven in Lyon in the 1760s. A London dressmaker used it to make this garment for a member of the British social or political elite to attend royal events at court.</p>
	<p>'Jumpers provide me with a site for direct actions', says artist and maker Bridget Harvey. 'Their body-like forms [can be] recast as messengers to communicate discourses of repair, protest and activism. MEND MORE Jumper was initially made as a placard for the Climate March 2015 and has since been an aid for dialogue and social engagement.'</p>
	<p>In a bid for a different approach, visual artist Diana Scherer trains the roots of plants to grow in intricate structures, creating a 3D textile. When the roots are fully grown, she removes them from the soil and cuts off the plant stems. The pieces produced are not yet suitable to be worn, but hint at a potential, more sustainable future in which we grow our own fashion in the ground, reducing the volume of synthetic fibres that seep into the ocean</p>

What unites these objects?

Write down your artistic statement here.

Object 1

Object 2

Title

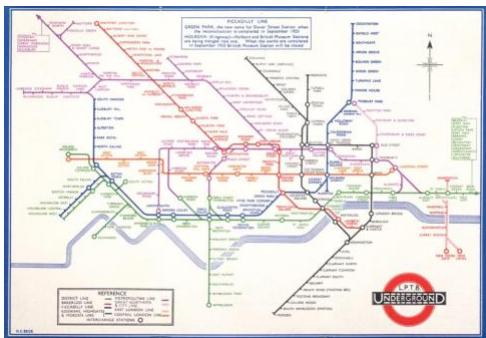
Group 4



Langlands and Bell work with a variety of media to explore the systems of communication that codify our world. This print diptych is based on the global network of international airline routes. Similar to star constellations in the sky, they offer an alternative map of the world where air travel defines the important locations.



'Gelam Nguzu Kazi [Dugong My Son]', David Bosun In the 1990s young artists in the Torres Strait Islands, north of Australia, began to rediscover their local material culture, largely lost under colonialism. They made linocut prints celebrating traditional visual patterns, creation myths and other stories. In this print, the story relates to the shaping of the land itself, described in a map-like narrative.



Henry Beck's London Underground map is the most famous transport map in the world, and an icon of 20th-century London. Beck was an unemployed engineer when he first devised the map. Prioritising the relationships between the lines and stations, rather than geographical accuracy, he used a method that recalls electrical circuit systems.



'Birth of a Thought 1', Susan Aldworth Sometimes artists have used strategies such as automatism or meditation to access and to map the visions of their own unconscious mind.

What unites these objects?

Write down your artistic statement here.

Object 1

Object 2

Title

Examples of student responses:

What unites these objects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These objects are all forms of protest through art. • They are all peaceful. • They are all subversive of expectations.
Write down your artistic statement here.	<p>Throughout history, protest has been utilized as a catalyst for social and political change. Although many turn to violence in order to gain attention or expedite change, nonviolent protesting continues to be a safer and more effective means of advocacy. All of these works provide commentary on current d</p> <p>How can one fight for change without stooping to the moral level of their opposition?</p> <p>By what means can one attract positive attention towards their own cause?</p>
Object 1	Protest against agent yellow in <i>The Host</i>
Object 2	The Algerian chant after Ali La Pointe's execution in <i>The Battle of Algiers</i>
Title	The Element of Surprise: Effective Protests Via Subversion

What unites these objects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all maps of some sort, • how things are connected on a deeper level (cities, communities, minds)
Write down your artistic statement here.	Connections between entities extend from things as big as cities to things as small as neural networks. At every level, maps and networks are a part of our world. To that end, this exhibit gently asks us to consider the abstract concepts that can connect us together. Another question that follows is with what matters more: the nodes or the connections?
Object 1	North by Northwest may not make sense at first with the movie starting off with the abduction and accusation of Roger Thornhill, but when things are consecutively revealed, everything comes together and we see the bigger picture. The movie's setting also changes every 30 minutes which can relate to the air travel and underground map.
Object 2	The scene in Robocop where Jones has a tracker attached to Robocop that allows him (Jones) to be able to see Robocop's location in a very literal sense. In a deeper sense this can relate to tracking our own creations (literal and mental) as they take on the environment.
Title	Everyday Networks: From Meta to Macro Connections