

ED412174 1996-08-00 Using Museum Resources in the K-12 Social Studies Curriculum. ERIC Digest.

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WHY MUSEUMS?

Teachers are always looking for good teaching materials that will bring the social studies to life for their students. A teacher's "toolbox" often includes resources gathered over time from many different sources, including colleagues and institutions such as state departments of education, school systems, publishers, libraries, and universities. However, a large group of dynamic educational institutions, numbering over 7,600 in the United States, is often overlooked by teachers. What are these under utilized educational resources and why should their materials be added to a teacher's "toolbox?"

They are museums. By procuring, caring for, studying, and displaying significant natural and cultural objects, museums as educational institutions teach us about the objects of lasting human interest and value. The word "museum" derives from the ancient word "muse," a Greek mythological association with the nine muses who presided over song, poetry, and the arts and sciences, and thus education. In the ancient world, a museum was both a "place of the muses" and a place of scholarship and learning, as in the Museum of Alexandria founded during the third century B.C.

Today the muses, presiding over the world's objects of historical, artistic, and scientific value, can be found in every corner of the globe in aquariums, arboretums/botanical gardens, art museums, children's museums, historic sites/homes, history museums, natural history museums, nature centers, planetariums, science museums/technology centers, specialized museums, and zoos. Within each of these places, objects of lasting interest and value, organized into collections representing all time periods and increasingly understood and exhibited within an interdisciplinary human context, await discovery. They are the real things of our social world and their value and accessibility make them vital teaching tools for connecting students to the world of social studies. As we enter the twenty-first century, large and small museums are working harder than ever to help teachers and students make this discovery and connection to these objects. According to the American Association of Museums (AAM), the community of museums recognizes that "education is inherent in the public mission of museums" (The Official Museum Directory 1997, AAM 1996). As a result of this widely accepted museum policy, museums increasingly are taking their educational function more seriously. Recent museum education initiatives include the application of educational principles (learning theories and teaching methodologies) to the development, implementation, and assessment of exhibits and K-12 school programs and materials. This translates into better "musing" for teachers and students through museum learning opportunities designed to complement and enrich classroom instruction.

WHERE TO START

* Types of Museums. First, think broadly about what types of museums exist at the national, state, regional, and local levels relevant to the desired curriculum objectives. Specific categories useful to social studies teachers include but are not limited to the

following:

- * history, art, and science museums
- * historic sites and homes
- * park museums and visitor centers
- * children's museums
- * college and university museums
- * archives
- * specialized organizations (containing museum-related collections, information, and programs):
 - * historical societies and bureaus (including their student divisions and genealogy chapters)
 - * preservation and historic landmark organizations
 - * libraries It is important to note that science, nature, natural history, and technological museums also offer many resources for social studies educators and teachers seeking interdisciplinary and across-the-discipline instructional materials.
- * Types of Museum Teaching Aids. Next, consider the types of free, for-loan, and/or for-purchase teaching aids available from museums. Experiencing and obtaining these aids through a visit is preferable for teachers and students alike. Well-planned, pre-arranged student tours provide the best learning experiences for schools. But if a first-hand visit is not geographically or financially feasible, it is possible to acquire teaching aids through museum outreach and the electronic connections outlined below:
 - * school and teacher programs and materials (often available on-site or through outreach):
 - * student tours, programs, and classes (individualized programming often available)
 - * "on-the-shelf" teacher resources such as lesson plans and packets, professional development classes, traveling resource persons and kits, teacher brochures, and newsletters (for updates, submit address to mailing list)
 - * facsimile artifacts and documents (maps, images, letters), publications, photographs, slides, transparencies, postcards, posters, videos, tapes, CD-ROMs, and video discs--often available through museum gift shops
 - * general and specific information material:

- * brochures, pamphlets, and other introductory material
- * museum publications (collection monographs, journals, guidebooks, and other specialized items)
- * museum newsletters (for updates, submit address to mailing list)
- * World Wide Web sites (where available, an international, national, state, regional, and local museum source for teacher materials, collection highlights, changing exhibitions, upcoming events, new programs, and links to additional resources)

Give priority to materials that are most likely not available through any other source. When visiting a museum, be sure to explore all available gift shops for teaching aids. (Museum gift shops can often mail teaching aids ordered by phone or electronically. Large museum gift shops often publish mail-order catalogs.) Remember that museums are individual institutions differing in size, collection focus, and staff and funding levels. Not all museums can produce specialized K-12 educational programs and materials but they can provide good will, personal contact, and the kinds of basic information listed above. And both large and small museums are constantly growing and expanding, creating new exhibits, programs, materials, and World Wide Web sites.

MAKING THE LINK

- * Finding and Contacting Museums. This is a key step. One strategy for finding the names, telephone numbers, and mailing and electronic addresses of museums is to start with the familiar. Consult the nearest museum. Usually a staff member or volunteer knows about teaching and teachers' needs. Many large museums have education departments consisting of one or more professional educators who would make an excellent teacher contact. Even if these museum contacts do not have the answers, they can often refer teachers to a regional, state, and/or national organization or consortium of museum educators who knows what resources are available and how to obtain them. Another strategy is to consult libraries. Talk with reference librarians about how to obtain information, tourism/travel books, and museum guides/directories. Also, make sure any museum information already being sent to school is accessible. If possible, search the following World Wide Web international museum indexes:
 - * "The World Wide Web Virtual Library: Museums" (supported by International Council of Museums)--<http://www.icom.org/vlmp/>

- * Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's "Guide to Museums and Cultural Resources"--<http://www.lam.mus.ca.us/webmuseums/>

A NATIONAL MUSEUM TEACHER RESOURCE SAMPLER

* National Archives and Records Administration, Education Department, 700 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20408; (202)501-5205;



<http://www.nara.gov/>



Highlights: Variety of primary source teaching materials (catalog available).

* National Gallery of Art, Department of Teacher and School Programs, Washington, DC 20565; (202)842-6796;



<http://www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm>



Highlights: Extensive teaching resources loaned free of charge ("Extension Programs Catalogue" available) and school and teacher programs.

* Smithsonian Institution, Office of Education, Arts & Industries Building, Room 1163, MRC 402, Washington, DC 20560; (202)357-2700;



<http://educate.si.edu/>



Highlights: "Smithsonian Resource Guide for Teachers 1997" describes 455 educational museum products available annually (print or on-line publication, 84 pages). For additional materials and information, contact the education departments of specific Smithsonian history, art, and science museums.

REFERENCES AND ERIC RESOURCES

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NOTE: To locate additional museum teaching materials in the ERIC database, use museum-related search terms (free text and/or as keywords) such as: "museums," "experiential learning," "heritage education," "built environment," "local history," "community resources," "primary sources," "material culture," "field trips," "exhibits," and "outreach programs."

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