



Museum Curator: Sod Houses and Earth Lodges

Adventure Description:

In this adventure, students will think like museum curators and create replicas of artifacts that would be found in a sod house on the Kansas Great Plains.

Activity

Teacher note: This activity is long and can be completed across multiple days. You can complete Steps 1-4 on one day and Steps 5-6 on another day.

Step 1: Background Information on Museum Curators and Sod Buildings (5 minutes)

- Show [Video: Sod Houses and Lodges](#).
- Ask students what they know about sod houses. Sod houses were homes made from soil and prairie grass, instead of typical building materials like lumber or stone. Why would pioneers build their houses this way? (e.g., there were not many trees, lumber was expensive, using sod allowed them to adapt to their new environment).
- Next, ask students what it might be like to live in a sod house. (e.g., students may say it would be dirty or cold, it would be small, no light or heat). Tell students to think about their answers as you move through the lesson.
- Discuss with students briefly the differences between the sod houses and sod lodges. (e.g., lodges were used by Native Americans, houses by pioneers).
- As a class, review what museum curators do. Show [Handout: Being a Museum Curator](#). Discuss different responsibilities that curators have.
- Discuss with students about what would happen if museum curators did not work at museums or were not knowledgeable on different events in history (e.g., artifacts might be placed in the wrong exhibit, artifacts might be mislabeled, visitors who visit a museum might not learn correct information).
- Extra Time? Explain to students that the word curator comes from the Latin word *cūrāre* which means to “watch over.” A museum curator is someone who looks over and protect artifacts, documents or other objects. Some museums have just one curator. Larger museums will have more than one.

Step 2: Activity Set Up (10-15 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will imagine they are museum curators who are creating a new exhibit about living as a settler in frontier Kansas. They will imagine that they have received an email from the president of the museum saying that a box of artifacts was donated to the museum! The artifacts are all from the period of when homesteaders were settling in Kansas.
- Explain to students that they will imagine they opened the box and found all of the artifacts! There is also a list of what the artifacts are and a little bit of information on them. Provide students with [Handout: List of Artifacts](#).
- Explain to students that they will choose two artifacts from the list that they want to include in a new exhibit on Life in Frontier Kansas.
- Divide students into groups of 3-4. Have students spend about 7-10 minutes reading about the artifacts and deciding which ones they want to include in their exhibit. Remind students to only pick two artifacts.

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Step 3: Identifying Artifacts for an Exhibit (20 minutes)

- Tell students that there is a problem! The list of artifacts does not have information about where the artifact was originally found and any history about it. Explain to students that before they can create their museum exhibit, they must first figure out what the artifacts are associated with.
- Provide students with [Handout: Sod Houses and Lodges](#). Explain to students that they will use this handout to help figure out how the artifacts fit with the construction of sod houses and lodges.
- When students think they have figured out where their artifacts are from, have them write the name of the artifact and its significance to the history of the time period on a piece of scrap paper or a sticky note. Then, have one person from each group come to the front of the classroom and check with you (the teacher) about whether or not they are correct. See [Handout: Teacher Key to Identify Artifacts](#). If students are incorrect, have them try again.

Step 4: Creating Replicas of Artifacts and Labels (25 minutes)

- Explain to students that now that they know in what way the artifacts are associated with the history of the Kansas frontier, they will create replicas of two artifacts that will go on display in their new exhibit. Discuss how replicas are an exact model or copy of an object.
- Explain to students that in addition to creating replicas, they will create labels that will go next to their artifacts. That way, visitors can read about the artifacts while they walk through the exhibit.
- Provide students with [Handout: Creating Labels](#). Students will fill out the two labels to go next to their artifacts.
- Provide each group with the following materials: pieces of cardboard, popsicle sticks, construction paper, tape, scissors, and other art/building supplies based on what is available in your classroom.
- As students are creating their artifacts and labels, discuss the following:
 - Why do museums have replicas on display? (e.g., so that professionals can examine the real artifact while the replica is on display, to protect the real artifact from damage by guests or even from the lights in the museum, so the real artifact can visit other museums).
 - What materials will you use to make your replica look realistic?
 - How do artifacts provide clues about what life was like on the Kansas frontier?
 - What would happen if artifacts did not exist from this period of Kansas history?
- When students are finished creating their labels and artifacts, have students cut out the labels and paste them on the bottom of their artifacts or near them.
- Teacher note: if students are setting up their exhibit on another day (next step), have students store their artifacts and labels in a safe spot for another day. We suggest having students place their artifacts and labels in brown paper bags that are labeled with students' names.

Step 5: Set Up Exhibit (10 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will now set up their exhibit.
- Show [Handout: Setting Up an Exhibit](#). Explain to students that they will design a sign for their exhibit.
- Provide students with construction paper and markers to create their signs.
- As students are working, ask the following:
 - Who is your exhibit meant for? (little kids, adults, students on a field trip, etc)
 - How will you make sure your exhibit's sign is attention grabbing so that visitors will want to come visit?
 - How will your exhibit teach viewers about the importance of the artifacts from the Kansas frontier?

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Step 6: Presentation and Concluding Discussion (10 minutes)

- Have students walk around to see others' exhibits.
- Tip: have other classes come see students' exhibits!
- If time permits, have students fill out [Handout: Going to a Museum](#). Have students fill out the handout when they walk around and attend others' exhibits!
- If time permits, have a concluding discussion about the following:
 - If you aren't sure what an artifact was used for, what additional information would you need to figure out what it might be?
 - Why is it important for curators to be experts in a particular field?
 - What might happen if a curator was unfamiliar with the history of a certain period?

Materials List

Provided online:

- Video: Sod Houses and Lodges
- Handout: Being a Museum Curator
- Handout: List of Artifacts
- Handout: Sod Houses and Lodges
- Handout: Teacher Key to Identify Artifacts
- Handout: Creating Labels
- Handout: Setting Up an Exhibit
- Handout: Going to a Museum

Not Provided Online (Each Student or Group Needs):

- Tape
- Scissors
- Construction paper
- Assortment of art supplies and building materials (pieces of cardboard, egg cartons, popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners)

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