

Activity

VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Look around you. What objects do you have at home that might interest people in the next century, visitors to a museum 5,000 years from now, or an alien holidaying on Earth..? Write a series of information cards to caption the objects you choose to display.

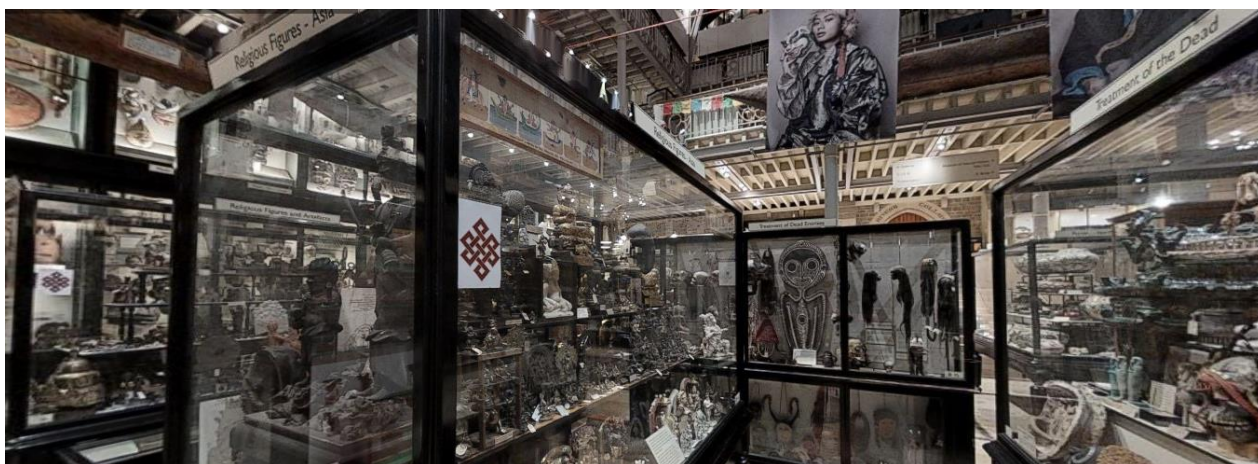
What should I do?

Take a (virtual) trip to the museum

Lots of museums now have virtual tours, e.g. [How to explore the British Museum from home](#) provides a link to 'the world's largest indoor space on Google Street View', among other things – more than 60 galleries!

Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford is perhaps less well-known, but is a personal favourite...

Take a look here <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/>, where you can wander around on a virtual tour if you like. The museum is jam-packed with cabinet upon bulging cabinet, drawers stuffed to bursting with layers and layers of fascinating items...



Once you've got a bit of a feel for the place, navigate your way to the lower floor collections: Online Collections > Ethnography and archaeology > Selected Lower Gallery objects (<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/LGweb/index.htm>).

Browse whatever category takes your fancy. As you explore the site, you might like to bookmark (add to your browser favourites) any objects that interest you in particular and ones that have especially full and helpful descriptions/explanations. This below is in the 'Feathers' category:

Americas**Feather headdress****Guyana**

Thought to have been collected by William John Burchell between 1826 and 1829
Transferred to the Museum from the Ashmolean Museum in 1886

📌 Main Gallery Menu

📌 Americas Menu

➡ Next Object

➡ Previous Object



In South America the brightly coloured feathers of parrots, toucans, and macaws have been used to make headdresses since before the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. Macaws are large and brightly coloured. This bright blue headdress is decorated with macaw feathers. It belonged to a chief and was collected between 1826 and 1829.

[View database record 1886.1.907](#)

And this from the 'Medicines & Medical Instruments':

Asia

Baby feeder

India

Collector not known

Given to the Museum in 1924 by the The Government of Madras

↑ Main Gallery Menu

↑ Asia

→ Next Object

→ Previous Object



This chank shell is from India. It has had its interior coils removed, to allow it to function as a baby feeder. As well as being a suitable shape, the chank was believed to have medicinal qualities, and was preferred to a manufactured feeding bottle. It was collected some time before 1924.

[View database record 1924.44.5](#)

There is lots to look at here. Visit the amulet collection on the Small Blessings area too:

<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/>. Again, read about as many of the items as you can, or enjoy reading them with somebody else, e.g.

Stone Llama, Bolivia



Transferred from the Wellcome Institute in 1965; 1965.52.223 and 1965.52.2254

In 1903 the French government organized a scientific expedition to Tiahuanaco, a pre-Columbian archaeological site in western Bolivia. The principal archaeologist on the expedition was **Adrien de Mortillet** and, although de Mortillet returned to France early due to ill health, he brought several stone amulets, known as *llas*, home with him.

This *lla* resembles a llama. It is carved from huamanga, an alabaster stone found in the Andes, and would have been carried in this traditional sacred coca bag together with some coca leaves. *Lla* were, and still are, carried to protect the herds of animals that they represent from harm, and to bring fertility to the animals and prosperity to the herders. They are treasured as guardians of the herd and passed down from generation to generation by Andean herders.

<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/index.php/stone-llama-bolivia/index.html>

Lucky Pig, Europe



Transferred from the Wellcome Institute in 1965; 1965.52.1370

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the pig was a popular lucky charm in France, England and Ireland, as well as Germany and Austria, where it was – and still is – known as *Glücksschwein* ('good luck pig'). This little pig is made of painted enamel, but lucky pig charms were often made of silver or gold. Expressions such as 'happy as a pig in the mire', 'a pig in clover', and 'you lucky pig', reflect the association of pigs with happiness, financial prosperity and good luck.

[Connected Objects: Four-Leaf Clover](#)

<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/amulets/index.php/lucky-pig-europe/index.html>

Curate your own museum

The Pitt Rivers Museum displays *archaeological* and *ethnographic* objects from all parts of the world.

Look up definitions of the following words, and explain your understanding to somebody else:

- *archaeology*
- *anthropology*
- *ethnography*

You've probably made the connection by now, but 'ethnography' includes looking and thinking in detail at objects belonging to people, past and present societies and different cultures to see what those items can tell us about those people – what they considered important and special and essential to their lives.

Look around your home, or classroom if you're in school. What can *you* find that might interest people in the next century, or in 5,000 years from now, or fascinate and inform an alien from a faraway planet? Choose at least three items to 'display' in your museum. You may want to go for things that are somehow linked, or objects with very different purposes and meanings.

Write your information cards

Visitors to your museum will need some help to learn all about your exhibits. You will have to think very carefully about what you might tell them on labels to caption each of the items on display.

You're going to need to get to grips with this type of writing... Explore the museum site again and read some more descriptions of objects that interest you, this time really thinking hard about the vocabulary and sorts of sentences used and the way the information has been presented. If you compare several entries, this will give you a better idea of what they have in common – this is the style you're aiming to mimic.

There are a few tips and tricks you can use to sound like an expert museum curator...

Firstly, you should plan the information you will include in your description/explanation and decide in what order it will make the clearest sense. You may have spotted that these labels often include some of the following points:

- Item name
- Date it's from
- How, where and when it was acquired (who found it and collected it and donated it to the museum, etc.)
- Description of its appearance, including materials it's made from and measurements
- How it was made and who by
- What it's used for
- Why it is considered special/useful
- How it fits in with beliefs over time
- The object's history
- What else is like it and what we know so far about these things

If you are in Years 5 or 6, you may have already learned about the passive form of verbs or how modals can be useful to suggest possibility. If not, it really doesn't matter at all (this isn't a grammar test!) - just try mixing and matching some of these in the table below and see what you come up with. You should find that some of your results start to sound a bit like the museum labels you've been reading:

Verb ‘to be’		Optional adverbs	Past participle				
			Verbs linked to making, getting, valuing, believing... Add your own to this collection!				
is		often	made	formed	brought	prized	considered
are		probably	crafted	inlaid	sold	treasured	thought (of)
was		generally	wrought	sewn	bought	revered	(to be/have been)
were		sometimes	spun	carved	taken	worshipped	believed (to
to be		rarely	created	joined	seen		be/have been)
(to have been)		most likely	polished	cast	found		associated
Modal verbs		certainly	edged	assembled	purchased		supposed
		regularly	fringed	used	collected		known
would	have been be	usually	engraved	attached	discovered		assumed
can		typically			unearthed		
may		still			excavated		
		once			acquired		

Write your museum labels!

Re-read your writing regularly and identify where you can...

- pack even more useful facts into your sentences. (Think about how to combine information in clauses, or add adverbial phrases to say more about when, where, who, etc. Consider when you might need to use commas and when brackets, or if dashes would be better. Keep returning to the examples from Pitt Rivers, or other sites you've explored, and see how the museum's writer has done this.)

- make information clearer. (Should you break up overlong sentences, or use commas to stop your readers from getting confused? Will any other punctuation you've already been taught about in school help?)
- check and correct spelling – you can't display inaccurate information in your museum!
- improve presentation. (This could be handwriting, or the layout you've chosen, even the colours and font you will use, etc.)

When you are happy that you are as close to perfection as possible, produce a final neat copy of your labels. These could be handwritten, word processed... You may want to make them look as though they are smartly mounted, or have been pinned up for years and have yellowed over time...

Share your work

How might you also share your work with your friends and your teacher(s)? Take a photograph or draw a picture of your objects on display together with their labels. Can you film or record an audio file of yourself reading your information cards, then email or upload to a shared area? Could you create a duplicate of your work to post?

You can tweet what you've been up to using the Twitter handle @BabcockLDPEng and the hashtag #BabcockEnglishAtHome. You may want to tag the museums you've used too, e.g. @Pitt_Rivers

IMPORTANT: If you decide to share your finished work publicly, just remember everything you have been taught about staying safe online, and do check with the person who looks after you before posting anything.

Things that could help me

Think back to when you have visited a museum or gallery before on a school trip or with your family. What did you find most interesting, or exciting, or helpful, and why? How can you give your readers (museum visitors) something of a similar experience? Can you include details about the objects to really capture their imagination?

You can find a good online dictionary at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>.

Change it up! ...Go further!

- A) What items would you choose to exhibit if you are curating a *themed* collection? If on the subject of 'Precious Things During Lockdown', might you have toilet rolls, pasta and hand sanitiser on display, for example?! What about if you choose objects to represent you and your personality? How about a 'room 101' collection of items you loathe and wish never existed?
- B) Not all museums and galleries' labels are easy for everyone to read and understand. You could have a go at writing different versions of your labels: for a KS1 child, for visitors who cannot see colour, for the alien who has no idea what anything on Earth is for, at all! etc. What would you have to change about your descriptions/explanations?

Notes for parents and teachers

Any online search will return plenty of other suggestions for interesting museums and galleries, e.g. <https://letsgowiththechildren.co.uk/virtual-museum/>

The webpages recommended from Pitt Rivers Museum aren't written specifically for children, so you should be prepared to support your child with reading some of the information. Other museums and galleries have areas designed with children in mind and so will have simpler explanations, but because you want your child to capture that 'clever', 'knowledgeable expert' tone in their own writing, you don't want to simplify the text model they read too much.

You might also want to preview the collections yourself first to vet their suitability, unless you are perfectly happy for your child to spend quite some time marvelling at the Pitt Rivers' shrunken heads in a cabinet on the lower floor...(!)

If this is work children are completing back in school, could you stage your own exhibition of (thoroughly disinfected and well-quarantined) objects?