



museums matter: accessing Ireland's heritage

To an imaginative person, an inherited object ... is not just an object, an antique, an item on an inventory; rather it becomes a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging. It can transmit the climate of a lost world and keep alive in us a domestic intimacy with realities that otherwise might have vanished. The more we are surrounded by such objects and are attentive to them, the more richly and contentedly we dwell in our own lives.

Seamus Heaney

'The Sense of the Past' *History Ireland* 1999 1 (4)

Objects, or material things, are central to the museum experience. They can provide many opportunities for learning and cater for different learning styles, giving children meaningful and lasting memories of their museum visit.

The resources for teaching tools like the ones described in these notes and activity sheets, together with many more ideas and educational programmes, can be found in museums.

These resources can be used as inspiration across the curriculum and with pupils at any age. History, the arts and science have the most obvious links, but language skills and literacy, geography and drama can all be taught to great effect with the imaginative use of local museum and heritage resources.

Museums are Ireland's treasure houses. They're packed with objects, stories, ideas and creative, knowledgeable people. When these elements combine with a teacher's professional expertise they can add an extra and magical dimension to a child's learning.

Examples of generic learning outcomes from a museum visit:

Knowledge and Understanding: *to learn more about the topic of the exhibition and understand its relevance to everyday life*

Skills: *to develop skills of working together through cooperation, listening, watching and communicating effectively*

Attitudes and Values: *to increase in confidence and self esteem; pride and sense of ownership of local, regional and national heritage*

Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity: *to have used imagination and enjoyed a visit to a museum; to enjoy creating a piece of art inspired by the collection*

Activity, Behaviour & Progressions: *to have an intention to visit the museum again independently*

There are specific learning outcomes relating to various curriculum strands (Visual Arts, Language, SESE) and schemes of work in key stages 1-4.

There is an activity sheet for primary school students (1st-6th class / Key Stage 1&2) and suggestions for classroom activities before and after your visit (below).

There are also 2 downloads designed for older students, Junior Cycle / Key Stage 3 and Senior Cycle / Key Stage 4.

VISITING THE EXHIBITION WITH PRIMARY CLASSES / KEY STAGE 1&2

Before the visit to the exhibition:

Talk to the children about what museums are and what they do.

Discuss why particular types of objects are in museums.

Identify links between their work in school and their visit to the museum.

Set the children a number of tasks to be carried out during their time at the exhibition.

They could:

1. Record their impression of the building, its atmosphere, how objects are displayed. They could explore and develop these ideas by collecting visual and other information in a sketchbook to choose areas they wish to develop.
2. Focus on the main purpose of their visit, for example– on a key idea or on a small number of objects or rooms.
3. Scan the objects on display and try to make connections between them, for example making links between objects with similar uses or from different periods.
4. Try to gain information quickly, for example- What is the oldest object? Most valuable? Most useful?
5. Invite the children to carry out independent research, for example, picking their favourite object and later trying to reconstruct it in the classroom, perhaps taking on the role of the artist or maker in a different time or culture.

During the visit or using a handling collection:

Use the activity sheets provided or create your own.

Use a series of open questions to discuss an object:

Materials

What colour is it? What is it made of?

How big is it? Is it heavy or light? What shape is it?

Does it feel hard or soft, rough or smooth? Does it feel warm or cold?

Does it make a noise?

Production

Who made it? When was it made? Where was it made? Why was it made?

Use

What is it for? Who might use it? Why might they use it? When and where might they use it?

Aesthetic Value

Do you like how it looks? Why? What would you do to improve how it looks?

After the visit to the exhibition:

Review the visit with the children. Encourage them to respond to the objects or pictures in an open way: Did the objects impress? Inspire? What would the artist or maker say about the object? What does the object say about the time or culture it existed in?

Try some arts and crafts exercises with the children based on the handling objects in the collection using different materials, tools and techniques, for example - making a St. Brigid's Cross or learning the different parts of the axe and putting one together (simple instructions on these are provided).

Use postcards from the museum or gallery in the classroom, for example:

The archaeologist game:

Cut up a postcard of an object. Divide the class into groups and give a different segment of the card to each group. Ask them to imagine they are archaeologists and have found a small piece of an object in the ground. What is it? What does the whole object look like? What was it for? How old do they think it is? Can they draw the rest of the object? Can they describe it to the rest of the class? How does their version compare to the real thing?

Postcards can also be used for memory games, 'pairs', starting points for discussions, debates or creative writing exercises.

These activities incorporate fun ways of learning about history, geography, art and crafts, religion and personal, citizenship and social and health educational studies.

