



YOU BE THE CURATOR!

VMHC EDUCATION

You Be the Curator! Instruction Packet

THE ROLE OF A MUSEUM CURATOR

1. *You be the Curator* asks you to step into the role of creating a museum exhibition. Before beginning, think about the role of a **museum curator**. Have you heard the word curator before? Do you know what a curator does?
2. **Curators use the items & objects in museum collections** to create exhibitions for guests to visit and learn from. What are some museums you've been to and exhibits that you've seen? Do you have a favorite exhibit or museum experience?
3. At the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, we focus on telling stories about Virginia history. This means **curators must decide what story they want to tell**: will an exhibition be about a certain person, a certain place, a certain time, or a certain event? Will it talk about one experience, or multiple experiences? Everything that has ever happened is history – which means everything has a story! After curators decide what they want to say, they must decide which objects best tell that story.

YOU BE THE CURATOR | STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Today, it is **your turn to become a curator** by creating an exhibit about Colonial Virginia using objects from the VMHC collections. Before beginning, what do you already know about Colonial Virginia? If you need a refresher, visit our [Story of Virginia Online Exhibition](#).
2. In the *You be the Curator* Image Packet there are seventeen **objects that can be mixed and matched to form a variety of exhibits about Colonial Virginia**. We don't expect you to already be experts, so we've also included a list with some information about each item.
3. After looking through the selected objects, **choose FIVE "must have" artifacts** to teach people about Colonial Virginia. You can print out the objects, tape up your top five choices and take a picture of your object selection! (**No printer? No problem. Just copy and paste the images into a Word Document or PowerPoint of your own!*)
4. After choosing your objects, **choose a title for your exhibit**. Remember – titles can be funny, but they aren't meant to be tricky! Remember: you want your visitors to know what to expect from your exhibit. (*Need help finding the perfect title? Check out the Title Worksheet in this packet.*)
5. Now that you have your objects and a title to connect them, you can **write exhibit labels**. Visitors don't always know what they are looking at in your exhibit, so exhibit labels help give information and tell parts of the story. (*Need help telling the story? Check out the Exhibit Label Worksheet in this packet.*)
6. After you finish, **think back to choosing your objects & reflect on your exhibit**. What made it hard or easy to pick items? Does your exhibit include stories from all the different types of people who lived in Colonial Virginia? Why or why not? If you already knew a lot about Colonial Virginia, is there anything missing from the list of objects that you wished you could include? What is something you learned?

KEEP CURATING | THERE ARE MORE STORIES TO BE TOLD!

- Visit the [Virginia History Explorer](#) to find objects from other time periods in our collection or create a "Museum of You" with the objects in your house. **What can people learn about you and your life from the exhibit you put together?**

Show us what you're up to! Tag us in a picture at any step of the process and share with our social media @VMHCEducation on Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook. We'd love to share your exhibit, and the next generation of curators, with our followers!

YOU BE THE CURATOR! Title Worksheet

Museum exhibit titles are created to help visitors understand what they might see if they visit an exhibit. Below, you will find three exhibitions we have at the museum. For each exhibit title, answer the questions below, and then visit our website to learn more about the exhibits, take virtual tours, and download additional resources.

The Story of Virginia: An American Experience

What do you think this exhibit is about?

What is something you think you might find in this exhibit? Why?

What is something you think you wouldn't find in this exhibit? Why?

Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality

What do you think this exhibit is about?

What is something you think you might find in this exhibit? Why?

What is something you think you wouldn't find in this exhibit? Why?

Agents of Change: Female Activism in Virginia from Women's Suffrage to Today

What do you think this exhibit is about?

What is something you think you might find in this exhibit? Why?

What is something you think you wouldn't find in this exhibit? Why?

Think about what your exhibit is about. What will visitors find inside? What do you want them to learn?

Your Exhibit Title:

YOU BE THE CURATOR! Exhibit Label Worksheet

Exhibit labels should answer the question WHY did you include this item in your exhibit? How does this item add to the story? A single object can mean different things, depending on what you are trying to teach the visitor. A painting can be important because it belonged to a famous person, because it can teach us about the artist, because there aren't many paintings like it, or because it shows us what life might have been like in a certain time period.

To show you how one object can be interpreted multiple ways, we will look at a painting in our collection that's been used in several exhibits and the three labels that were written. After you read each label, answer the questions below. (*Note – this painting is not from the Colonial Virginia time period.)



Slave Auction, Virginia, by LeFavre Cranstone c. 1860s (VMHC Accession Number 1991.70)

An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia (2011-2015)

Enslaved African Americans generally welcomed the war as an end to intolerable conditions. Charles Grandy remembered, “All dem what could pray ‘gin to pray more’n ever. So glad God sendin’ de war.” One of the worst abuses was the slave auction, a horribly degrading experience in itself and one that often separated family members. Virginia novelist George Tucker wrote, “One not accustomed to this spectacle, is extremely shocked to see being, of the same species as himself, set up for sale to the highest bidder, like horses or cattle.” Here a British artist dared to record the spectacle, though he idealized it. Because of the critical need for black labor, auctions lessened during the war, but they did not cease.

Story of Virginia (2015-Today)

After an 1808 act of Congress abolished the international slave trade, a domestic trade flourished. Richmond became the largest slave-trading center in the Upper South, and the slave trade was Virginia’s largest industry. It accounted for the sale of as many as two million people from Richmond to the Deep South, where the cotton industry provided a market for enslaved labor.

Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality (2019-2020)

Virginia had two of the nation's largest slave markets in Richmond and Alexandria, making scenes such as this common. Between 1820-1860, an estimated 350,000 enslaved individuals left the Commonwealth – most through the interstate slave trade.

Write down two observations about each exhibit's label.

What is similar between them?

What is different?

Why do you think some of those differences exist?

Which label do you like the best?

Choose one object from your exhibit and write your label here.

Object Name:

Exhibit Label:

What was difficult about this? Why?

How does an exhibit label differ from the information you were given in your object packets?