MAKING A MUSEUM

Gallery themes and ideas pack. Inspiration sheets to create your own exhibitions in school based on collections at the Dorset Museum

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In November 2019, we visited Dorchester Middle School with our inflatable museum. The day was formed as part of the Kids Takeover Day which is a national event for museums, galleries, historic homes and heritage sites invite young people in to take over jobs normally done by adults and on this day, they were taking over the roles of exhibition designer, curators and tour guides.

The pupils were asked to respond to the following themes:

**Natural Dorset, People’s Dorset and Artists’ Dorset.**

Pupils were also encouraged to explore ways in which museums make exhibitions and activities as relevant and appropriate to young people as possible, and to incorporate these ideas into their exhibitions.

The final exhibitions were displayed in and around the Inflatable Museum. There were some fantastic creations in the exhibition and students put in a lot of work curating their pieces for display including: information panels on famous Dorset people, beautiful paintings of Dorset landscapes, replica models of objects such as the composting toilet. We were also educated by displays of their own collections from home such as fossils, which were brought to life by labels written about them with lots of information.

So, over to you!

We are inviting you and your classes to create responses to our gallery themes! Use the inspiration sheets to find out about the themes of our new galleries and the objects that are going on display.

**What could you create in response to these?** You could take one object to research, recreate or produce a whole class worth of exhibits for display. This is perfect for cross curricula activities.

Please get in touch if you would like more information and ideas to take this forward with your classes. We are looking forward to seeing what you produce!
All about Dorset people, from past occupants to present day and visitors! From ancient romans, Vikings, Punch and Judy puppeteers, smugglers and holiday makers...

The People’s Dorset gallery will tell the story of Dorset’s people from around 400,000 BC to the present day.

Discover the importance of Dorset’s landscapes to prehistoric people and explore the many important finds by archaeologists since the 19th Century.

Reflect on how the land and sea have shaped the experience of living in Dorset from medieval times to the present.

Explore stories of Dorset people including farmers, smugglers, religious martyrs, social reformers, political rebels and holidaymakers.

Some questions to explore
• Who lived in Dorset in the past?
• How did they live?
• What were their struggles?
• Can you find facts about the people who lived here and how this has changed or stayed the same?
• Is there any one you know who has always lived in Dorset? What do they remember?
Some objects or themes to research

- Moules Earth closet (composting toilet!)
- Clandon Barrow Gold Lozenge
  What archaeological treasure has been discovered in Dorset? What can it tell us about the people who lived here?
- Romans
  Research Romans in Durnovaria (Dorchester) or Dorset. How did they live?, what did they eat?, what did they wear?, how were mosaics made? etc
- Dorset Ooser mask
  A wooden head that featured in the 19th-century folk culture of Melbury Osmond

- Punch Puppet
  Pupils could research the history of the punch and Judy show at Weymouth. Who made the puppets and performed/s the shows? Create your own theatre or puppet show about Dorset
- Shipwrecks
  Research the history of smuggling in Dorset

Some Dorset people to investigate

- Mary Anning
- Thomas Hardy
- William Barnes
- Elizabeth Muntz
- Powys family
- Sylvia Townsend Warner
- TE Lawrence
- Isaac Gulliver
The Natural Dorset gallery will tell the story of Dorset’s changing natural world over 250 million years. The landscape, the living creatures and the people who have studied it.

Explore a time when Dorset was under the sea and the large marine reptiles living there to the rolling fills and coastline we see today.

Discover the county’s incredible geology, discover more about the UNESCO World Heritage Jurassic Coast site, and meet the creatures and wildlife that have lived both in the past and today.

Uncover how early people used the land’s rich natural resources and started to dramatically shape the landscape.

Meet the Dorset people who made important scientific discoveries that shaped our understanding of the natural world.

Some questions to explore

• Where and what is Dorset?
• What are it’s characteristics?
• Why is it special?
• What lives here?
• What are the endangered species?
• How can we protect Dorset for the future?
Some objects or themes to research

- ‘Swanage crocodile’ or pliosaur fossil
  *Reptiles from Jurassic age. What other prehistoric reptiles roamed the land?*

- Butterflies and insects
  *What insects are local to Dorset? Are there any that are protected? What other wildlife is under threat?*

- Geology and fossils
  *What are the different types and timelines?*

- Birds
  *Great bustard- an endangered species*

Key themes to investigate

- Underwater
  *Jurassic period: 201-145 million years ago. This period is characterised by rising sea levels and warm temperatures*

- Ice Age
  *Mammals and the appearance of humans*

- Discovery
  *The age of reason*

  *Early 1800s – first modern scientific ideas about geology and the Earth’s history began to emerge. Skeletons and bizarre creatures that were being found in the early Jurassic rocks around Lyme Regis grabbed the attention of many important scientists of the day.*

Some people and subjects you might like to research

- Mary Annings
- Alfred Russel Wallace
- Charles Darwin
- James Buckman
- Mansell Playdell
- Fossil hunting/Fossil timelines/Fossil folklore
How has Dorset been captured in the past to present day, who were the artists that live here and what were they inspired by?

The Artists’ Dorset gallery will celebrate the richness of Dorset’s artistic heritage and showcase the county’s contemporary art scene.

In this gallery you will be able to explore Museum’s important collection of paintings, drawings and sculpture and can discover how artists have been inspired by the county’s unique geology, landscape and way of life.

Changing displays will tell the story of different creative communities in the county, and will show the work of local artists and community groups.

A Prints and Drawing study room will help visitors to explore parts of the collection up-close and take part in creative workshops.
Some key things to explore

- Dorset’s landscape has attracted many artists to the region (Dorset as a place of the picturesque) and has been a place of inspiration for them
- Fine art is a record of how Dorset looked or was imagined at different points in time
- Dorset’s elite families have often been depicted, emphasising their status within Dorset society
- Paintings of Dorset individuals are a record of who was considered important or shaped the county’s history
- Paintings can help us to illuminate the social history of the county, e.g. agricultural methods and housing.

Things to research or recreate

- Famous Dorset Artists
- Pictures of worthy Dorset folk, their jobs and way of life
- Pictures of Dorset Landscapes
- Pictures relevant to Dorset as a cultural retreat
- Dorset sculptures or monuments

Famous Dorset Artists to investigate

- Elizabeth Frink
- Thomas Gainsborough
- George Romney
- William Hogarth
- Alfred Stevens
CREATE MUSEUM LABELS

A great exhibition needs 'interpretation'. This is a term we use in museums to describe information produced for visitors. Consider who your audience is and that will help you to write the text for your object.

Here's some tips for writing information for your displays:

TOP TIPS!

• Keep it brief and to the point. Use short sentences. It can be difficult to read long pieces of text when you are standing in a noisy and busy exhibition
• Include simple pictures or diagrams if useful
• Stick to a specific word count – this can be harder than it looks
• Include a fascinating 'Did you know...?' fact to grab attention
• Be creative: write a story, poetry or haiku label, or ‘personify’ the object by writing from the object’s perspective
• Remind students to always keep the reader in mind. What information do they really need to know? What might they find interesting?
• How does this object fit with the theme of the gallery? Why is it important to Dorset?
All objects in the Museum come with information which includes: what they are, where they are from, material etc. As a class you might want to make your own catalogue of objects that students have curated. Start by completing a label for your creations like below!

**LABELS IN DETAIL**

- Item name: __________________________
- Item number: ________________________
- Date made: __________________________
- Materials: __________________________
- Maker/artist: ________________________
- Owner: ______________________________

Use the space in the box to write a short description, fascinating fact or to create a story or poetry label.
Museum exhibitions often have interactives or games to help engage the audience, so they have fun while reading and learning about the displays. Here's some examples of what you could create for your displays...

**True or false game**
This could be based on students’ ‘Did you know...?’ facts.

**Who/what am I?**
Invite visitors to guess what the mystery object/who the mystery person is.

**Create a jigsaw**
Print out and cut up a picture of an object in the exhibition and turn it into a jigsaw

**Exhibition treasure hunt**
Challenge visitors to find five specific things that feature somewhere in the exhibition.

**Create a storytelling area**

**Create a dressing up area**

**Exhibition quiz**
How many questions can visitors answer about your theme?