

The Object

Summary

In this scenario, the participants trace an object from its creation, via the original cultural context, when it is collected, is put on display, and finally archived. The object plays the central role, and the participants play people that for one reason or another come in contact with the object.

Background

Museums make a host of decisions about their objects. While some are given as donations to the museum and other are actively acquired, it is the museum that decides if the object deserves to be in its collection.

Of those objects that are kept in the museum, only a few are put on display. For those, the museum creates a context: the object is put into an exhibition that frames the stories told, reflected in the context and placement as well as signs and other information provided. Finally, museums will cull their collections at times, making critical decisions about which objects to keep and which will be destroyed.

At the same time, museums often know very little about the actual objects, their history and their lifecycle. This scenario was inspired by museum objects such as this one.

<https://digitaltmuseum.se/021027881314/kruka>

This object was donated to the museum by a private donor. Nobody knows how old it is, or what it was used for.

Aims and goals:

- Reflect on the life cycle of museum objects, what makes them valuable and what is not valued about them
- Reflect on the stories we tell in museum exhibitions. What alternative stories exist?

Groups and roles in the scenario

- Scene one: Museum personnel
- Scene two-three: Villagers
- Scene four: Villagers and the Expedition
- Scene five: Museum personnel

Preparations (before players come)

1. Choose an object. You can either just buy a cheap object in a thrift store, or do a 3D-print of a scanned museum object.
2. Place a big table in the middle of the room with chairs around. Place the Object out of sight but near to reach for you as a facilitator.
3. Place all materials on a separate table, readily available
4. Print and prepare all handouts. Put all roles for a specific scene in separate envelopes and write the number of the scene on the envelope.

Players: 4-9 including facilitator, optimal 6.

Time: 1 hour 20 min

Supplies:

- An object
- Printed roles, sorted by scene
- Printed instructions for the facilitator
- Printed handout
- Large papers
- Pens for writing
- Pens/crayons for decorating the object
- Optional: Clay

Keywords

Cultural heritage, cultural appropriation, deaccession

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Introduction: [10 minutes]

Present the scenario

This will be a scenario about an object at a museum. During the scenario we will make time jumps to play out different scenes to follow the history of the object and how it ended up in the museum. The scenes will not be played in chronological order. You will be given new roles for each scene.

Role play - How you do it

If your participants have previous experience of role-playing, this can be omitted.

1. They will play different roles
2. Their roles will have different agencies and wishes, express them as if they were your own.
3. You do not represent your own opinions, you express the opinions of your role.
4. The game master will indicate clearly when the role play starts and ends.

Background

Background about the game:

1. Where are we: In this scenario we will make several time jumps. Each time you will get an introduction to where and when.
2. Why are we there: You will play people who come in contact with the object. You will get new roles for most scenes.
3. What are we doing there: That will be set by your role for each new scene.
4. Read out the short flavour text:

The object was created. An idea in a person's mind became solid and took the form of an object. It was needed, it was wanted by its creator. Through its life, it has seen many things and heard many things. Now it remembers and looks back at its life. Who has loved it, shunned it, hated it? What impact has it made? Will it be remembered?

Role Play

Tell the participants that they will play several small scenes, and that the scenario will end with an epilogue. Tell them that the most scenes will last for only a couple of minutes.

Scene 1: The End (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the roles for scene 1 randomly among the participants. Hand out roles randomly. If you have fewer players than nine, use the lower numbered roles.
2. Read the introduction to Scene 1.
It is 2019. You are playing staff at a museum. You are at a deaccession meeting; the goal is to cull the museum collection. At the end of this scene you will decide to thin out and get rid of the object from the collection. How you get there are up to you.
3. Tell the participants that you will count down from 5 to zero. And that when you reach zero everyone will play their characters. Ask the participants to close their eyes and count down slowly from five to zero. When you reach zero ask them to open their eyes and read out loud:
"I am the object. I am the object and this is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."
4. You, the facilitator, plays a curator. Start the scenario by opening this meeting of deaccession, where your task is to collectively select which objects to cull from the museum collection.
5. Hand out the *list of considerations for evaluating an object*. Let everyone read the list and discuss it shortly (1-2 minutes maximum).
6. Look at the list of objects that might be thinned out. Select number 1237 - The Object and hand out the *information paper about the object*.
7. Everybody at the meeting discusses the object. When they have reached the conclusion (if this takes too long time the facilitator speeds up the process) the scene ends.
8. Take the object in your hands and hold it up again, reading:

"I am the object. I am the object. This is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

Scene 2: The Creation (10 minutes)

1. Put crayons, dough, etc. on the table. Hide the object for the moment.
2. Read the introduction to Scene 2. (If you are using a replica from a specific museum collection, you can change the setting of this scene to something that fits with the museum object.)

This is a scene describing where and how the object was made, and why. The scene will end when you have finished making the object. You are allowed to make changes to it.

3. Hand out the roles for Scene 2.
4. Tell the participants that you will count down from 5 to zero. And that when you reach zero everyone will play their characters. Ask the participants to close their eyes and count down slowly from five to zero. When you reach zero ask them to open their eyes and read out loud:

"I am the object. I am the object and this is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

5. You, the facilitator, opens the scene by saying that they most get this new piece of <whatever your object is> done tonight.
6. If you have clay, let the participants first create a pot. After a while (around 2-3 minutes) take it and say "let's put it in the oven". If you do not have clay, let them instead draw pictures and discuss what the object will be like.
7. Make a small time-jump. Bring out the object and ask the participants to decorate it.
8. End the scene when the participants have decorated for a while by saying "Now it will be enough, it is done, we have created an object".
9. The facilitator holds up the object in his/her hand and says:

"I am the object". I am the object. This is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

Scene 3: A Close Call (maximum 5 minutes)

1. Read the introduction to Scene 3. (If you are using a replica from a specific museum collection, you can change the setting of this scene to something that fits with the museum object.)

This is a short scene where the object is used in everyday life. It is in a rural setting and a few decades after the object was created. You are preparing for a marriage. During this scene, the object will almost break/gets destroyed/become thrown away but last minute it is saved. It is ok if it gets partly broken or so during the scene. How this all will happen is up to you.

1. Hand out the roles for Scene 3.
2. Tell the participants that you will count down from 5 to zero. And that when you reach zero everyone will play their characters. Ask the participants to close their eyes and count down slowly from five to zero. When you reach zero ask them to open their eyes and read out loud:

"I am the object. I am the object and this is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

3. The facilitator plays one in the household and starts by engaging in some activity where the object can come to use. It can be cooking, preparing a wedding, making medicine or such (you as a facilitator can decide).
4. If the participants do not do it by themselves quickly enough, initiate play that leads to a point where the object is nearly destroyed.
5. End the scene when the object has been saved.
6. The facilitator holds up the object in his/her hand and says:

"I am the object". I am the object. This is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

Scene 4: Leaving home (5 minutes)

2. Place the object in a reasonably central and visible place.

3. Read the introduction to Scene 4. (If you are using a replica from a specific museum collection, you can change the setting of this scene to something that fits with the museum object.)

The object is already old, a keepsake more than in regular use. An expedition in the late 19th century comes to a village to collect material for a new museum. At the end of the scene the expedition members will get the object and leave. How you get there are up to you.

7. Hand out the roles for Scene 4.

8. Tell the participants that you will count down from 5 to zero. And that when you reach zero everyone will play their characters. Ask the participants to close their eyes and count down slowly from five to zero. When you reach zero ask them to open their eyes and read out loud:

"I am the object. I am the object and this is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

9. You, the facilitator, plays a local guide hired by the expedition. You bring the expedition to the village and introduce them to the villagers.
10. Let the villagers and expedition members discuss. If they don't start to focus on the object, nudge them by lifting it up and say "this looks interesting".
11. End the scene when the expedition has gained the object.
12. The facilitator holds up the object in his/her hand and says:
"I am the object". I am the object. This is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

Scene 5: Leaving home (10-15 minutes)

1. Read the introduction to Scene 4. (If you are using a replica from a specific museum collection, you can change the setting of this scene to something that fits with the museum object.)

We are now in modern times. The object is on display in the museum as one of a large set of similar artefacts. The museum is about to open a new exhibition about life in the villages during the turn of the century. During the scene, you will discuss and decide on the focus of the exhibition. You will consider using the object and how it can be best displayed. It is up to you if it ends up in the new exhibition or not.

2. Hand out the roles for Scene 5.

3. Tell the participants that you will count down from 5 to zero. And that when you reach zero everyone will play their characters. Ask the participants to close their eyes and count down slowly from five to zero. When you reach zero ask them to open their eyes and read out loud:

"I am the object. I am the object and this is my story. My life has been long and I have seen much, heard much."

4. You, the facilitator, play the exhibition coordinator. Open the scene by giving the group the news that the museum will open a new exhibition. In this meeting, they will brainstorm about the new exhibition. If you have a large group of participants you can split them in two groups and give them one handout per group.
5. Give them the handout for the scene: *Brainstorm for the new exhibition*. Put out large sheets of paper (at least one per group) and pens.
6. During the scene, inspire them and/or question their decisions. Make sure they keep the ideation process going.
7. Reconvene and have the groups present their ideas for the exhibition coordinator and each other.
8. Let them collectively decide if they are going to use the object or not.

Epilogue

1. The facilitator holds up the object in his/her hand and says:

"I am the object. I am the object. I have seen much and I have heard much. I have been loved and shunned. I have been put to good use, and I have been put away. Through my

life, I have been worn and torn. I am neither good nor evil but I have been used for both. Now my days are over. I came from dust, and dust I shall once again become. I am the object; my journey ends here."

Debrief

Take a round and let everyone reflect on:

- How did it feel to play the scenario?
- What did the scenario want to say?

Then go into a more detailed discussion related to each of the individual scenes.

Scene 1: The end

- The process of deaccession was based on the Swedish national heritage boards guidelines.
- The roles were based on different attitudes towards the collections and exhibitions, that are common in museums and reflected in literature on New Museology.
- How do emotional and personal opinions affect decision-making?

Scene 2: The creation

- The scene was primarily focussed on highlighting how people interact in a creative process.

Scene 3: Close call

- This scene was intended to give some context and background for the object, for the purpose of the following scenes.

Scene 4: Leaving home

- The scene was included to reflect ethical issues related to how objects are acquired.
- Did you as a player read the village as one in the same cultural region as the museum or was it from a foreign culture? How does that affect the interpretation of the situation?
- If you ran it as scripted, it was based on how local objects sometimes would end up in Swedish heritage museums around the end of the 19th century.
- When does collection become cultural appropriation?

Scene 5: At the museum

- The roles in this scene reflect different attitudes towards New Museology, the goals or a museum, and how objects and collections are displayed.
- How does it work to be creative in this type of groups?

Curious?

Traditionally, museums have been seen as institutions responsible for conserving and classifying historical objects. In the late 80s and early 90s, political and social changes prompted a renewed critical perspective on the practices of cultural heritage. Many museum collections are aggregations of items from different parts of the world, some acquired through private donations, some through purchase while some are stolen goods, or war pillage. The classification systems have also been criticized as flawed or even racist with focus of historical narrative on the white western world. With the rise of identity politics, many museums found themselves questioning their own identity. That led to a renewed interest in the needs of the local communities and the contributions that museums could make to the modern world.

Increasingly museums turned their attention towards quality of user experiences focusing on joy and engagement. The visitor would be the central point of consideration when new plans

would be made. That also led to quick adoption of technology as an element associated with fun and entertainment. Digital solutions such as displays, touch interfaces, games and even augmented and virtual reality have proliferated within cultural heritage industry. Still, museums are largely defined by their collections and the combination of preservation and visitor considerations is not easy to navigate.

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Merriman, Nick. "22 The crisis of representation in archaeological museums." *Cultural Resource Management in Contemporary Society* (2000): 300.

Middleton, V. "The future demand for museums 1990-2001." *The Museums Profession: Internal and External Relations* (1991): 139-160.

Museum association - disposal toolkit

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/collections/disposal-toolkit>

Witcomb, Andrea. "Interactivity: thinking beyond." *A companion to museum studies* 39 (2006): 353-61.

Appendix 1: Roles

Hand out roles randomly. If you have fewer players than nine, use the lower numbered roles.

Scene 1: The End

<p>1 The emotional You love this quirky object and don't want to get rid of it.</p>	<p>6 The rule observer You want to follow the guidelines and make the right decision based on them.</p>
<p>2 The hoarder You never want to get rid of anything. Keep everything!</p>	<p>7 The crowd pleaser All you care about is what is best for the visitor audience and public opinion.</p>
<p>3 The pragmatic If it is no longer of use, get rid of it.</p>	<p>8 The storyteller Does the object have an interesting story? Or can you make one? If not, get rid of it!</p>
<p>4 The planner Knows that the museum is running out of storage space.</p>	<p>9 The team player You just want to find a solution everyone is happy with.</p>
<p>5 The effective You just want this to be over quick, make a decision, you don't care so much what it will be.</p>	<p>The facilitator Plays a curator in this scene. Your goal is to lead the meeting and get the group to make a decision</p>

Scene 2: The creation

<p>1. The Artist You want to create something beautiful</p>	<p>6. The joker You want to make it feel fun</p>
<p>2. The practical You want to create something practical</p>	<p>7. The meticulous You want to do it carefully and thoroughly</p>
<p>5. The effective You want it done quickly</p>	<p>8. The planner You want to create something that lasts for a long time</p>
<p>4. The social You just want to chat with the others</p>	<p>9. The team player You just want to find a solution everyone is happy with</p>
<p>5. The apprentice You want to learn how to create such objects</p>	<p>The facilitator Plays a leader. Stay in the background, steer the scene if needed. Speed it up if needed and decide when they are done.</p>

Scene 3: Close call

<p>1. The Bride/Bridegroom You are excited and stressed for the celebration.</p>	<p>6. The Grandparent You are more pragmatic than your son and daughter-in-law right now. You need to remind them that there will be more weddings in the future.</p>
<p>2. The Mother You want a grand celebration with a big feast to show off.</p>	<p>7. The Other Grandparent You are very focused on preparing the feast for the wedding and time is running out quickly. It's time to work, not bicker.</p>
<p>3. A Father You want to make sure the young ones have everything they need to start their new life.</p>	<p>8. The Housemaid You are being kept busy while still having to keep up with your other chores. You haven't had much sleep lately and hope it will all be over soon.</p>
<p>4. The Older Sibling You are excited for your sibling, but you also hope to get married. You are getting a little nervous that there will be nothing left when your turn comes.</p>	<p>9. The Farm-hand You love a big wedding, mostly because you get to join in and there will be much to eat and drink. You are ready to help wherever you're needed.</p>
<p>5. The Younger Sibling You have no interest in all this mayhem around you. But you are very excited about all the food being prepared.</p>	<p>The facilitator You can choose to play a family member. Remember to steer the scene towards the object if the participants forget.</p>

Scene 4: Leaving home

<p>1. Expedition: the leader</p> <p>You want to get nice objects fast and cheap</p>	<p>6.Expedition: the expert</p> <p>You realise that the object might be old and probably worth a lot of money</p>
<p>2.Villager: The nostalgic</p> <p>This object means a lot to you and you don't want to give it away</p>	<p>7.Villager: The greedy</p> <p>You want to get as much money as possible from giving the expedition the object.</p>
<p>3.Villager: The Marie Kondo</p> <p>You want to get rid of stuff anyway (but better if for a good price)</p>	<p>8.Expedition: The brutal</p> <p>You have no respect for the villagers and just want to get the job here done.</p>
<p>4.Expedition: the generous</p> <p>You want to give the villagers a fair deal</p>	<p>9.Villager: The expert</p> <p>You know what the object is and understand its true value.</p>
<p>5.Villager: The defensive</p> <p>You think the expedition has no right to come here and ask for objects.</p>	<p>The facilitator</p> <p>Plays a local guide who helps the expedition. Goal: keep in the background, try to help make the roleplay interesting. Make sure the players come to focus on the object.</p>

Scene 5: At the museum

<p>1.The market manager</p> <p>Your focus is to attract new visitors to the museum. You are a crowd pleaser.</p>	<p>6.The contemporary</p> <p>You want the exhibition to say something about our world today and connect it to the present. You'd like to make a political statement.</p>
<p>2.The historian</p> <p>You want the exhibition to be accurate, informative and correct. And display objects.</p>	<p>7.The digitalized</p> <p>VR, AR, apps LED-lights, sensors... You love it!</p>
<p>3.The artistic</p> <p>You want everything to feel new and awoke questions and feelings</p>	<p>8.The economical</p> <p>You like cheap solutions.</p>
<p>4.The respectful</p> <p>You want to honour the people who once lived and portray them in a respectful way.</p>	<p>9.The old school</p> <p>You want a traditional exhibition. The objects speak for themselves.</p>
<p>5.The storyteller</p> <p>You want to tell a capturing story. You have no problem to use imagination and creative interpretation if needed. What is truth anyway...</p>	<p>The facilitator</p> <p>You play a coordinator for the exhibition. During the scene ask questions and inspire creativity.</p>

Appendix 2: Handouts

Scene 1: The Object

Item 1237 - Pot

Pot, large, tapered, earthenware. Beaded round opening.

PROVENANCE

- Produced 1600 - 1850 (estimate)
- Accession (included into collection) 1897

DONOR Lundqvist, C O

DONOR HOMESTEAD Bergsboda

METADATA

- NAME Pot
- ALTERNATIVE NAME Pot Vessel (original classification)
- NUMBER item1237
- ALTERNATIVE NUMBER NM.001237 (Earlier number from original collection)
- TYPE Pot Storage
- HEIGHT approx 20 cm
- DIAMETER approx 20 cm
- MATERIAL Earthenware
- IN COLLECTION General collection of home accessories.
- OTHER One of several similar items
- LOCATION Magazine 3 Shelf 14, Compartment 75
- OWNER City Museum
- INSTITUTION City Museum
- LATEST UPDATED 31 mars 2019

Scene 1: Deaccession considerations

Considerations in the process of deaccession

Economy and public opinion

- How will deaccession of this item affect public opinion about museum?
- How will deaccession affect the will for people to donate to or engage in the museum?
- Why is the item not used in museum activities?

History of the item

- Why was the item added to the collection?
- Is the accession history interesting in itself?
- Does the item have a high value from the perspective of cultural or natural history?
- Does the item have a unique and clear provenance and history?

Future considerations

- Is it likely that the item will become more relevant in the future?
- Is it possible to imagine a future use for the item?

Uniqueness

- Is the object unique or are there many similar objects in the collections?
- Is it likely that other museums have similar objects?

Options for deaccession

- Can the object be of better use for another museum, in another archive or collection?
- Can a deaccession of this item release resources so that other parts of the collection can be better cared for and used?
- Does the deaccession create space to allow better management of the collections and continued renewal?

Scene 5: Brainstorm material

Brainstorm session: the new exhibition

What should be the theme for the new exhibition?

Why is that a good theme?

Describe at least 3 ideas/installations for the exhibition that you think the public will like.

This year we do have a special focus at the museum: digitalization. How can digital experiences be integrated in the new exhibition?

1. Choose a certain object (for instance a piece of pottery). Describe how that object can be displayed. In your description include the following:
 1. What story do you want to tell by exhibiting this object?
 2. How do you display in a way so you do justice to the cultural heritage connected to the object?
 3. How do you display it in a way so it gets interesting for the public (do consider different age groups and target groups)
 4. How will this object relate to the rest of the exhibition?

Use a large sheet of paper to make a drawing on how the display of the object could look!!