

Museum Field Trip or “Reading” Public History Spaces

xx/xx/xx

Group # _____

Names _____

Today you will observe a cultural space in detail—i.e. its patrons, its curation, and the language it uses in official documentation. By doing so, our class will consider how institutions like museums and archives describe historical narratives to the public.

INSTRUCTIONS

- **xx:xx: MEET** with your writing group outside the museum.
- **xx:xx:** Before you go inside, **READ** this entire sheet together.
- **xx:xx:** Once inside, **WALK** and **OBSERVE** with your group and **RECORD** your findings below. Make sure you visit both:
 - ◆ Museum “access” spaces—i.e. the entryway, halls, giftshop, and free literature like pamphlets
 - ◆ A *single* exhibit of your group’s choice
- **xx:xx:** Outside the museum (in the quad), **DISCUSS** the follow-up questions below with your group and **RECORD** your responses.
- **xx:xx:** Turn in this worksheet to your instructor before you leave.

QUESTIONS TO ASK / THINGS TO LOOK FOR

You are not required to respond to every question. Focus on the ones that stand out or interest you. Try to respond to at least one in each section.

→ **LANGUAGE**

- ◆ In what language(s) is information available? Are they written, audio, braille, others?

- ◆ What voice (passive or active) and perspective are used when describing the objects on display? Who is writing these descriptions and is their name included?
- ◆ Describe the tone and accessibility of the language. Is it easy to understand? Does it use jargon or unfamiliar vocabulary? Is it serious, entertaining, informative, provocative?

→ PEOPLE

- ◆ What audience(s) is this institution trying to reach?
- ◆ What audience(s) are actually present?
- ◆ What people or communities are being represented?
- ◆ Who is staffing the institution? Are they visible? Do they interact with patrons?

→ SPACE & LOCATION

- ◆ Where is the institution? What communities are nearby and are they represented (in the audience or in the subject matter)?
- ◆ Is the space accessible by public transit? Is there parking?
- ◆ Is the building handicap accessible?

→ OBJECTS

- ◆ Where and when are the objects on display from? How does this compare to the time/geographic distribution of the institution's complete collections?
- ◆ What information is included about each piece? Where and how is it displayed (pamphlet, plaque, audio tour)?
- ◆ How are objects displayed? Which, if any, are prioritized and how?

→ MONEY

- ◆ Is the institution public or private?
- ◆ Are funders, donors, or benefactors listed anywhere? Who are they?
- ◆ Is there an admission fee? What discounts are offered?

→ ADDITIONAL NOTES & QUESTIONS

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What did you find most interesting or surprising about your observations?

- ◆



→ If you could ask the curators of the museum one question, what would it be?



→ What historical narratives or themes does the museum seem to emphasize? What NON-WRITTEN clues (i.e. visual, spatial) help you understand this?

