DEM APPLES IS JUICY:
CRITIQUING MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS
USING THE DAIJ FORMAT
ART AND LANGUAGE ARTS
GRADES: 7 - 12

BASED ON

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), British
*Ann Ford (Later Mrs. Philip Thicknesse)*, 1760
Oil on canvas
Bequest of Mary M. Emery, 1927.396

OBJECTIVES

- Students will apply the DAIJ (“Dem Apples is Juicy” is a pneumatic device) process of art critique to a real-life or virtual visit to a museum exhibition or element of a museum exhibition.
- Students will infer/discuss inclusion of specific works in the gallery, focusing on *Ann Ford*.
- Students will visit a gallery (either by physical field trip or virtually).
- Students will write a basic review of an exhibition (or item in an exhibition).

BASIC OVERVIEW OF MUSEUM EXHIBITION DESIGN

A museum is a great place to learn about specific artworks, cultures, scientific discoveries, archaeology and more, as well as the past, the present and implications for the future. An exhibit in a museum doesn’t just happen. It takes hours, days, weeks and even months of research and planning to result in an “educational” experience that engages a diverse audience’s visual, aural and even tactile senses. This is what exhibition design is all about.

Merriam Online defines an exhibition as “a public display, as of the work of artists or artisans, the products of farms or factories, the skills of performers, or objects of general interest.”
Museum exhibition design, according to museumplanner.org is, “the making of a plan for the construction of public displays for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment, in the service of society and its development.”

The exhibition design process can be divided into five distinct phases (www.museumplanner.org):

- Concept Development
- Schematic Design
- Design Development
- Final Design
- Construction Documents

According to Maria Lorena Lehman of Sensing Architecture – New Ideas for the Architecture of Tomorrow, there are 10 factors in great museum exhibit design:

- **Motivate Visitors**: Target an audience — the general public and/or specific communities.
- **Focus Content**: Filter content so visitors are not bombarded with information overload
- **Immersion**: Engage visitors within a “story”
- **Modularity**: Present smaller themes instead of one larger complex topic
- **Skimmability**: Information should be easy to take in because visitors are often standing and/or have different levels of education
- **Patterns**: Incorporate traffic/ circulation patterns, exhibit sequence patterns and pre-existing framework patterns (architectural elements)
- **Capture Curiosity**: Use storytelling techniques to engage visitors
- **Interaction**: Give visitors a “fun” experience by tapping into their emotion
- **Integrate Technology**: Technology should enhance visitor’s experience, not detract from it.
- **Layer Content**: Present information in a hierarchical manner

**MATERIALS**

DAIJ Handout / Questions
Handout – Aaron Betsky Blog

**VOCABULARY**

- **Exhibit**: a public display, as of the work of artists or artisans, the products of farms or factories, the skills of performers, or objects of general interest

- **Museum Exhibit Design**: the making of a plan for the construction of public displays for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment, in the service of society and its development

- **Visual**: relating to the sense of sight

- **Aural**: relating to the sense of hearing

- **Tactile**: relating to the sense of touch

- **4-Step Art Critique Process**: Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Judge (or Evaluate)
PROCEDURE*

1. Discuss changes to the Schmidlapp Gallery at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Show pictures before/after. Ask: why do museums change galleries?

2. Show the Focus Object – Ann Ford – and give students time to make inferences about why this might be included in a new exhibit that spans 6000 years.

3. Define exhibit.

4. Using Lehman’s 10 Factors in Museum Design, allow students to select which might be most important to them as viewers of exhibits.

5. Define museum exhibition design.

6. Discuss with students how just like writing a paper or planning a project, there are steps involved with designing museum exhibits: Concept Development (get an idea and develop it) / Schematic Design (sketch or plan what the exhibit will look like) / Design Development (continue to move the design plan forward) / Final Design (put a plan in place for the final exhibition design) / Construction Documents (plan of action to make the exhibit a reality)

7. Have students visit a museum either in-person or virtually. Have students take notes. Allow time for students to discuss the development of the exhibit from start to finish.

8. Review DAIJ process.

9. Go through DAIJ handout and discuss in context of the exhibit(s) that students viewed.

10. Assign DAIJ review for exhibit. Four paragraphs only. Complete sentences. Follow structure on handout.

ASSESSMENT
Students will be assessed based on their overall participation in class discussion and their completion of the DAIJ exhibit review. Grades will be based on quality of writing, grammar and punctuation, and clarity of thought.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Art Connections
Standard 1. Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines.

Visual Arts
Standard 3. Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.
Standard 5. Understands the characteristics and merits of one’s own artwork and the artwork of others.

Language Arts
Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
Standard 4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

* You will need to first decide on a method for your students to view a museum exhibition, either in-person or virtually. See RESOURCES section for suggested virtual museum experiences.
Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

RESOURCES

Schmidlapp Gallery at the Cincinnati Art Museum

Blog
http://www.cincinnatiartmuseum.org/blog/?p=403

CityBeat Review
http://www.citybeat.com/cincinnati/article-24454-mixed_results.html

YouTube (Video) Resources
Planning involved in designing an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BR8Y5oFuq4  (Planning Process)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcSgteSV1gQ&feature=relmfu  (Planning Process)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYh4F0azg&feature=relmfu  (FAQs)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X5j5a26-7U&feature=relmfu  (Evaluation)

On-line Virtual Field Trips

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
Thousands of images archived. Take a Virtual Trip to view famous paintings and sculptures from the museums of the San Francisco Area.
www.thinker.org

Kids Smithsonian
Visit the arts, as well as, numerous other curricular areas.
http://smithsonianeducation.org/students/index.html

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
One of the world’s most famous Art museums. Take a trip without leaving your school.
www.metmuseum.org

Virtual Field Trips
www.noodletrip.com

This is a search engine designed to search for virtual field trips.
http://www.virtual-field-trips.com/DirList.asp

Google Art Project
http://www.googleartproject.com

Websites /On-Line Resources
http://museumplanner.org/
(this gives a good overview of the scope of planning projects in an actual project document)

http://mavic.asn.au/resources
(This website for Museum Victoria gives many resources that could be easily adapted to the classroom, depending on what aspect of exhibition design you would choose.)
(Best practices for museum exhibits from British Columbia Museums Association)

Books

- *Running a Museum: A Practical Handbook*
  (online book available at this link: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001410/141067e.pdf)
Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), British
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Guidelines for Reviewing a Museum Exhibition

A good exhibition review should address most of the following points. Specific questions listed under each item to be suggestions rather than absolutes. In other words, use your good judgment in adapting the DAIJ (Describe/Analyze/Interpret/Judge or Evaluate) model to the assignment. Remember – these are GUIDELINES. All questions do not have to be answered!

**DESCRIBE: WHAT STORY IS THE CURATOR TRYING TO TELL?**

- Include a brief description and summary of what you SEE in the exhibit. What is the subject, topic, thesis or message of the exhibition?
- Based on what you see and have described, what do you think is the purpose or goal of the exhibition? What is the museum trying to accomplish with it?

**ANALYZE: HOW HAS THE CURATOR ORGANIZED THE EXHIBIT TO ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSE?**

- What is the method of the exhibition -- what kinds of objects make up the exhibition and how are they used to tell the story the museum wants to tell?
- How are the objects displayed?
- Can you understand what they are and how they function as evidence to support the theme of the exhibition? Is there a sufficient number or variety of objects to support the theme? Are the objects displayed so that you get a sense of their historical context?
- Do the objects selected document a sense of change over time (or should they)?
- How is the exhibit organized? What is the logic of its organization? Why are the objects arranged just so?
- How do you enter or leave the exhibit (does it matter)?
- Is the exhibit in the form of a historical narrative? Is it thematic? Is it topical? Is it artifact driven? Are the objects ordered so that they demonstrate causality or motivation in human history?
- What kinds of exhibition techniques have been used – how is it "constructed"?
- Are there labels for the objects? What kinds of information do they convey? Are there audio-visual components or interactive displays?
- In what kinds of display cases or sets are the objects displayed? What kind of technical artistry has been used in creating the exhibit?

**INTERPRET: WHAT IS YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE EXHIBIT?**

- What is your interpretation of the exhibition? What did it mean for you? What is its importance (did it teach you something? was it entertaining? did it exemplify "how not to do a museum exhibit")?
- What does the exhibition communicate about society or culture? What did you learn by viewing the exhibit? Did you gain any insight about yourself? About others? About history? About culture?
- What does the exhibit reveal about the values and priorities of the museum?
JUDGE OR EVALUATE: WAS THE EXHIBIT SUCCESSFUL? WOULD YOU SEND YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO SEE IT?

- Does the exhibit tell the story the curator intends to tell? Is this an effective exhibit?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are the confusing parts (and why)? What are the enjoyable parts (and why)? Does any part of the exhibit make a point in a particularly dramatic or delightful way? Does any part of the exhibit cause you to lose interest?
- Is the method effective? Are the objects chosen appropriate to the topic or theme? Do they convince you of the exhibit's message?
- How effective are the constructed aspects of the exhibition? Can you read and understand the labels? Do the audio-visual segments (if any) communicate clearly? Do you understand the purpose of the interactive components? Did you learn from them?
- Does the exhibit create a "world" that tells an effective story?
- Are there any biases or hidden agendas in the exhibit? (Be suspicious.) Who has underwritten the exhibit? Do you detect any biases in the story being told? Does the exhibit suggest that only certain kinds of objects or artifacts are valuable to our culture?
Our visitors seem to be enjoying our new installation in the Schmidlapp Gallery, in which we aim to show eighteen of our most iconic pieces as an introduction to our whole collection of over 60,000 works of art covering six thousand years of human history. I get a lot of questions, though, about those curtains. Why does it look the way it does? And can you touch the curtains? Yes, you can finger those black strings. I could blame the whole design on our excellent in-house architect Eli Meiners, but it was a group effort. We started with the result of some strategic planning we did at the Art Museum almost two years ago. Five different committees, with members from every department, as well as volunteers, examined how we appear, how we work, and how we look. We examined every aspect of what we do, and especially how we bring people and art together. It led us to rethink our exhibitions, our public programs, our communications, and even the website you are looking at right now.

One of the things we realized was that we wanted to make moments where you can truly concentrate on some of the great works of art we have in our collection. You should be able to lose yourself in them, and learn a great deal from a concentrated experience. At the same time, an art museum is a social place and you always want to feel as if you are part of a larger community. It should let you see the best at whatever pace you want, giving you an opportunity to browse, discuss, contemplate, and learn.

We decided to try this out in the Schmidlapp Gallery. I suggested that we might want to think of that long, thin space like a church, with side chapels each devoted to one single work of art. We didn’t want the experience to be too sacred-seeming, though, and we certainly did not want to be blasphemous. Eli suggested hanging the work on beautifully crafted walls, and devising a way to both light them and provide information that would concentrate your gaze. The Venetian plaster backdrops were the result. We still needed a way to define the space around each work, however, and that was difficult. Chief Curator James Crump and Eli both thought that we should try to keep the space open, and our Curator of Learning and Interpretation, Emily Holtrop, pointed out the importance of accommodating tours and docent activities.

Eli found a great new flexible wall system that we could shape according to our needs, altering it as needed. It was cheap and light, but it was also brand new, and the only installations we could see did not make us think that it would look good enough for the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Then Eli came up with the string curtains. I have to admit I was skeptical, because they reminded me at first of 1960s beaded curtains. The advantage they have—along with being affordable—is that they can create a sense of enclosure, without making you feel completely isolated. These curtains have a way of giving you glimpses of what lies beyond, while also having overtones of the kind of heavy curtains that once framed important works of art—including at the Art Museum, in the 1940s. Eli figured out a way to hang them so that you move through them without causing any harm, and have to really pull at them to get any of them loose. You can’t hurt yourself by backing into them, and yet most people stay away from the curtains. If any rambunctious child manages to get enough time away from adult supervision to really do the job, each string is fairly easy to replace.
We decided to make the curtains black to help focus your attention on each work of art (and to lessen the 1960s associations) and we used theatrical lights to make that art shine. The labels also glow, so you can read them with ease. We are working on an installation towards the south end of the gallery that will tell you where to go in our other galleries if you liked one particular work or another, and a mobile app will make that even more easy by this December.

We are pleased with the way the Schmidlapp Gallery turned out. I think the eighteen pieces there look better than they ever had. If you are coming to the Art Museum to have lunch or for an event, and you just get a glimpse of something great on the way, that is fine with us. If you come here for the first time and see this installation, we hope you will be inspired to see more. And if you want to really get to Whistling Boy or Warhol’s Soup Can, I think this will give you every opportunity. We would love to hear what you think of the installation. This is, after all, just the beginning. Next up: The Collections, a presentation of thousands of works of art in our second floor galleries.

Aaron Betsky
Cincinnati Art Museum Director