



## Teaching *Collecting and Curating Meaning-Filled Objects*

### Interdisciplinary Connection

While the work in this lesson begins with collecting and curating artworks, the concepts having to do with how humans collect objects that have meaning to them or to their community extend beyond visual art to other subject areas. Curatorial practice is basically the same, even when the objects collected and the ideas conveyed through the display of the objects are different. Students easily might collect and curate objects having to do with history, science, mathematics, and foreign languages, for example. There are several opportunities in this lesson to practice and refine writing, in the creation of a vision statement, certainly, but also in the rationales provided for objects in the collection and the interpretive labels that will accompany the objects in the exhibition.

### Instructional Strategies

Ask students if they now have or if they have ever had a collection of any sort. Perhaps they know someone—a family member or a friend—who collects something. Remind them that people collect all kinds of things, everything from rubber ducks to comic books, bottle caps to Pokemon cards, baseball cards to teddy bears, Barbie dolls to transformers. Some people collect rocks, shells or sea glass. Invite students to share what they or someone they know collects.

As you discuss collections, ask students to think about why it is that people collect things. Have them consider further how people choose something to collect. Elicit from students that people tend to like whatever it is they collect. They tend to be drawn to the objects they collect, perhaps because of the way they look, perhaps because they have special meaning in their lives, or perhaps because they have access to these particular objects. Explore a range of reasons why people have collections.

Suggest that people organize, care for, and display their collections in different ways. Here again ask students to recall collectors they know and their respective collections. Where are these collections kept? Some people store collections in shoeboxes or other containers. Some people store the collection as a display on shelves or tabletops. Occasionally an entire room or building is devoted to a collection. Much depends on the collection—what is collected, the size of the objects collected, the number of objects within the collection, and so on. Collectors also tend to organize their collections. Have students share how collections they know about are organized. Are there categories and subcategories within the collection? Again, depending on the collection, objects might be grouped together according to their history, function, or appearance, for example.

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This should be a lively discussion in which students are invited to recall collections they have had or have seen and to think about them in new ways. Students should recognize that many of us collect something, and when we do, we tend to store, care for, produce an inventory, and display the collection for others to see and appreciate.

Explain that for the next few class periods students will be thinking more about collecting and collections. They will be introduced to one collector, but they should also consider collectors and collections they know about. They also will be introduced to a curator—a person who takes care of collections and who plans exhibitions to showcase collections. Tell students that they will have the opportunity to think like a collector as well as a curator, as they “collect” artworks or other objects and then plan an exhibition of the collection.

Post the critical questions for the lesson and explain that as they work together to learn more about collecting and curating, they should be able to discuss the following critical questions:

- Why do people collect?
- How do collectors organize and display their collections?
- What is involved in curating an exhibition?

### Before Viewing

Tell students that in the video segment they are about to see, they will meet Forrest L. Merrill, a man who began collecting artworks when he was in high school. His collection has grown over the years and includes artworks created by many different artists, but in this video they mostly will learn about his collection of artworks by the artist, Kay Sekimachi.

The segment opens with Michele Ellis Pracy, a curator with the Fresno Art Museum, claiming, “Kay Sekimachi is a visionary.” As a curator, Ms. Pracy selects, interprets and presents objects in an exhibition. In this case, she is responsible for selecting and exhibiting artworks created by the artist Kay Sekimachi for an upcoming exhibition of her work. We will see her talking with Forrest L. Merrill because the exhibition will include many of Sekimachi’s artworks borrowed from his collection.

As they watch the video have students consider the following:

- What kinds of artworks does Forrest L. Merrill collect?
- What does Forrest L. Merrill value or look for in the artworks he collects?

In order for students to appreciate how objects in a collection have meaning, provide them an opportunity to carefully view and interpret Kay Sekimachi’s *Leaf Bowls*. View the segment on Kay Sekimachi in which she demonstrates making her *Leaf Bowls*.

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Review the process the artist uses to create the *Leaf Bowls*. Make sure that students realize that these are real leaves that have been soaked overnight and then are dried around a mold. So that students might look more carefully, project an image (or provide students with photocopies) of one or more of these bowls.

Remind students that Forrest L. Merrill collects this artist's work and that he has several of her *Leaf Bowls* in his collection. Remind them also that he says he is not simply interested in beautiful objects; he is interested in objects that tell a story or convey a message. Have students describe and discuss the story or message conveyed by Sekimachi's *Leaf Bowls*.

### After Viewing

Discuss the video. Ask students to share their immediate response; what resonated with them. Refer to the questions that students were asked to consider along with others listed here.

### Discussion

- Who is Forrest Merrill and what does he do?  
Forrest is a collector who collects handcrafted items such as weavings and pots.
- What does he collect? Why is his collection important?  
He collects handcrafted items and wants the artworks to tell a story or provide a message of some sort.
- What is a Curator? What do they do?  
Curator has its origins in the Latin word, *cūrāre*, meaning "to watch over, attend." A curator is responsible for the care and maintenance of a collection, such as a collection in a museum, zoo, or other place of exhibit. Curators also plan exhibitions of collections. They also select, interpret and present objects from the collection for others to see and appreciate.
- What do collectors and curators consider when selecting and curating artworks and objects?  
Curators need to know a lot about the objects in the collection, including their origins, significance and meaning. In creating an exhibition, curators need to consider the audience who will see the exhibition, which objects to exhibit, how the objects should be arranged in the exhibition, what they would like the audience to do and think about as they view the exhibition—the story or message they wish to provide for the audience, and how they will convey the story or message by the way they arrange the objects.
- Who is Kay Sekimachi? What inspires her work?  
Kay Sekimachi is a fiber artist and weaver who is known for her unusual use of the loom



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in constructing three-dimensional sculptural pieces. Her primary sources of inspiration are the shapes, forms and natural colors gleaned from her Japanese heritage.

- Do you collect objects or artworks? If yes, what do you collect? (answers will vary)