

# Making Museums: helping children to understand the value of museum learning



## The People

Pitt Rivers Museum  
 Museum of Natural History  
 Blackbird Leys Academy Trust Primary Schools:  
 Pegasus School  
 Windale School  
 Orchard Meadow School

## The Project

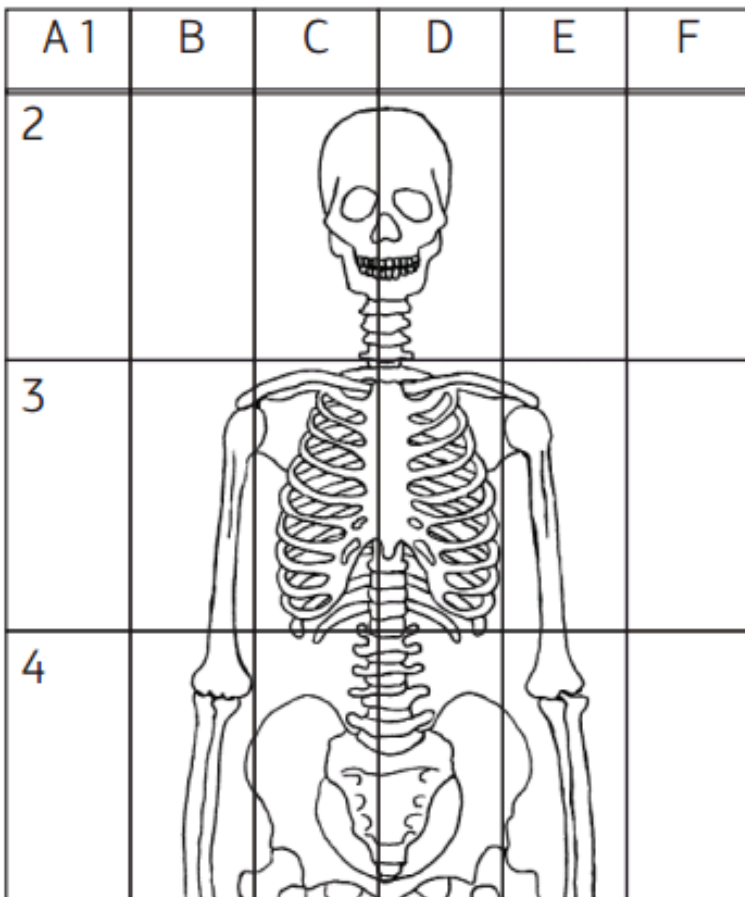
Making Museums is a project run by The Pitt Rivers Museum and the Museum of Natural History for the past 11 years, working with around 20 classes of Year 6 pupils from across 11 schools. A total of around 500 children each are involved in the project.

The aim of Making Museums is to allow children to understand the value of museum learning through hands-on discovery of what museums do and how they operate, including the roles of different staff. The project's ultimate goal is to create greater confidence for children and young people in terms of visiting museums. Making Museums has been developed to encourage a sense of personal achievement and pride

in the children's schools and local culture. Although the project is highly analytical, it includes almost no written work, which fosters inclusivity at all levels. However, in order to satisfy the Arts Award criteria, we had to incorporate written work alongside this.

The core project is delivered in the autumn term, with three days for each school. This comprises of an outreach session at a school, a whole day visit to the museums, and a final outreach session back at school, which looks at the work the children have developed during the project. Each child develops their own personal mini museum as part of a 'wider school museum'.

In 2013, staff at the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Museum of Natural History decided to pilot building Discover Arts Award into Making Museums, working with three of the 11 schools that participate in the project. Museum staff felt that the range of activities covered by Making Museums – detailed below, with some minor alterations and adaptations, could fit in with the Discover Arts Award criteria and enhance an already highly successful and popular project.



Site Name: The Pitt Rivers and University Museum of Natural History

Archaeologist's Name:

Colour in the bones that you have found.

Draw your finds (the objects found with the bones).

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Rachel Parle, Interpretation & Education Officer, M.O.N.H.

### **Schools outreach: meet the team and the objects**

In the initial outreach session, children met with the Education Officers they would be working with throughout the project and found out about the museum they would be visiting. The children investigated what a museum is and why developing and caring for collections is important. This session was delivered through object handling and allowed children to personally engage with real museum objects. The children then chose an object and developed their own questions about it.

With the support of the Museum staff, the children then created answers to their questions. Through participating in this activity, children discovered that they already had a great deal of transferable knowledge and ideas that enabled them to understand and relate to an object that may have initially seemed strange and unfamiliar to them.

### **In the museums: dig, conserve, research, record**

The second session was a visit to the museums, enabling the children to experience how a museum is 'created'. Children found out about acquisition, documentation, conservation and research. The day was packed with fast-paced activity, which maintained excitement as well as concentration. The core activity was an archaeological dig, where buried museum objects were revealed in a box of sand alongside a 'body'. This task demonstrated both acquisition and

documentation – the children had to carefully record their findings. There was then a 'behind-the-scenes' tour, where the children met a real museum worker and learnt about the importance of conservation and research. The final task comprised of the children choosing an object from their earlier dig in order to compile their own research using the museum's collection. This ultimately led to open-ended speculation about who the 'body' might have been.

### **Time to share: mini museums on display**

In previous years the final session has taken place back at school, where the children develop their own collections and create a museum within their schools. The objects the children collect and curate are often very personal items, which allows them to explore both their own identities and local culture. Museum education staff visit the schools to see the fantastic museums created by the children. This final session is an opportunity to demonstrate the interpretation and design skills of the children themselves. The children

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and their museums are documented and photographed by museum staff, and are added to the Making Museums website, where previous project work can be seen. This year the three Discover Arts Award schools came together for the final session to share their work. They displayed their museums at Blackbird Leys Community Centre, inviting the school and wider community to visit and share their learning.

In order to develop Making Museums to deliver Discover Arts Award, we had to make the following additions and adaptations:

- School teaching staff were asked to participate in a discussion session on 'What are the arts?' and 'What is a museum?'
- After the above discussion, teachers supported each child to develop a spider diagram as evidence for their Discover Award.
- For the pilot, we created a larger sharing event and asked all 3 schools to bring their museums to Blackbird Leys Community Centre where a larger museum display was created. This allowed the children to have their picture taken with their museum for the Making Museum's website and undertake additional



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Caroline Bray, Museums Lead, Arts Award

sharing with their peers, teachers, museum staff, other schools and their families.

- In order to create a Discover portfolio for each student, museum staff had to devise a computer based filing system to bring together all documented evidence of the project. Each child had a digital folder with their project evidence in ready for moderation.

## Successes

- 79 children gained their Discover Arts Award by taking part in Making Museums.
- Although building in Arts Award generated additional work for teaching and museum staff, the strategies developed to manage this worked well. By doing this pilot project we considered how we could improve Arts Award delivery within Making Museums in the future.
- By developing an existing project to include Arts Award it has made museum staff think about other projects, which could be redeveloped to include Arts Award.
- By developing a wider sharing session at the end of the project and bringing the schools together for this section, it created a larger event which was more a celebration of the children's learning.

## Challenges

- By incorporating Discover Arts Award into this project, we required additional input from school staff who were already very busy and were not familiar with Arts Award. The three project days were so packed that there was not enough time for museum staff to deliver any additional content.
- Although we tried hard to ensure that every child gained their Discover Award, in the end it wasn't possible. This was because in some instances, a child was off sick and missed part of the delivery. Also, one school at the last minute was unable to bring their museums to the Community Centre for the sharing

afternoon. Owing to school and museum staff having such packed timetables, this was not something that could be rescheduled.

- Museums are relatively new to delivering Arts Award and although Arts Award language is changing to be more museum-specific, we had to work hard to check and recheck that we were interpreting criteria appropriately within our museum sessions. For example, objects in the Pitt Rivers Museum often do not have a specific named artist or maker and at the Museum of Natural History, the objects and specimens also have no 'maker'. To overcome this, we sent descriptions of the project delivery and content to Arts Award to gain their assurance that we were delivering a project that satisfied the Discover criteria.
- Any Arts Award has an additional cost attached. Although Discover is moderated in-house by museum staff, each certificate costs £2.50. We were wary of asking the pilot schools to pay this cost, partly because the schools are in an area of social and economic disadvantage, and partly because this was a pilot programme, and we were not sure if building in Arts Award would turn out to be successful. In the end, Oxford University Museums funded certification costs.

## How might the project influence how you approach or deliver similar work in the future?

We learnt a huge amount from delivering this project:

- Working with a large number of students requires a lot of administration. We decided that a large, well-established project like this needed its own bespoke logbook to help manage the sections of the Award and help staff at school support the project.
- In order to further help school teaching staff support Making Museums, we think creating a booklet providing information about the Arts

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Chris Jarvis, Education Officer

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Award ethos and assessment criteria would help with the crucial buy-in needed to deliver a project on this scale.

- With the project a success, we see two ways to deliver it in the future: to expand the project, making it into an Explore Award for the Blackbird Leys Academy Trust Schools, or to roll out the project at Discover level, to potentially all 500 children involved across all eleven schools.
- In 2014, we decided to pilot offering Making Museums as an Explore Arts Award to the 150 Year 6 pupils at the Blackbird Leys Academy Trust Schools. The Headteacher has bought into the project and will be providing financial support for the moderation. Explore seems better value because of the accreditation – Entry Level 3 Award on the QCF.
- We will be creating our own Explore Logbook for Making Museums, as well as a short teacher guide to the project and Explore criteria.

## Feedback

*“Running an Arts Award project gave last year’s Making Museums a real focus. We were given extra motivation to ensure that every child produced a high quality display of their own and that we documented it accurately. This means that we, and the school, have an excellent bank of images and work as a record of their experiences. I’m confident that it was an added encouragement to the students, too. They knew that this wasn’t just a fun trip to the museums, but that it held added value.”* (Rachel Parle, Interpretation and Education Officer, Museum of Natural History)

*“By building Arts Award Discover in to Making Museums, an already successful project model, the Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum showed that offering Arts Award need not mean developing new projects from scratch. The flexibility of the Arts Award framework means that the majority of museums can use their existing education offer to meet the requirements of Discover. With 79 children achieving Discover through Making Museums,*

*the Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum have shown that going straight into a large scale delivery is possible, adding extra value for the children who took part in this established and successful project.”* (Caroline Bray, Museums Lead, Arts Award)

*“Combining the Arts Award with Making Museums gave the project an added dimension. From the viewpoint of an education officer slightly sceptical about using the Arts Award in a science setting, I feel that it allowed a partnership between the arts and sciences, allowing children to see the importance of art in a science museum. This was particularly evident through the children’s drawings of specimens and artefacts when recording their digs in the museum and their exploration of display and conservation and was reflected in the excellent standard of work produced in creating their own museums back at school.”* (Chris Jarvis, Education Officer)



To see the work that took place as part of this project, head to:

[museums.ox.ac.uk/makingmuseums/](https://museums.ox.ac.uk/makingmuseums/)

## Credits

**Taken from: Programme Evaluation by Miranda Millward, Arts Award Coordinator for Oxford University Museums**

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