# Object Lessons: Teaching Musicology Through Museum Collections

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The physical qualities of musical instruments are not usually the focus of music history education. However, non-sonic encounters with performance-related objects provide opportunities for students to connect music making with a range of historical, cultural, and social topics. The physical qualities of these objects—as diverse as banjos and balalaikas, nyckelharpas and nose flutes, shadow puppets and shekeres—inspire curiosity, which ideally motivate students to continue to respect, cherish, support, critique, and ultimately love and care for artistic practices and communities. Wonder is a feeling powerful enough to animate enjoyment for a lifetime.[1] Yet, Stephen Greenblatt cautions that wonder at the unfamiliar is a two-edged sword.[2] On the one hand, wonder can lead to feelings of resonance or sameness with cultural others, or foster cross-cultural experiences and creative, mutually beneficial hybridity. On the other hand, wonder, coupled with greed and fear, has motivated centuries of colonial appropriation and exploitation—the very impulses that educators in the twenty-first century work to combat. In musicology classroom settings, educators endeavor not only to spark wonder through encounters with "new" musics and cultures, but also to provide frameworks that help students ask questions, make connections, and work to respectfully represent and advocate for the artistic communities they study.

Facilitating student work with museum collections of musical instruments and other performance-related objects is one opportunity to cultivate students' wonder and transform it into critical inquiry and respectful representation.[3] This

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1. For example, see accounts in Margaret Sarkissian and Theodore Solís, *Ethnomusicological Lives: Growing Up and Into a Profession* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

2. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 19ff.

3. In many cultures, music, dance, puppetry, and other performing arts are not separated conceptually. Here, we use "musical objects" and "performance-related objects" to refer generally to the wide array of item types integral to performance, whereas terminologies used for

article describes a collaboration between the authors—Elizabeth Clendinning is a professor of music and Andrew Gurstelle is director of a campus museum of anthropology—as we guided student research on musical objects culminating in the exhibit "Musical Narratives of the Southwest Pacific Rim." This exhibit drew on materials in the museum's collections and was experienced by over 3,000 visitors over six months. Most of these students had taken little or no prior music or anthropology coursework in college. Yet, for this final project, students learned how to select and examine the objects on display, including musical instruments, dance costumes and masks, and other performance-related objects; to research how the objects were used within their original historical and cultural settings; to write informative text panels; and to conceptualize and design thematic exhibit displays. In doing so, they not only fulfilled core cognitive learning objectives, but also developed feelings of respect, kinship, and deep affection for the objects and cultures that they had researched in the process.

In this article, we use our students' work on the "Musical Narratives" exhibit as a case study to examine the strategies and benefits of a curation project. We begin with a brief discussion of the colonial origins of instrument collecting in the West and its relationship to the development of the modern musicological fields, highlighting why acknowledging and discussing the legacies of such histories can be a crucial method to decolonizing music history education. Subsequently, we describe contemporary scholarly approaches to considering the lives of musical instruments, all of which can animate discussions and project design within the undergraduate classroom.[4] We then discuss how to design, develop, and execute a student-curated exhibit project, including insight into building museum partnerships; articulating and scaffolding student learning objectives that are grounded in musical, historical, and anthropological theory; facilitating the project itself; and organizing community outreach programs, all with reference to the pedagogical frameworks mentioned above. Finally, we share student reflections on how their approaches to music, history, culture, and the value of public culture-work had changed because of their work on this exhibit project.

specific categories of such objects found in multiple cultures (instruments, masks, etc.) follow English-language Western conventions for clarity. Culture-specific objects are given their proper name when discussed individually.

4. Our focus here centers on literature on musical instruments rather than a wider array of performance-related objects for concision. We recommend that exhibit designers engage in further depth with literature across the performing arts as relevant to their specific exhibit topics.

**Music: A Material Turn**

The history of musical instrument collecting in the West is deeply rooted in the European colonial project, as is broader interest in ethnographic collecting, museum studies, and the many sub-disciplines of Western musicology. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, "cabinets of curiosities" filled with a mixture of interesting natural and human-made objects sourced from locations throughout the world became popular with European aristocrats, merchants, and scientists. Such collections were used to demonstrate the owner's social prestige, economic standing, and intellectual curiosity, and were used as aesthetic collections as well as for scholarly study.[5] In subsequent centuries, the European Romantic movement renewed interest in domestic collecting of natural and folk objects, but prestigious collections increasingly featured items gathered from distant parts of the world through sea exploration. Performance objects are found in many such collections. For example, in the late eighteenth century, musical instruments were included among the ethnological material collected as part of Captain James Cook's expeditions to the Pacific Ocean region, which constituted the first recorded contact with that area of the world by Europeans.[6] The core holdings of many museums derive from these early collections.

Novel instrument forms and musical practices greatly interested European patrons, but instruments often arrived completely de-contextualized from systematic information about how they were made, used, and valued by those who created them. This meant that even those who collected instruments for purposes of research began first to investigate and classify instruments based on physical properties alone. Early collectors created analytical frameworks that mirrored the typological schemes employed by naturalists, essentially adopting their concern for form.[7] The Hornbostel-Sachs classification system introduced in 1914, which organizes instruments by sound production and whose structure mirrors the Dewey Decimal library organization system, grew from this lineage of inquiry.[8] In its own time this system was considered revolutionary;

5. MacGregor Impey and Arthur Oliver, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 737.

6. Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Polynesian Music, Captain Cook, and the Romantic Movement in Europe," *Music Educators Journal* 65, no. 3 (1978): 54–60; Jeremy Coote, ed., "Cook-Voyage Collections of 'Artificial Curiosities' in Britain and Ireland, 1771–2015," *Museum Ethnographers Group Occasional Paper* 5 (2015): 74–122.

7. Christian F. Feest, "'Repatriation': A European View on the Question of Restitution of Native American Artifacts," *European Review of Native American Studies* 9, no. 2 (1995): 33.

8. Erich M. von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs, "Systematik der Musikinstrumente. Ein Versuch," in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 46, nos. 4–5 (1914): 553–590.

its perceptibly scientific scheme that could be applied to all instruments on a global scale implied, at least to some degree, that "exotic" and "primitive" instruments had commonalities with the "sophisticated" instruments most valued by Western society. The system implied that all instruments were worthy of study, even as its approaches and utility have been criticized in more recent times for both its tone and standardizing, mono-conceptual approach.

In the twenty-first century, the disciplines of ethno/musicology, organology, and museum studies continue to grapple with these colonialist legacies. With an eye to the persistent inequalities of the past and present, the problem of how to productively teach, research, and present information to the public that builds on past knowledge while positively moving beyond colonialist legacies remains a work in progress. The terms "decolonizing" or "decolonial work" have been frequently applied to such efforts, including social justice, sustainability, and preservation work designed to dismantle the legacy of historical colonial systems. Scholars also apply these terms to their efforts to restructure research, education, performance, and their relationships to each other.[9] Yet, even as such decolonial work is happening in musicological and anthropological research, it often remains invisible to students, especially at an introductory level.[10] Stand-alone world music courses frequently remain isolated within the curriculum.[11] Further, the inclusion of diverse subject matter alone is insufficient to present alternatives to historically Eurocentric power relations and norms of cultural and artistic representation.[12]

Because of the colonial histories of collecting and curating musical instruments, the opportunity to curate a public exhibit provides students profound opportunities to engage in decolonial learning. First, providing students an introduction to collecting practices, like that provided in the brief history above, encourages them to examine the historiography of the educational structures in which they are participants—an important first step in understanding how their own knowledge has been and could be constructed. Second, depending

9. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40. The discourse on decolonization efforts is too extensive to discuss in detail here; thus, we engage with several sources that are immediately pertinent to our pedagogical approach.

10. Margaret E. Walker, "Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum," this *Journal* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–19.

11. E. Eugene Helm, *The Canon and the Curricula: A Study of Musicology and Ethnomusicology Programs in America* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1994); Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

12. Michael A. Figueroa, "Decolonizing 'Intro to World Music?'," this *Journal* 10, no. 1 (2020): 39–57.

on its situation within a specific course, learning about instruments presents opportunities for instructors to challenge traditional curricular structures that frequently divide Western music history and ethnomusicology. Additionally, students learn critical approaches to museum representation that include problematizing the divisions between ethnographic and art museums. They learn to reframe narratives and display conventions within exhibits. They consider how to center indigenous knowledge and the meaning these objects might have through repatriation or re-connection to their source communities.[13] Finally, such work also decentralizes educators as the sole experts, allowing students—who are often perceived to be at the fringes of music knowledge production—to develop expertise and representational decision-making skills. It is their diverse past experiences and potential for creative new forms of inquiry that are crucial to developing the next generation of patrons of history, culture, and the arts.[14]

**Cultivating Wonder with Instruments**

It is important that students envision the objects not only as relics or sound-making devices, but as important participants within their own historical, cultural, and artistic narratives. This engagement transforms students' initial wonder into a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the cultural role of musical objects. In "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," Eliot Bates presents a transformational framework for considering how to treat the material products of musical production.[15] Extending Appadurai's arguments about approaching objects from the perspectives of their life-histories, Bates incorporates perspectives from material culture studies, actor-network theory, as well as musicology and ethnomusicology to propose investigations of instruments that treat instruments as *subjects* rather than *objects* of study—essentially, as actors whose

13. Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinus, eds., *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020); Elizabeth Mackinlay, "Decolonization and Applied Ethnomusicology: 'Story-ing' the Personal-Political-Possible in Our Work," in Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 379–397.

14. Depending on the scope of the project, other decolonial approaches may emerge, including having students perform research using primarily indigenous sources or methodologies for research and working directly with constituent communities. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

15. Eliot Bates, "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," *Ethnomusicology* 56, no. 3 (2012): 363–95.

histories and cultural contexts are individually worthy of attention.[16] Placing musical instruments at the center of historical or ethnographic analyses invites students to consider materiality and how music has moved through the world, whether in the past decade or over the past two millennia.[17] In short, investigating the lives of instruments and other performance-related objects can provide insight into not only instrument structure, but also the historical and cultural contexts, practices, and values of those who made, used, and distributed them.[18]

Every performance-related object has a story to tell—either a story specific to that object and its individual past, or a more general narrative about its historical and cultural context and place of origin. The film *The Red Violin* (1998), which traces the adventures of a single Stradivarius violin through three continents and four centuries, provides an example (if a fictional and fanciful one) of an individual instrument's life-history and why one might be compelled to tell its story. But compelling narratives do not have to be centered on the exciting life of a singular object. Ugandan drum families, for example, tell stories of kinship and the modern transformation of kingship.[19] Stradivarius violins and Haitian drums speak of intertwined efforts to avert ecological and cultural loss.[20] Depending on if they are played by men or women, different instruments—such as the guitar—can challenge or reify extant gender roles.[21] Finally, the process of making, repairing, or even recreating an Indian tabla or a Balinese gamelan showcases how instruments have distinctive identities that

16. Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); George W. Stocking, ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* 3 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications" *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369–81; DeVale, *Issues in Organology.*

17. Kevin Dawe, "Guitar Ethnographies: Performance, Technology and Material Culture," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 22, no. 1 (2013): 1–25; Marko Aho, *The Tangible in Music: The Tactile Learning of a Musical Instrument* (London: Routledge, 2016); Jonathan De Souza, *Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

18. Viewing musical instruments as valued subjects also encourages students to hold them in higher regard and treat instruments respectfully when they are handled in a curatorial setting.

19. Damascus Kafumbe, *Tuning the Kingdom: Kawuugulu Musical Performance, Politics, and Storytelling in Buganda* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

20. Aaron S. Allen, "'Fatto di Fiemme': Stradivari's Violins and the Musical Trees of the Paneveggio," in Laura Auricchio, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, and Giulia Pacini, eds., *Invaluable Trees: Cultures of Nature, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), 301–315; Rebecca Dirksen, "Haiti's Drums and Trees: Facing Loss of the Sacred," *Ethnomusicology* 63, no. 1 (2019): 43–77.

21. Veronica Doubleday, "Sounds of Power: An Overview of Musical Instruments and Gender," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17, no. 1 (2008): 3–39.

are shaped by the individuals and communities that use them.[22] In sum, there is no shortage of compelling ways for students to understand the intersection of history, cultural practice, and artistic practice as they examine musical objects.

Any instrument, whether perceived as "exotic" or "mundane," can be a compelling subject of study. Using familiar instruments that students may already own is an easy way to facilitate classroom encounters with musical objects; the instruments are readily available and student-musicians can take an active role in leading personalized, informed discussions about the instruments. For example, the substantive research literature on guitars can bring students to understand the construction, history, and global distribution of the instrument, as well as its multi-genre development, usage, and social significance. It is an instrument that is commonplace in North America and essential to a multitude of global musical genres over the past five centuries. Large instrumental sets owned by universities that are already used for hands-on music education also provide compelling subjects for student examination. Engagements with these instruments are particularly fruitful when they come from musical traditions that are largely unfamiliar to students. In a globalized teaching context, this could include Western orchestral or band instruments. The novelty of encountering new forms, materials, and iconographic features is a good lead-in to observation, research, and ultimately creating knowledge through informed interpretation.

Museums with large collections of instruments and performance paraphernalia are potential sources for musical objects that can become the subject of student encounters.[23] Such collections include art and natural history museums (e.g., the Metropolitan Museum), music museums with substantive instrumental collections (e.g., the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame), museums of individual artists' personal collections (e.g., Elvis Presley's Graceland and Prince's Paisley Park) and museums devoted specifically to instrumental collections (e.g., the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix). Smaller collections can be found in colleges and universities, museums dedicated to a variety of subjects, historic houses, or can even be assembled from the personal collections of faculty, staff, or students. Any of these settings provide opportunities not only for students to engage with instruments, but also potentially research, construct, and present their own interpretations of the life-worlds of instruments. Contrary to Bates's

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22. Allen P. Roda, "Tabla Tuning on the Workshop Stage: Toward a Materialist Musical Ethnography," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 23, no. 3 (2014): 360–82; Tyler Yamin, "One or Several Gamelan? Perpetual (Re)construction in the Life of a Balinese Gamelan Semara Pagulingan," *Ethnomusicology* 63, no. 3 (2019): 357–392.

23. Leonie Hannan, Rosalind Duhs, and Helen Chatterjee, "Object-Based Learning: A Powerful Pedagogy for Higher Education," in *Museums and Higher Education Working Together* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 159–168.

assertion that "Instrument museums are mausoleums, places for the display of the musically dead, with organologists acting as morticians, preparing dead instrument bodies for preservation and display,"[24] student work on the creation and display of musical artifacts allows for the evocation of past musical and historical-social lives and the assumption of new life by an object previously viewed as inanimate.

**Creating "Musical Narratives of the Southwest Pacific Rim"**

Before we discuss generalizable strategies in the next section, we describe our own collaboration in creating the exhibit "Musical Narratives of the Southwest Pacific Rim" to illustrate the process of creating a student-curated exhibit and highlight potential outcomes. Though no two educators will have the same available resources, our journey demonstrates many core principles of engaging students that can be adapted for diverse resource sets and pedagogical situations. The "Musical Narratives" exhibit grew out of the Department of Music's and the Museum of Anthropology's convergent, pre-existing emphases on community-engaged pedagogy. The Wake Forest University Museum of Anthropology (MOA) is a teaching museum with a permanent collection of more than 30,000 objects. Led by an academic director, MOA is similar to many museums and galleries on college campuses that frame museums as interactive spaces that bridge classroom knowledge and experiential learning through student-centered exhibit curation.[25] This model allows students in-course opportunities to develop areas of expertise integral to professional museum work.

Our collaboration spanned three semesters and included students from three iterations of a semester-long introductory world music course. While some students in this course were music or anthropology majors or minors, the majority of students were enrolled in the course to fulfill a general education requirement. In the first semester, students could choose any relevant items from the collection, with choices ranging geographically from Mexico to Mali to Papua New Guinea. Students worked individually; the primary intent of the project was to provide an opportunity for each student to gain extra depth of study in their area of choice. In the second semester, we narrowed the range of objects down to a series of countries around the Pacific Rim—Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Samoa, and Australia—and developed the parameters for turning the students' work into an exhibit. In the third and final

24. Bates, "The Social Life of Musical Instruments," 365.
25. Christina Kreps, "University Museums as Laboratories for Experiential Learning and Engaged Practice," *Museum Anthropology* 38, no. 2 (2015): 96–111.

iteration of the project, students in the class received some information from the previous group's work to assist in their preliminary examinations of the objects and worked directly on designing the exhibit.[26] Though each semester's focus was crucial in developing our process as collaborators, this timeline could be compressed into a single semester. In terms of our pedagogy, the important element is that students participate in every step of exhibit development.

The pedagogical framework for studying musical objects at the museum began in the introductory unit of the course, where students received a brief global overview of instrument classification. Discussion of culturally specific systems—such as the Western orchestral system, the Chinese *bayin* (八音) system, and the classification for Indian instruments presented in the Nāṭya Śāstra (नाट्य शास्त्र), all of which reappeared at appropriate points later in the course—was complemented by more in-depth organological work. In this introductory unit, students examined a variety of musical instruments that were sourced from their instructor and their classmates within the classroom setting, where they considered materials, method of construction, and sound production and were encouraged to ask questions about musical and social performance contexts. Attending live performances and participating in hands-on music playing opportunities in other portions of the course reinforced students' observational skills, while discussions of specific instruments within units devoted to theoretical subjects (like gender) or historical-cultural subjects (like the historic and contemporary roles of drum families within African royal court ensembles) highlighted instruments' changing roles within different times, places, and contexts. In sum, students were instructed to consider instruments simultaneously as musical, material, and social objects, and to build on information across topical units to develop a more nuanced understanding of the multiple lives of musical instruments.

In more direct preparation for the museum project, students were encouraged to reflect on the historical and cultural representational strategies that they had encountered in museums that they had visited in the past. Students' previous experiences with attending museums was varied, but we found that most students had at least encountered small displays of objects during prior school field trips, which was sufficient to form a basis for reflection. To provide a point of focus for their thoughts, the students were also assigned to read and react to an academic article and several popular articles about the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, an internationally recognized ethnographic museum with a significant Australian and island Pacific collection (including objects from

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26. Though in this case working across three semesters proved helpful to creating the project design and procedures, we believe that future collaborations could be accomplished under a shorter timeline.

the Cook Expeditions) that has in recent years experimented with variations on traditional museum display models.[27] Originally printed in newspapers and popular periodicals, these critical review articles of the museum provided a concrete and accessible introduction to the aesthetics, practicalities, and ethics of museum display, and a point of stimulus for students to organize thoughts about their own past experiences and hopes for their curation work.[28]

The instructors chose the premise and organizational schema of the exhibit and translated the exhibit development process into a course assignment. Within this framework, the project embodied democratic pedagogical approaches by including practices that support student choice, agency, and decision-making. Students were able to choose their own subjects of study, decide which musical objects to research, structure their research teams, evaluate the needs of communities that would see the exhibit, and make substantive choices about how their research would be communicated to a public audience.[29]



**Figure 1:** Students receive instructions to examine museum objects.
Photo credit: Elizabeth Clendinning.

27. James Clifford, "Quai Branly in Process," *October* 120 (2007): 3–23; Michael Kimmelman, "A Heart Of Darkness in the City Of Light." *The New York Times,* July 2, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/02/arts/design/a-heart-of-darkness-in-the-city-of-light.html.

28. Kreps, "University Museums as Laboratories."

29. Dana Bennis, "What is Democratic Education?" Institute for Democratic Education in America, (accessed January 12, 2021), http://democraticeducation.org/index.php/features/what-is-democratic-education/.

After students had chosen their working groups, they visited the museum and examined relevant musical objects. The museum staff prepared for the students' visits by pre-identifying a core set of relevant objects and preparing information about their provenance. Understanding how museum objects were collected can be as important to research and interpretation as the object's form and associated function. The students received an introduction to the museum itself and its collections and how to use the online museum catalogue. Donning blue latex gloves, they passed around instruments, examining each to decide what piqued their interest and learning safe object-handling skills in the process. They toured the room in the museum where their class exhibit would be installed and shown the types of display cases, lighting, and other resources that they might expect to house their objects. Finally, they received practical instructions to complete the project, including several blocks of time set aside for their work with their chosen objects under guidance of museum staff.

Following this visit, students filled out worksheets to help them organize their observations on the musical objects (see appendices). They then worked independently, in consultation with their instructor and museum staff, to conduct research on the objects and their culture of origin. Student groups produced eight written works during the semester based on their collections research: one 200 to 250-word text panel that introduced the objects' countries of origin, and seven different 25 to 50-word object labels that identified a specific object, its physical properties, and its typical historical and cultural context. Student groups also identified opportunities for special interactive features, such as video or hands-on activities that would make a visit to the display more educational and engaging.

At the end of the semester, students submitted a final project containing their text and labels, a diagram of their ideal display layout, audiovisual materials that might enhance the display, and personal reflections on their work and the working process. Some students participated in an extra credit opportunity to help the MOA staff install the exhibit according to class designs. One month after the next semester began, the exhibit was ready to open.

## Building an Exhibit: Strategies for Success

### *Locating instrument collections*

A collections-based instrument research project requires a source of instruments. Dedicated instrument collections are rare and tend to be focused on Western musical practices. Outside of specialized museums, most dedicated collections are associated with universities or music schools, and so their curators are likely used to working with faculty and students. If you are fortunate

**Figure 2:** The authors with the Indonesia portion of the student-curated exhibit. Photo credit: John Stifler.

to teach at or near an institution with a robust collection, then hopefully our experiences will encourage you to consider the benefits of student curators. You can locate collections by reaching out to museum staff through communication networks maintained by professional organizations, such as the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries.

Private instrument collectors are another potential source. Collectors are often performers themselves, but they may be difficult to identify unless they are publicly known for their collecting. Unless you already know such a collector, institutional collections are the most approachable. Even if you are not near such private or institutional collections, you may still be able to access musical objects by negotiating a loan, though shipping can be expensive and many collectors may balk at sending their valuable objects to unfamiliar partners. Many institutional collections have missions that include outreach, education, and research, and may amenable to facilitating your project. Even if your local collecting institution does not have an instrument collection, it is worthwhile to partner with them, as other institutions are typically more willing to loan to institutions than individuals.

*Locating instruments in other museums and collections*

Fortunately, instruments are often included in larger collections owned by museums of all kinds. Historical collections often include instruments. These may be objects associated with specific musicians or historical individuals, but they may also be associated with certain time periods and social classes. In the United States, many county historical societies maintain collections from their locales, and may be a source of instruments that represent regional musical traditions. However, such collections do not always reflect local cultures. Many historical collections include objects acquired by travelers, missionaries, and merchants. These are often acquired as souvenirs, rather than performance objects. It could be helpful to clarify with the collections staff that you don't necessarily need the instruments to be playable! The cultural and historical value of the instruments are equally important in motivating student research.

If students will be working with a limited range of musical traditions, heritage institutions or community museums may have appropriate instrument collections. Many cultural entrepreneurs identify musical instruments and related paraphernalia as excellent symbols of heritage, and so instruments are often available and oriented toward display. Negotiating access is a major concern if the instruments are still in use, as it may be difficult or impossible to remove them from cases until after the exhibit has closed.

Other types of collections may include instruments related to a diverse range of musical traditions. Ethnographic collections typically contain musical instruments and have the benefit of focusing on non-Western traditions. Like dedicated instrument collections, these are relatively rare. Many large fine arts museums include musical instruments in their collections, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Smaller art museums may have musical instrument collections, but this is often not the case. Occasionally science or children's museums will have instrument collections. However, these types of collections are generally not rich sources for collaboration.

*Working with stakeholders*

Collectors and collections staff will be important stakeholders throughout the entire research project, but they will be most involved in the initial stages of the project. Students will need access to objects for the observation and research stages. Access may be limited by the collector's schedule or by the space allocated to a collections staff. This process can be streamlined by pre-selecting appropriate objects for student research. However, student choice can be a powerful motivator, so a good compromise is to pre-select a pool of potential objects, and then let students choose from the pool.

Whatever the source, collections staff will be concerned about two things: the safety of the objects, and the value of the objects to the project. You will likely be asked how the objects will be cared for, what kind of display environment they will be in, and what security measures will be put in place to safeguard them from damage or theft. Expect to be asked why these objects are essential to the project, how they will be interpreted, and how the collecting institution will benefit or be credited. Having clear answers to these questions before you approach collections staff will show your good intentions to working with them as a valued stakeholder in your project.

The collector or collections staff you are working with are one stakeholder in this project, in addition to you and your students. However, it is worthwhile to identify other stakeholders early in the design process. Potential stakeholders include local institutions that are facilitating a loan, the gallery that is providing space for your exhibition, other instructors that may use the exhibit as a teaching resource, and community organizations that will visit the exhibit. By reaching out early, you can better utilize opportunities and resources these stakeholders present to you, as well as better anticipate any requirements they may have.

*Designing a project*

Once a collection has been identified, you can begin to design the research project. Begin your design process by thinking about the outcome. We began our project, for example, by thinking about the public exhibition of student research. However, other outcomes could be a musical performance, a digital humanities product such as a website or mobile app, or an educational outreach program. Whatever the outcome, it must connect with both the collections available to you and to the student learning outcomes in your curriculum.

The project's theme is the overarching idea that connects all the objects on display with the students' research and interpretation. It can relate to any facet of the project, but the best themes are those in which students invest themselves. Good themes complement the learning outcomes you have for your students as well as impress those same outcomes on visitors. Usually, the theme of an exhibit is represented in its physical organization. For our project, the theme was cultural diversity in the western Pacific region, and so the exhibited objects were organized according to geography and cultural identity. In a different exhibit with a different theme, the same objects might have been organized according to their performance context (courtly, popular, religious) or according to their construction materials (plant fibers, wood, animal hide, etc.). Of course, you should also choose a theme that is supported by the collection you have available. Avoid the impulse to force the objects to fit a pre-determined theme, as this will result in poor research and interpretation in the end.

Most projects will follow a standard trajectory of initial observation, research, interpretation, writing, re-writing, fabrication, installation, and programming. Each stage requires different kinds of work, and each offers students a valuable learning experience. For each stage, consider how students will conduct their work. Will they work individually or collaborate in groups? Will their work be checked by the instructor, by other students, or by stakeholders? What is the standard for work to be presented in a public exhibit? What are the consequences if work does not meet that standard? Addressing these questions early will set clear expectations for your students.

*Facilitating student research*

The first encounter your students have with the objects is a powerful experience. While there do not need to be set outcomes for their initial observations, giving the students a framework to make sense of their experience can be helpful. Greenblatt's concepts of resonance and wonder are useful terms for students to articulate their encounters.[30] Another useful exercise is to have students write descriptive summaries of the objects, including their physical dimensions, materials, aesthetic properties, and points of articulation. With these descriptions, students can speculate on the object's historical and cultural context, such as the way it might be used, where it was created, and who would be familiar with it.

A goal of student research should be to compose an object life history. For this, they will need access to the provenance documents associated with the collection. These documents give evidence for how an object was collected, who owned it, and perhaps what testing or dating has been applied. While provenance is often used to establish ownership and value, for research it is helpful to show how the object's life history has intersected with broader historical and cultural trends. This is particularly helpful for objects associated with famous musicians, composers, or instrument makers.

Unfortunately, most common instruments and musical objects do not have detailed provenance documentation. In the absence of specific details, you can suggest students compare their objects to similar objects with known provenance. For this, they can consult museum and gallery publications, databases of other collections (such as those available online from the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Smithsonian Institution), or auction catalogs. Additional secondary sources can help give context to the objects' life histories that students have established.

30. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions,* 19ff.

*Interpretive writing for exhibits*

An important part of exhibit interpretation is to have students write original text based on their own research and experience. Museum writing is an excellent opportunity to integrate rhetorical writing skills into the project.[31] Writing for an exhibit gives students a new way of articulating their experiences with musical instruments through the genre of museum interpretation. Museum interpretation is an example of an authentic writing genre that provides students with a real audience and real motivation for crafting effective and polished texts.[32] The research they conduct becomes the source that they share with visitors, effectively turning them into experts. The differences between this public-oriented genre and more traditional academic writing empowers students by elevating their research experiences.

Equipped with life histories, students are now ready to distill their research into interpretive text for the exhibit. The goal of interpretive text is to communicate information about the objects on display that enriches the visitor's experience. This information can foster curiosity and get visitors to ask questions about the object, or it might guide the visitor to look closely at certain details, or it could give context to the object that is not obvious through visual inspection. Labels often start by directing the visitor to what they are already looking at or experiencing, and then segueing to novel revelations. Students will need to carefully select what information they present, as the limitations of interpretive text mean they can likely only express one or two ideas.

It is important that students understand their audience in framing their interpretive texts. Will it be other students? Members of the public? School children on field trips? Each group will find different kinds of information interesting, as well as come in with difference prior knowledge and experience. Regardless of audience, there are certain stylistic conventions common to interpretive museum writing as a genre. Use clear language that avoids more poetic devices, such as metaphor or alliteration. These techniques are not commonly used because museum texts are designed to communicate clearly to visitors of all backgrounds and educational levels. Similarly, avoid specialized terminology and infrequently used words or phrases. Visitors expect short pieces of text: typically, 25–50 words for a single object's label, 100–200 words for a text panel introducing a thematic section of the exhibit, and 250–500 words for a long introduction or summary of the exhibit. These text lengths are much

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31. John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 39–51.

32. Dee L. Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013).

shorter than what students are used to writing. Encourage them to be concise and choose their words carefully.

Editing and revising must be part of the exhibit project and is a process that should be undertaken dialectically between students, instructors, and other stakeholders, such as museum staff. It can be very helpful to set student expectations regarding the editing process and what editorial decisions the museum might make to fit their standards of public display. Emphasize to the students that making revisions is a normal part of producing an exhibit. At the same time, have a clear policy as to how you would accommodate a student wanting to make powerful or provocative public statements with their interpretive text. For the "Musical Narratives" project, students in each group reviewed their own texts. The course instructor then reviewed the labels for accuracy and MOA staff reviewed the texts for clarity.

*Public considerations*

It often makes sense to partner with an established gallery space as they can provide access to display equipment, such as cases, vitrines, pedestals, staging blocks, and label holders. They are also set up to manage visitors and provide security to the objects on display. That said, nearly any publicly accessible space can be used as a gallery for your exhibit if the security of the objects can be assured.

Visitors make sense of the objects on display visually by viewing the objects, cognitively by reading associated labels, and spatially by navigating the gallery. Often it is the spatial relationship that is neglected. Encourage your students to develop a layout for the exhibit that emphasizes connections between objects by positioning them in relation to each other. Have your students try to anticipate how a visitor will move through the gallery. Is there any information they absolutely need to see first to make sense of the rest? Does the exhibit have to be viewed in a specific order, or can visitors freely bounce between different display cases? Are there any specific cultural mandates for object display, such as a prohibition on certain ritual objects being stored near the ground, which should be honored if possible?

After the students finish their assignments and the exhibit opens, it may seem like the project is done. However, the exhibit isn't complete until its final closing date. Museum exhibits are great venues for other types of outreach and programming. Students can invite community groups to visit the exhibit, serve as docents for tours, or organize special events such as guest lectures or performances within the space. Encourage the students to think creatively about the lasting impact of the exhibit and how this associated programming can be meaningful to local audiences.

**Pedagogical Connections and Measuring Impact**

Though this work can be undertaken at any level of collegiate or graduate study, such projects particularly benefit introductory-level students because they provide a tangible link in their initial encounters to the artistic production of other times and places. Because instruments and other performance-related objects are used in different ways throughout global history and in a variety of artistic contexts, student research work with musical objects provides opportunities for them to learn about performance cultures in a way that cross-cuts traditional historically or geographically oriented course design in musicology. Museum curation projects provide opportunities for students to engage in democratic learning, build substantive cognitive skills (including the full range of those outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy), and improve cultural competency. By having students take an active role in developing a public exhibition of musical objects, such projects viscerally engage students in understanding the colonialist collecting impulses at the historic roots of both ethno/musicology and museum studies, as well as provide ways for them to gain practical experience in finding more equitable ways to represent and advocate for musical and cultural communities.

Measuring the impact of any pedagogical project or public display is a complex task. One way to approach this task is to examine how well students were able to achieve specific learning outcomes. In our project, we primarily targeted cognitive and social outcomes with our students, though the project also involved physical and emotional learning. We also encouraged students to set their own goals for themselves in working on the project and evaluate their own learning. Finally, our project was specifically designed to increase cultural competence as students research musical objects and present their findings. This mix of models for constructing learning objectives offers opportunities to incorporate a range of metrics to examine what and how students are learning, including but not limited to traditional Western models.

One way to identify and classify many of the cognitive outcomes from this project is to map them onto Bloom's Taxonomy.[33] We view their categories not as hierarchical (such that students must master one level before moving to the next), but as mutually reinforcing and appropriate objectives for students of all levels. Exhibit curation projects engage all aspects of the cognitive model: remembering (learning basic information about performance objects), understanding (organizing this information), applying (using this information

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33. Our discussion here most closely follows the 2001 revision: Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, ed., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (State College, PA: Longman, 2001).

to group or draw connections between objects), analyzing (planning how to display objects together), evaluating (assessing the plan's efficacy and appropriateness to subject matter and audience), and creating (designing the final project). At each step in their work on the project, students cycled between these different stages as they learned new information and worked discursively with each other, their instructor, and museum staff. The other two models of Bloom's Taxonomy, the affective domain (emotion-based) and the psychomotor domain (action-based) are also useful to understand secondary outcomes of the project, such as the students' newfound respect for and protectiveness of the objects in their display and the acquisition of professional-standard object handling techniques, respectively.

Having students accomplish assignment objectives related to building community and increasing cultural competency were also crucial outcomes of this project. As discussed previously, the project was rooted in democratic learning processes in which instructors guided students to form and self-regulate their research teams, conduct research, and evaluate what they had learned to design exhibits that would both satisfy class requirements and meet community needs. In doing so, many students learned specific research skills that they had not practiced previously, including working with physical objects, consulting with museum staff, using the campus library, assessing the appropriateness (and copyright status) of audiovisual materials, and seeking further information from subject-area experts outside of the campus community. These processes inherently overlapped with objectives related to increased cultural competence in that students not only increased their breadth and depth of knowledge about other cultures but came to understand multiple points of view and worked to respectfully articulate the practices and viewpoints of others.[34] In doing so, they also learned to evaluate, critique, and in a small way re-envision current power structures regarding ethnographic display and public representation of artistic cultures.

In our experience, the quality of student work either met or exceeded expectations in achieving the level of understanding that would traditionally be measured by other assignments such as tests or exams, performance reviews, research papers, and individual reflections. In some cases, student work far exceeded the general expectation for the level of research work in an

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34. Janet M. Bennett, "Transformative Training: Designing Programs for Culture Learning," in M.A. Moodian, ed., *Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence: Understanding and Utilizing Cultural Diversity to Build Successful Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 95–110. Though this exhibit topic did not offer opportunities to connect directly with local heritage communities, this is an important further step when such communities exist. See Kreps, "University Museums as Laboratories."

introductory-level course; for example, some students used interlibrary loan to access materials and emailed scholars around the world in pursuit of information about their objects. Importantly, this collaboration opened new opportunities for interdisciplinary, cross-campus, and cross-generational learning, as well as more interest and support for faculty and students in both music and museum studies.

Perhaps most importantly, many students who participated in the project identified aspects of their work as experiences that would stay with them after the class ended. Most student reflections mentioned working within and managing groups as an important part of their learning. Some also commented on how the project improved their use of campus research resources. For example, one student explained,

> Coming in as a freshman, I was in the dark about a lot of the facilities and available resources at the university. This project pushed me outside of my comfort zone to seek out those resources and I am so glad I did. I learned how to effectively use the databases as well as how to check books out of the library, both through course reserves and by searching through the shelves. I am much more acquainted with the library and more comfortable going into research projects in the future.

In addition to foundational research and group-work skills, students also took pride in their own development of higher-level skills related to the course material. Many students commented on understanding, respecting, and developing expertise through their work. As one student wrote, "At the beginning of this project, I was personally terrified by the thought of creating and presenting a museum exhibit to the public; I had absolutely no background knowledge of the subject that I would be curating." However, by the end of the project, this student expressed confidence in her work and identified knowledge and skills that would be transferrable to her major. Students also enjoyed developing interactive materials for the museum's iPads that allowed visitors to play instruments from the museum's education collection. Students claimed that the interactive experiences would "be much more memorable as they [museum audiences] can have a chance to delve more into the culture and how it has traditional, yet also modern, music." Finally, students focused on the challenges of cultural representation. As one student wrote, "Through this project, I learned that a lot of work goes in to planning museum exhibits. I also learned that representing a culture in only a few words is very difficult. Humans are very complex and the societies that they create are tough to generalize."

Teaching musicology with museum collections empowers students to learn about and experience instruments in meaningful ways. The project gave the student curators an opportunity to see how their research and writing—even in academic subjects new to most students in the course—could be applied in a very immediate way. Students learned to share their insights critically and appropriately through object-oriented and genre-specific media, authentic genres of presentation with the potential for a far broader impact than other traditional forms of classroom assignments. Crucially, creating a successful museum exhibit requires close attention to the importance of stakeholders, including the museum staff, visitors, descendants of the object's source communities, and the students themselves. Approaching musical objects from this perspective goes beyond the formal concerns of organology by emphasizing human connections to such objects, aligning our pedagogical strategy with decolonizing modes of knowledge production that seek to transform the power dynamics embedded in our class assignments. We hope that the discussion of our example and general principles encourages others to use the curation and exhibition of musical objects in their teaching practices as a way to help students build tangible connections to artistic practices of the past as well as cultivate appreciation of musical objects within their own contemporary communities.

**Appendix A: Questions for Students Examining a Musical Object**

*Answer questions #1–3 during the initial object observation period.*

1. Basic object information:
   a. What is the object's general name (i.e. drum, mask, etc.)?
   b. What is the object's specific name?
   c. Where is the object from or where was it used?
2. Description of object:
   a. What materials were used to make the object?
   b. How is it constructed?
   c. Is there wear or damage to the instrument? How do you think the object became worn like this?
   d. Are there designs or ornamentations? Is there a maker's mark?
   e. Are there any other notable visual or sonic features of the object that *might* be symbolic within the culture in which it was used?
3. Usage of Object:
   a. *If it is an instrument*:
      i. How does it create sound?
      ii. How do you think it was held and played?
      iii. How could the instrument be classified? (optional)
   b. *If it is part of a dance costume*:
      i. Where was it worn on the body?
      ii. What effects would it have on the movement of a dancer (for example, eyes obscured by narrow mask slits, shaking of bells on bracelets, shoulder pads enlarging body, etc.)?
   c. *Other performance objects*:
      i. What function does this object have within a performance context (audio, visual, symbolic, etc.)?

*Answer questions #4–5 as you continue to research your object.*

4. Questions for further research:
   a. Which group or individual made, owned, and used this object?
   b. How does this object relate to individual or group identity?
   c. How did the object come to arrive at this location?
   d. What other questions about this object and its usage do you have from your observations?
   e. What resources might help you answer these questions?
5. Display:
   a. If this object were to be displayed in the museum, what type of display would best help visitors observe the most interesting

features you noticed above?
b. What accompanying objects or materials would help tell this object's story?
c. Are there any limitations that you notice that might alter your recommendations for display? (i.e., object is very fragile, object is light-sensitive, object has culturally based display restrictions)

**Appendix B: Questions for Students Designing a Musical Museum Exhibit**

1. General exhibit information
   a. What is the title of your display?
   b. To what demographics are you targeting your exhibit (children, college students, public)?
2. Exhibit contents
   a. Which performance-based objects are you planning to display?
   b. What other materials (maps, written primary source documents, photos, related objects, audiovisual examples) will enhance your exhibit?
3. Narrative and educational themes
   a. What musical and/or social themes do you want to highlight in your exhibit?
   b. Why, based on your research, do you think these themes are important and appropriate?
   c. How will you use your objects and supplementary materials to address these themes?
   d. Will there be any interactive elements to your exhibit?
   e. How will your exhibit engage your target audience?
4. Logistical concerns
   a. Please draw your ideal exhibit layout. Include in the diagram what kind of display cases you would prefer and where each element of the display will be located, including exhibit narrative, objects, object labels, and other materials. Include dimensions of the objects in the display.
   b. Do you have permissions to display any media you may want to use in your exhibit?
   c. What questions or concerns do you have about the project at this point? What will help you complete it?