

Quick Curation: Building Analytical Skills through Context and Juxtaposition

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.” ~ Nelson Mandela

An exhibit building activity that can teach students about context, meaning, and the power of juxtaposition.

Skills: Analysis of content and format of materials; construction of narrative using objects; team-building; translating materials and themes into public display/exhibition; concepts of selection and deselection; summarization and explanation of decisions and theme; interpretation of materials to fit a theme; role of selector in curation of materials; role of visuals and/or text in presentation and communication of materials in public spaces; navigating questions of historical context and importance, perspective, authority, and reliability of objects; familiarity with a variety of object types and what they convey; recognition of absences and silences in the archive.

Part 1

1. Divide into small groups of 3 to 4.
2. Explore and examine the materials at your station, with the goal of selecting a subset of items that your group feels best represent a theme that your group has either chosen or created.
3. Select and place the items into a simple “mock exhibit” at your station.

Possible themes include:

Race

Class

Gender

Advertising and consumerism/consumption

Baseball as pop culture and its connections to social and historical contexts

Baseball as “an American pastime”

Memory and nostalgia

Scapegoatism towards certain players

Public image of Individual players’ personalities and stories

Visual style and graphic design

Mass print production

Portraiture

Movement, pose, and the athletic body

Collecting and memorabilia

Part 2

1. Each group should be prepared to present their mock exhibit to the larger group, explaining why they selected the items they did, how the selections fit the theme they chose, why they chose that theme, why they arranged/exhibited the materials in the way they did, and how their selections are in dialogue with each other.
2. Viewers should be prepared to ask questions about how selections relate to the theme and reflect issues of bias, authority, evidence, perspective, the power of selection, and silences. How does the exhibit shape the way viewers understand that theme in the context of sports history?

Part 3

1. All groups discuss how they would organize their smaller exhibits as cases within a larger exhibit.
2. Do the individual group themes fit into a larger umbrella theme? How so? What thematic changes would allow for a larger theme or narrative?
3. The entire group should evaluate the entire exhibit as a whole. Do other themes emerge? Do the sub-exhibits work together? Would groups change their initial selections based on what other groups chose? What is missing? How could these gaps and silences be addressed?
4. Reflection on curation exercise or discussion around the potential of Cerulli materials for teaching.