

NAME: _____

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY – Discover the Science of Museum Collections

Language, like science, has rules, elements, and vast variety. Like science, language has nearly unlimited potential for exploration and discovery. Science, while based on observation of the known world, depends on language to communicate those observations, theories and findings.

So, here's a language-based science experiment. Imagine that you are in a museum [like Winterthur] and asked to study a new object delivered from a wealthy donor. The object is something of a mystery, and many facts are needed before it can be exhibited in the museum.

Your task is to describe an object, research its origin and history, analyze its condition [including any damage or decay], and then recommend how it should be treated [both immediately and going forward]. Be specific in your observations but also creative in your approach. The museum has facilities and expertise you may draw upon to reach your conclusion(s). For starters, pick an object that intrigues you and then be imaginative in studying it using the museum as your 'laboratory.' You can choose an object from Winterthur's online collection (<http://museumcollection.winterthur.org/>) or another source.

In developing and presenting your findings, incorporate the following "museum science" words in your work. You may switch parts of speech, changing nouns into verbs or even adjectives, but utilize as much of this vocabulary list as possible. If you're unsure of a word's meaning, look it up before you use it.

You can report your facts, findings and conclusion in a "memo to museum management." Make sure to refer to any visuals [tables, diagrams, photographs, etc.], though you don't need to actually produce them

Be rigorous but also let new ideas guide your thinking (that's why it's called an experiment).

Here are some "museum science" vocabulary words to get you started:

Conservation

Preservation

Restoration

Replica

Risk assessment

Deterioration

Authenticity

Inherent vice

Vandalism

Environmental controls

Evaluate

Maintenance

Curatorial

Spectrometer

