



## UNIT ONE

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PAST?



*The past is everywhere...Relics, histories, memories suffuse human experience. Each particular trace of the past ultimately perishes, but collectively they are immortal. Whether it is celebrated or rejected, attended to or ignored, the past is omnipresent.*

(Lowenthal 1985:xv)

### ***Museums Are Important***

Museums have existed for centuries and can be found in almost every community in the world in some form. Museums collect, document, preserve, exhibit, and interpret things and related information for the enjoyment and education of the public. There are many types of museums: general, archaeology, art, history, science and more. Museums also can be typed by how they present their information. Displays can be traditional and static, or they can be interactive and hands-on. History museums are particularly interested in preserving objects from the past and using them to show people today what it was like to live during that time period. This experience of learning for most people is much more meaningful and lasting than reading about history in a book. The activities in this unit are designed to prepare students for a visit to Pricketts Fort and to be more aware that it is a place where they can experience and learn from the past.

It takes many individuals to operate a museum. A museum might have a director, a curator, a historian, a designer, a registrar, an educator, and more, depending upon the size of the museum. Each has a role to play in the mission of the museum. Collecting may be done by the curator, research and documentation by the historian, exhibition by a designer, and interpretation by an educator. Careers in museum work can be explored further in some of the activities listed below.



## SUGGESTED UNIT ONE ACTIVITIES

### PRE-VISIT

- Take the pre-test/post-test (1-A): How much do you know? Talk about what you can learn from a visit to the Fort. Take this again after you return.
- Review reproducible handout about Museum Etiquette (1-B).
- Talk about different types of museums and museum careers.
- Locate museums in your community. Identify the type of museum and research what jobs there are in that museum. Interview someone who works in the museum profession. What education and experience help them to do their job? Alternatively, conduct internet research into various museum careers and share with the rest of your class.
- LOG ENTRY: Write about a time you visited a museum and what you saw.
- Complete the Internet Scavenger Hunt (1-C).

### ON-SITE

- Look for the answers to the questions from your pretest!
- Ask a museum staff person about their job.

### LEARNING TRUNK

- Use Learning Trunk clothing items to practice historical interpretation.
- Compare and contrast 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, male and female roles, Native American and settler roles.

### POST-VISIT

- Write a script for a historical interpreter 200 years from now. How would they portray a day in the life of a 21<sup>st</sup> century 8<sup>th</sup> grader?

### EXTENDED LEARNING

- Research exhibit design. Pick one aspect of the Fort i.e. clothing across the centuries, or foods and cooking, and develop an exhibition design that would educate the public about that topic.
- Create a website for Pricketts Fort.
- Write and produce a video commercial for Pricketts Fort.



## ***Pricketts Fort is a Museum***

Pricketts Fort is a museum in the sense that it is a collection of materials (including the buildings themselves) from the past that are preserved, documented, exhibited, and interpreted for the public. It is what is called a living history museum. It utilizes historical interpreters who tell the visitor about the lives of individuals of the two time periods (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century) represented at the park. They also represent two cultures that coexisted in the region: the Native Americans and the western Virginian settlers. Interpreters use objects from the time period to help them to tell their story. In this case, the interpreters speak to the visitor as modern people. They are not “pretending” to be from the past, so students can feel free to ask questions and interact with them. Interpreters often are artisans who show visitors how a particular craft was done in the past. At the Fort you might see a blacksmith or a weaver making cloth.

The creation of the fort as a museum tells an interesting story of grassroots community effort. The Prickett descendents saw the value of their family history. They got other people interested in saving the site and creating the park. The land was donated by the family and then money was raised. The Fort was reconstructed over a period of two years and was completed in 1976. Lots of people were involved in this process. Archaeologists and historians researched the original fort that existed on the site as well as other forts in the area. They used documents, oral history, physical evidence, and scientific techniques such as infrared photography for information. Many specialists were involved in the building process such as carpenters and blacksmiths. Volunteers were involved in collecting authentic materials such as logs that were donated from places across the state. Once the 18<sup>th</sup> century Fort was reconstructed, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Job Prickett House was restored. The local group of interested community members became the Friends of Pricketts Fort and Pricketts Fort State Park was created. The State Park takes care of the maintenance of the park itself. The “friends” are now the Pricketts Fort Memorial Foundation that is responsible for all of the programming. Today, both the Fort and the House require ongoing preservation.

### **PRE-VISIT**

- View the Pricketts Fort CD-Rom.
- Complete the Internet Scavenger Hun (1-C).

### **ON-SITE**

- LOG ENTRY: Why did the Fort need reconstruction, but the Job Prickett House need restoration? Will your house last 100 years? Why or why not?

### **POST-VISIT**

- LOG ENTRY: Look at your community. Are there areas of interest (land, buildings etc.) that are worthy of preservation and why? Are there buildings that have been restored?



- Visit another historic site or have someone come to talk to your class about his or her site.
- Invite a representative from the Vandalia Foundation to speak to your class about preservation careers.

## EXTENDED LEARNING

- Plan a campaign to increase community awareness about a local building in need of preservation.
- Volunteer to be a junior interpreter at the Fort.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY REFERENCES

- Alexander, E. P.  
1979 *Museums in Motion*. AASLH.
- Ambrose, T. and C. Paine  
1993 *Museum Basics*. ICOM with Routledge.
- Lowenthal, D.  
1095 *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press.

## INTERNET SITES

- AAM American Association of Museums  
[www.aam-us.org](http://www.aam-us.org)
- ICOM International Council of Museums  
[www.icom.museum](http://www.icom.museum)
- Museum career information  
[www.aam-us.org/infocenter/info03.htm](http://www.aam-us.org/infocenter/info03.htm)  
[www.algonquinc.on.ca/museum/jobres/](http://www.algonquinc.on.ca/museum/jobres/)  
[www.jobsearch.about.com/msubmuseum.htm](http://www.jobsearch.about.com/msubmuseum.htm)
- West Virginia Association of Museums  
[www.museumsofww.org](http://www.museumsofww.org)
- Assoc. of Living History, Farm and Agriculture Museums  
[www.alhfam.org](http://www.alhfam.org)

## HUMAN RESOURCES

- Museum Personnel (see list of area museums)
- Local Historical Societies
- Community MAIN STREET Programs
- State Historic Preservation Office
- Vandalia Heritage Foundation

## VOCABULARY

- Artifact** - something created by humans usually for a practical purpose
- Curator** - one that has the care and supervision of a museum, zoo, or other place of exhibit
- Museum Director** - the administrator or executive who carries out the policies of the museum board of directors
- Living History** - costumed interpreters recreate the time period
- Interpretation** - a teaching technique that combines factual with stimulating explanatory information often using actual objects from the past
- Artisan** - craftsman
- Blacksmith** - a smith who forges iron
- Textile Weaver** - one who weaves or knits cloth
- Carpenter** - a worker who build or repairs wooden structures or their wooden parts
- Registrar** - an official recorder or keeper of records
- Historian** - a student or writer of history
- Exhibit Designer** - one who researches and designs a particular exhibit
- Mission Statement** - a statement about goals, beliefs and purposes
- Community Activist** - one who actively raises community awareness and support for a particular issue
- Volunteerism** - the act or practice of doing volunteer work in community service
- Preservation** - the act of keeping intact, safe from injury or harm
- Reconstruction** - the act of establishing or assembling again
- Restoration** - the act of bringing back to a former condition
- Grassroots Effort** - beginning at the basic or fundamental level; involving local people