

CLAY : COLLECTING



CURATE A CLAY COLLECTION

This activity invites you to explore collecting and curating by focusing on gathering a collection of objects, in this case objects made from clay. There are things made of clay that are very valuable, rare, and housed in museums. But clay objects exist all around us and can be inexpensive, easily available, or even make-able! You probably have some already!

ARE YOU A COLLECTOR? Many people like to collect something, whether casually, such as placing coins in a jar, or with more interest and intent, such as artist-made pottery, antique quilts, or comic books. Maybe you, or someone you know has a specific collection of things. Some things people might collect include mugs, sneakers, postage stamps or stickers, caps, little “collectible” toys, key chains, or tee shirts. Some collections focus on things from nature like seashells, stones, or bird feathers. A souvenir collection might include a variety of different objects but all with the theme of “things from a place I visited.” Making a collection allows you to gather something that interests you. Arranging the collection allows you to “show it off” even if it is only on a shelf in your house or apartment, where not many people will see it. It can be fun to treasure-hunt for more additions to the collection. Arranging the collection can be enjoyable in itself, as you might add or take away some objects, or rearrange them to look more interesting. The selecting of things for your collection, and the action of arranging and displaying them, is called *curating*.

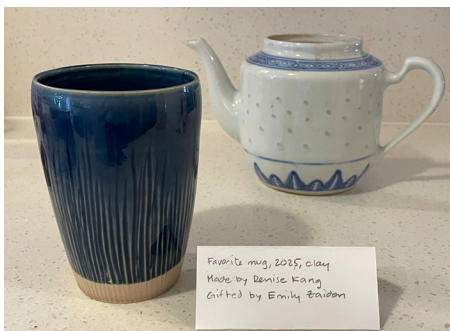
MAKE A ONE-MINUTE MUSEUM!

Well, maybe it will take five or ten minutes. Practice curating a mini-museum.

COLLECT ■ First, search around your home for items that are made of clay. You can probably identify clay objects, or ceramics, by the way they look and feel, and by sensing that they would probably break if dropped. (But please don’t test this!) Look for vases, plates, mugs, or mixing bowls. You might find ceramic salt and pepper shakers, figurines such as little animals, holiday decorations, souvenirs, or flower pots. If you cannot find enough clay objects, you can instead make a virtual museum. Gather images of ceramic objects online and place them in a folder. Then proceed to making your digital museum like the one described below.

CURATE, PART 1 ■ You now have a collection. Assemble the objects together on a table and sort them. You are in charge, so it is up to you to curate the collection. You decide the *criteria* (or standards) you will use to sort them. You can look for similarities, such as color, size, or kind (such as “dishes”) to group them. Or choose items that seem “fancy”, or that look (and maybe are) handmade rather than factory made. You choose what to include and what to set aside.





CURATE, PART 2 ■ Imagine a shelf or display in a museum. How would you arrange these objects in a way that looks appealing and that also allows other viewers to see them? Try out different arrangements.

LABEL ■ Create labels for your ceramics collection: Use a piece of paper, such as a plain index card, and fold it in half so it sits on the table like a small tent. Write your information on the front of the card. Include the name of the object, the material (or the medium it is made of) and the size. For example: *Mug. Clay with red glaze. Height: 5-inches.* You may wish to tell about the object's history—how it came to be in your possession, for example. What title will you give your collection?

DOCUMENT ■ Before you put everything back where it belongs, take a photo or sketch your museum display in a small notebook. You can share the photo online. If you repeat this process, you can make a photograph of each of your experimental museums and post them all. That's a kind of digital museum in itself.

THINKING ABOUT COLLECTING AND CURATING

You collected some ceramic objects and curated the collection in a mini-museum. Did you know that curating can also be an occupation? Museums and galleries have curators, whose job includes arranging objects for viewing, designing the signs and labels that explain the objects, and helping to choose more objects for the museum's collections.

- Did you enjoy making the mini museum? Why or why not?
- Do you think you appreciate the everyday ceramics objects in your living space more after having looked so closely at them? Why or why not?
- Did you get ideas about rearranging objects in your living space after making the mini museum? If so, what would you rearrange?
- If you already have a collection, can you think of new ways to display it?

WHAT'S NEXT?



- Visit a craft show and look for pottery and other clay objects. Notice how the artists arrange their wares to sell them. Imagine if you would change any.
- Visit a nearby museum. Pay attention to how the collections are displayed and lit. What kinds of signs and labels do they have? How are the objects grouped? Are there special exhibits, and what are they titled? (Your local library may have collections on display.)
- Using oven bake-clay, you can make an entire collection of miniature clay objects and enjoy arranging them in displays. Follow the package directions for handling and baking.