

Teaching in, with, and about Museums
Examples from Archaeology and Anthropology

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Teaching with Archaeological Frauds

Discussion section activity developed for Anthrac 285: Frauds and Fantastic Claims in Archaeology.

Goal: encourage students to critically evaluate material culture and discussion of how interpretations of the past are used for political purposes (a theme explored throughout the class)

Objects: Michigan Relics from the Museum of Anthropology, Great Lakes collection

Activity: role playing for students to identify criteria used to identify fakes/frauds

Discussion of why archaeological frauds are problematic building on link

Resources about Archaeological Frauds at University of Michigan

1. Michigan Relics

Website from a past exhibit at the Michigan Historical Museum, which featured some of the University of Michigan Relics, plus the extensive collection at the Michigan Historical Museum: <http://www.hal.state.mi.us/mhc/michrelics/>

2. Egyptian Frauds in the Kelsey Museum

<http://www.ipl.org/div/kelsey/gallery.html>

Museum Exhibit Field Trips

I use field trips to see exhibits to help students think about the ways that cultures and/or research are represented in museum settings. Students fill out an ungraded worksheet while viewing the exhibit and use this information as the basis for a paper.

Example of activity to examine changes in anthropological exhibits in natural history museums:

Field Trip to Cranbrook Institute of Art to see “The Story of Us” (exhibit opened in 2009)

Exhibit worksheet: Draw a sketch map of the exhibit

Questions: What was the organizing theme/message of the exhibit; how is this message communicated; how are objects used; what is the intended audience; whose voice did you hear in the exhibit; what did you like about the exhibit: what did you find confusing?

Paper assignment: Using information from course readings and discussions, plus your visitor experience, write a 10-15 page double space paper discussing how successful “The Story of Us” exhibit was at meeting the challenges faced by natural history museum that display cultural objects. NOTE: Students were asked to start their papers with a discussion of early anthropology exhibits and critiques issues of representation, using information from class discussions and readings.

Resources for funding: <http://www3.arts.umich.edu/funding/faculty/>