

Family Paideia Seminar Plan

Text: The Museum of Forgotten EmotionsbyAlexander Weinstein

Ideas, Values: Memory and Imagination, Emotion, Time, Relation

Pre-Seminar Content

Big Ideas Chat:

What one item in your home would you consider gifting to a museum?

Be creative in your thinking. It does not need to be a work of art or something of perceived value, just something that you would like to share with the world.

1st Read:

Read aloud the text while family and/or friends listen.

Vocabulary:

Discuss the unfamiliar words in the story. Explain what they mean, figure them out from the sentence, or look them up in a dictionary.

2nd Read:

Once you have completed your first reading go back to the item you selected from the Big Ideas Chat. What emotions are connected to that item? Be prepared to share the item that you selected and the emotional connection that it produces for you for our opening question, show, and tell.

Pre-Seminar Process:

* Share why you are having the discussion.

(Sample script from our classroom Paideia Seminars: Modify to fit your household.)

*“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.”*

*“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.”*

* Describe what you want to accomplish.
* Set a Family Goal.
* To balance the talk time
* To refer to the text
* To ask a question
* To speak out of uncertainty
* To build on others’ comments

Seminar Questions:

* Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):
  + What item did you select and what emotion did you connect to the item?
* Why did you select what you did? Did anyone’s item or emotional connection induce a similar or opposite experience, memory, or emotion?
* Core (Analyze textual details):
* What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of a museum? Did you have a particular museum in mind?
* In the first sentence of the second paragraph “That the curator was chosen for her insignificance is indicative of the museum itself, which can be said to hold nothing spectacular.” How does the author use the notion of a museum to creative cognitive dissonance in his story?
* Why are certain everyday items connected to some of our deepest memories?
* How might our time in quarantine be preserved as a place in history that is showcased in a museum? Could there be a Covid-19 Museum? Would the item you select change for this museum?
* In the last two sentences of the text the author states “And we are all drawn back to the museum. We stand gazing at the new displays, discovering our own lives as if for the first time. Why do you think that the author decided to end the story the way he did?
* Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):
* What about this text or its ideas resonate with you most? How did your thinking change as the conversation evolved?

Post-Seminar Process:

*“Ask each person what they liked most about the discussion.”*

* Have the family do a quick check of the discussion goal.

Post Seminar Content:

* Transition to Writing:

Together, talk about what you learned about time from the seminar discussion.

Think back to the Big Ideas Chat about the item you selected to showcase in a museum. Where is your item currently kept in the house? Why do you keep it there?

* Family Activity:

Find a place in the house to have a temporary museum of everyday items. If could be a shelf, a cabinet, a table, or a windowsill. Have a family member make a sign and another family member craft an invitation to a gallery showing. Each family member can share their item and the memory that is connected to the item.

Rotate the items to showcase the item for a couple of days.

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

Name: Jeremy Spielman

Organization: National Paideia Center

\*Text is attached if open sourced.

\*Text is cited if it needs to be procured.

<https://nebula.wsimg.com/221173ba8ec1e5cbcfafe6550aa8e9b7?AccessKeyId=04C05228EAB0135B6776&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

The Museum of Forgotten Emotions

by Alexander Weinstein

from the Raleigh Review Spring 2020 (Flash Fiction Winner)

It’s altogether possible that the lack of historical records at The Museum of Forgotten Emotions was orchestrated by its founders so that the possession of its growing gallery would be passed from curator to curator without notation. A key was placed in the new custodian’s palm, along with instructions for opening and closing the doors, and they were welcomed to the washroom and bedroom where they were to make their home. The last known curator dates back to 1976, when a baker was given the keys. She added to its holdings, dusted its cases, changed light bulbs, and began to charge a small entry fee.

That the curator was chosen for her insignificance is indicative of the museum itself, which can be said to hold nothing spectacular. Among the museum’s holdings one finds: wrinkled baseball cards, a broken bottle, train tickets, glow-in-the-dark stickers, eggshells, a tarnished ring, a handful of dirt, a joy buzzer, sackcloth, ashtrays, worn sneakers, candy wrappers, faded newspapers, a withered tulip. And yet the collection has an uncanny ability to remind us of memories we’d thought extinct. A small plastic top brings a vision of a cold winter’s day when we were six: The frost on the windows was beautiful in the morning light, and we spun the toy against the windowpane over and over, watching the street for our father’s return. A tube of chapstick reminds us of a woman we once loved who’d placed the balm by our bedside table. It’s not uncommon to find visitors weeping from the displays. We look at the item in front of them—a ragged stuffed toy, a bottle cap, a tissue—and shrug our shoulders. The display holds no ghosts of old lovers, childhoods, or fleeting friendships for us. It’s nothing more than one of the many items we pass in our daily travels, common in its insignificance. But then we come across a pair of shoelaces and recall our favorite sneakers in elementary school, or see the dog-eared copy of a paperback lent to us by a boy in college, and our heart comes to rest before the exhibit.

Those who visit the museum often find a different world upon exiting. A bus stop carries the outline of a man we once kissed; the leaves scurrying along the sidewalk remind us of being pulled by our sister in a red wagon on an autumn day. It must be these realizations which lead us to package up our trinkets, unused coffee cups, chewed up pencils, and spare pennies and send them to the museum—where the curator spends most of her day unpacking boxes and finding new spaces for the smallest items we send her way. And we are all drawn back to the museum. We stand gazing at the new displays, discovering our own lives as if for the first time.