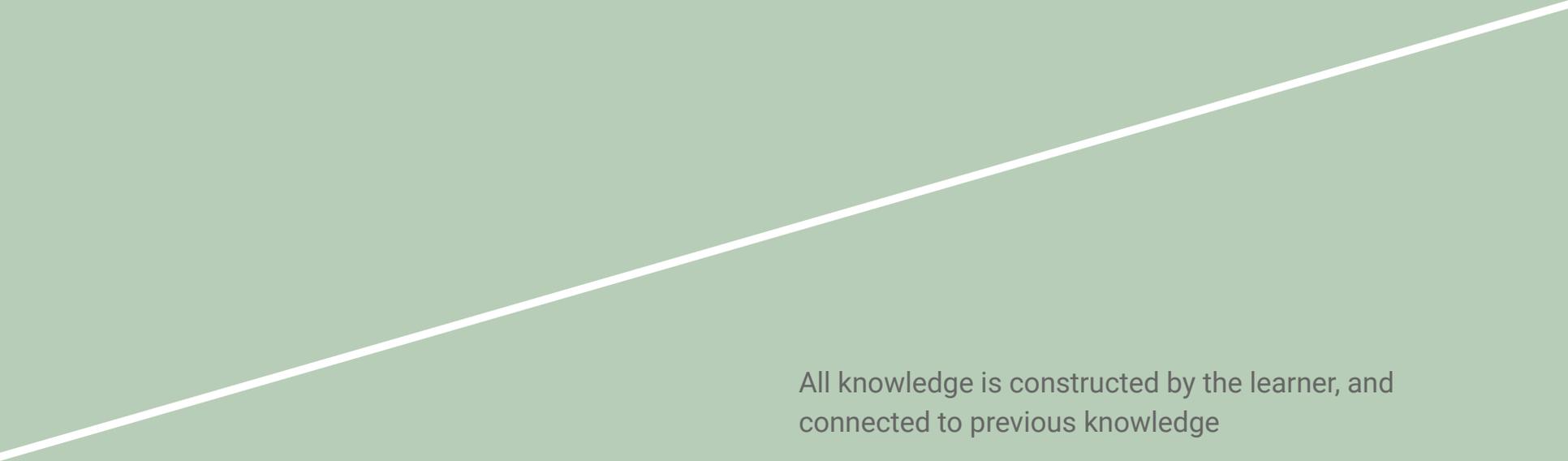


# Teaching with Objects

A brief introduction

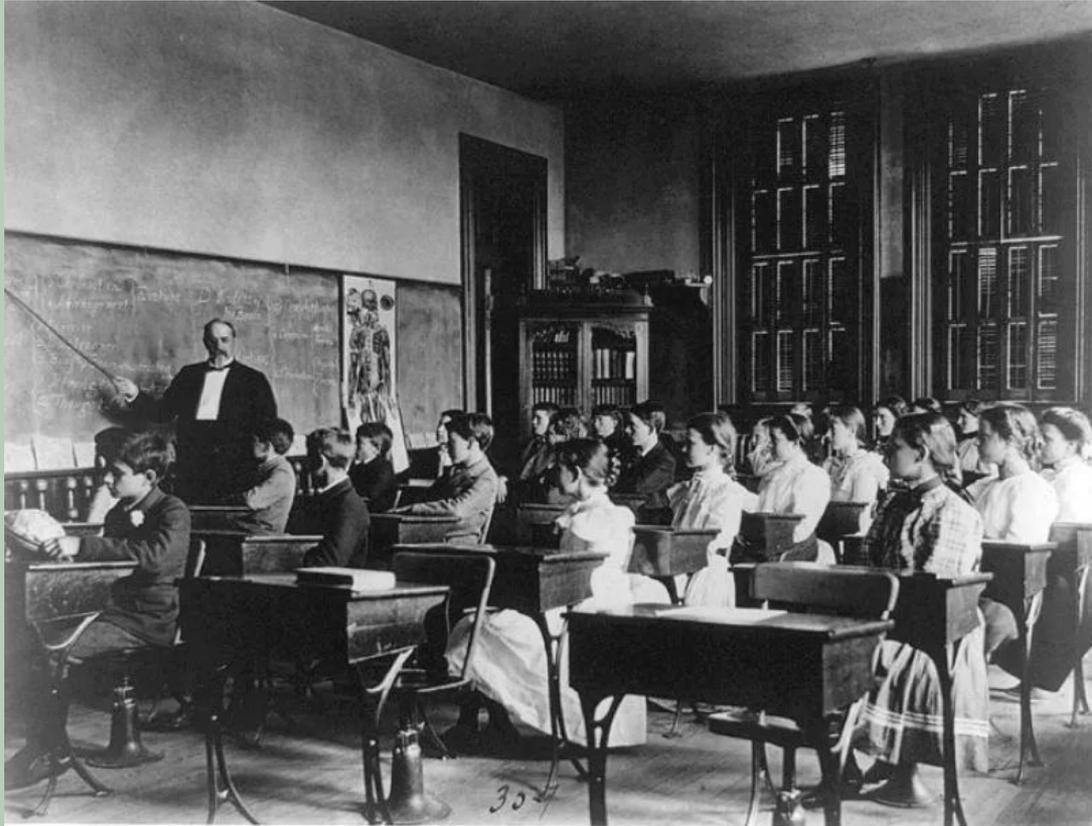


# Philosophy underpinning Museum Education



All knowledge is constructed by the learner, and  
connected to previous knowledge

# Education before 1850



## Metaphors:

- People are blank slates to be filled with knowledge (John Locke)
- People are seeds to grow in the soil of knowledge (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)

Emphasis on facts and memorization (memorizing the multiplication tables, alphabet, or a poem, for example).

# John Dewey

- The goal of education is recognizing one's own potential (not reading, writing, etc)
- People learn best by doing.



# Jean Piaget

- Described childhood in stages of learning; these stages were ways of gradually learning or acculturating
- At different stages people understand things differently; understanding is created through imagined “schemas,” or pictures of the world.



# Lev Vygotsky

- People are products of their environment. We develop through our interactions with people, cultural knowledge that is shared with us.
- Zone of Proximal Development: a child knows a certain amount, and is capable in that moment of learning a certain amount more, if that growth is provided by others.



# Jerome Bruner

- “Scaffolding” - the process of teaching in stages or making things understandable to kids, so that as you go learners need less and less support.
- Coined “Discovery Learning” - people construct knowledge based on their experience with the world around them.



What is a Spiral Curriculum?

TOPIC  
TOPIC  
TOPIC  
TOPIC



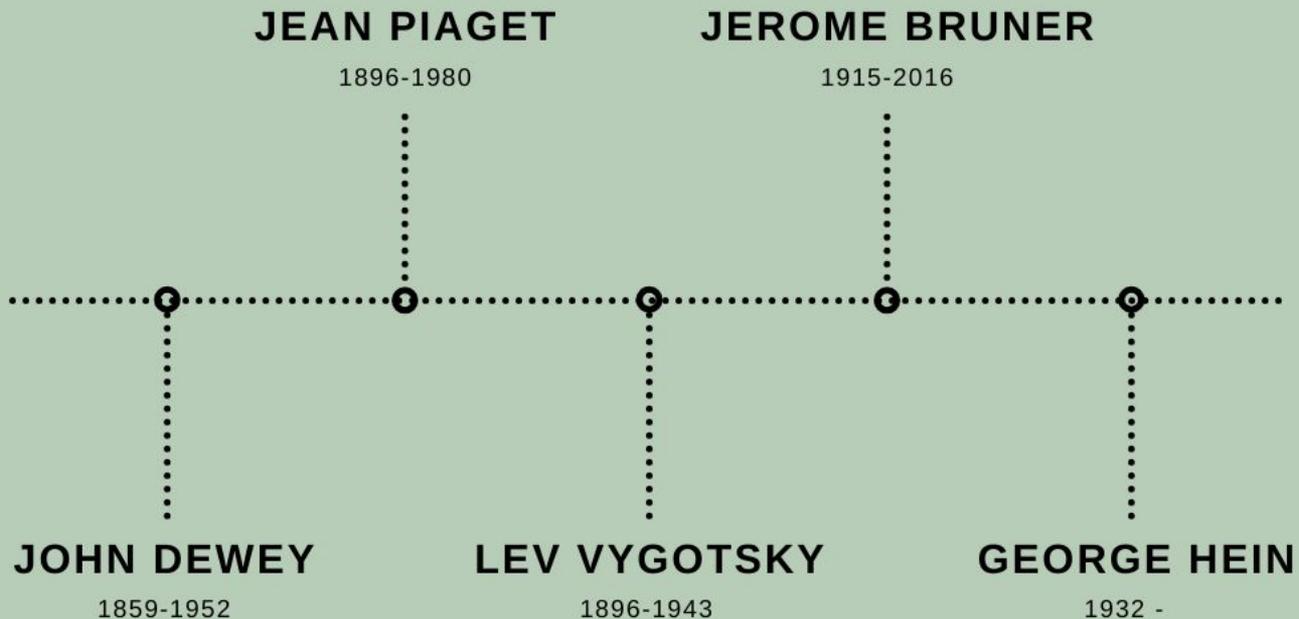
COMPLEXITY

# George Hein

- Brought these progressive, constructivist ideas to museums



# Interpretive Philosophy



# Contemporary Museum Education



# Teaching with Objects: An example



# The Object



Picture from the [Baltimore Banner](#)

# Object Lesson

*Big idea to explore: What is worth celebrating?*



## Questions to ask:

- What do you notice?
- How is National Poor Choices Day similar to or different from other national holidays you are familiar with?
- What national holiday would you help promote - even wear a button for! - and why?
- Do you think we should mark and celebrate “National Poor Choices Day”? Why or why not?

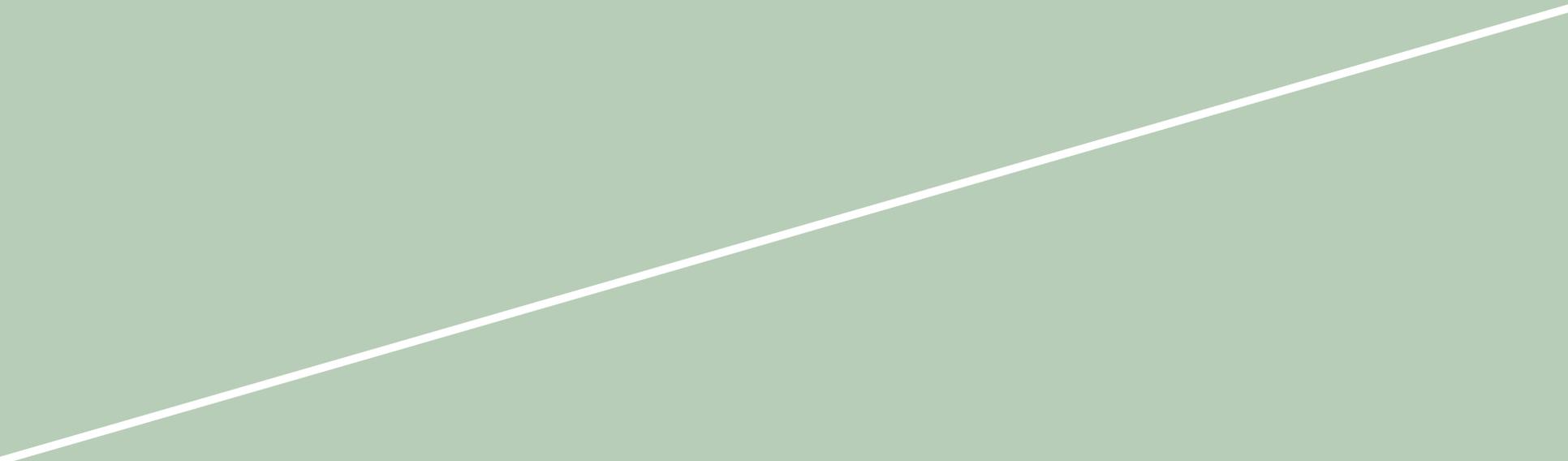
RELEVANT INFORMATION (to be inserted as appropriate to further conversation):

These buttons were created in 2024 by Baltimore artist Dug Retzler, 70, an artist and community activist. He distributed them around to Baltimore bars to make Leap Day a time to celebrate poor judgement.

How National holidays are determined:

- National holidays are designated by the United States Congress in Title V of the United States Code (5 U.S.C. § 6103).
- The **National Day Calendar** is a website dedicated to celebrating every day of the year and organizing all of these National Days in one place. Your organization can register your own holiday on their website. However, you only have a 1 in 20,000 chance of your holiday being chosen for the website - they choose 25 new submissions a year out of over 20,000 requests. February 29 is: National Time Refund Day; National Toast Day; National Leap Day; and Rare Disease Day US

# Approach to Teaching with Objects



# Start with Observation

What can you ask, or what prompts can you offer, to get people to look closely and share what they are noticing with others?



# Ask open-ended questions

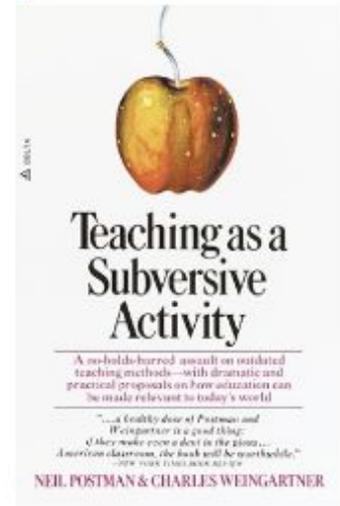
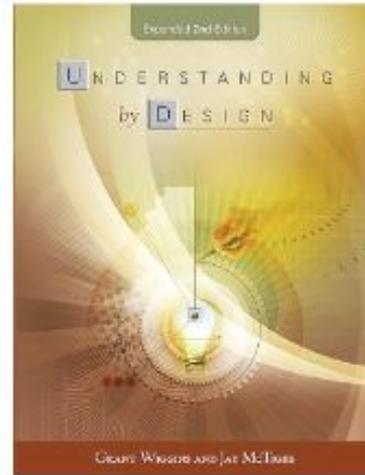
Open-ended questions have myriad correct responses, including responses that the instructor wouldn't think of in advance by him or herself.

That doesn't mean that no answers are wrong.



# Think about what's worth knowing

What makes it worth people's time and effort to find your program, travel to a museum, and spend an hour with you? The deep exploration of something that is relevant, meaningful, and persistent. What are the relevant, meaningful, and persistent ideas raised by an object or exhibition?



# Share information sparingly

What information can you share, and when should you share it, to deepen the exploration of the topic you identified as worth thinking about?



**WAMAKA OGNA KE ICANTE  
(THE HEART OF EVERYTHING THAT IS)**

The Mount Rushmore National Memorial has a controversial and painful history. It sits within the *Paha Sapa*, translated into English as the Black Hills, an area sacred to the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho people. The Lakota call it *Wamaka Oгна Ke Icante* (The Heart of Everything That is). The land was reserved for the Lakota Sioux under the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, an agreement the US government violated in 1877 following the discovery of gold.

In 1924, sculptor Gutzon Borglum was invited to create a monumental tourist attraction in the Black Hills. The site selected was Mount Rushmore, known to the Lakota as *Thunk'sila S'akpe Paha*, or the Six Grandfathers. Borglum began work in 1927 and died shortly before the monument's completion in 1941.

For the Lakota community, the National Memorial desecrates their sacred land, an offense compounded by the fact that Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt all participated in the oppression of America's Indigenous people.

Mount Rushmore has been an ongoing site of Indigenous American protest, most notably in 1970 and 1971. In 1990, the US Supreme Court awarded \$105 million in compensation for the loss of the Black Hills. The Lakota rejected the money in favor of the return of the land—a demand that stands to the present day.

The U.S. Government took control of the Black Hills of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1908.

# Provoke.

What can you ask or offer that makes people think in new ways? That encourages people to leave your program still thinking about this topic?





### Big Idea

Why is this object worth studying? How does it relate to the lives of learners?



### Close Looking

How will you get learners to look closely at the object?



### Questions

What will you ask that will move them from looking closely to understanding the object to the big idea?



### Information

What information is it important that they learn? Where might you insert information in the conversation?

- ❖ Start with observation
- ❖ Ask open-ended questions
- ❖ Think about what's worth knowing
- ❖ Use information sparingly
- ❖ Provoke

Resource for developing your own object lesson