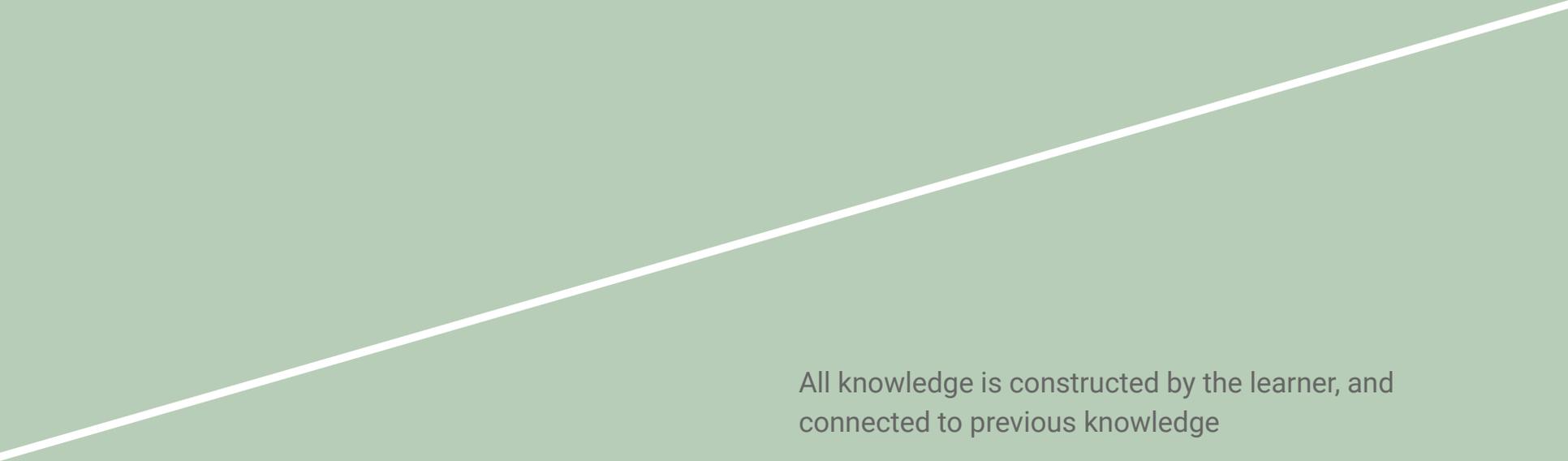# Teaching with Objects

A brief introduction
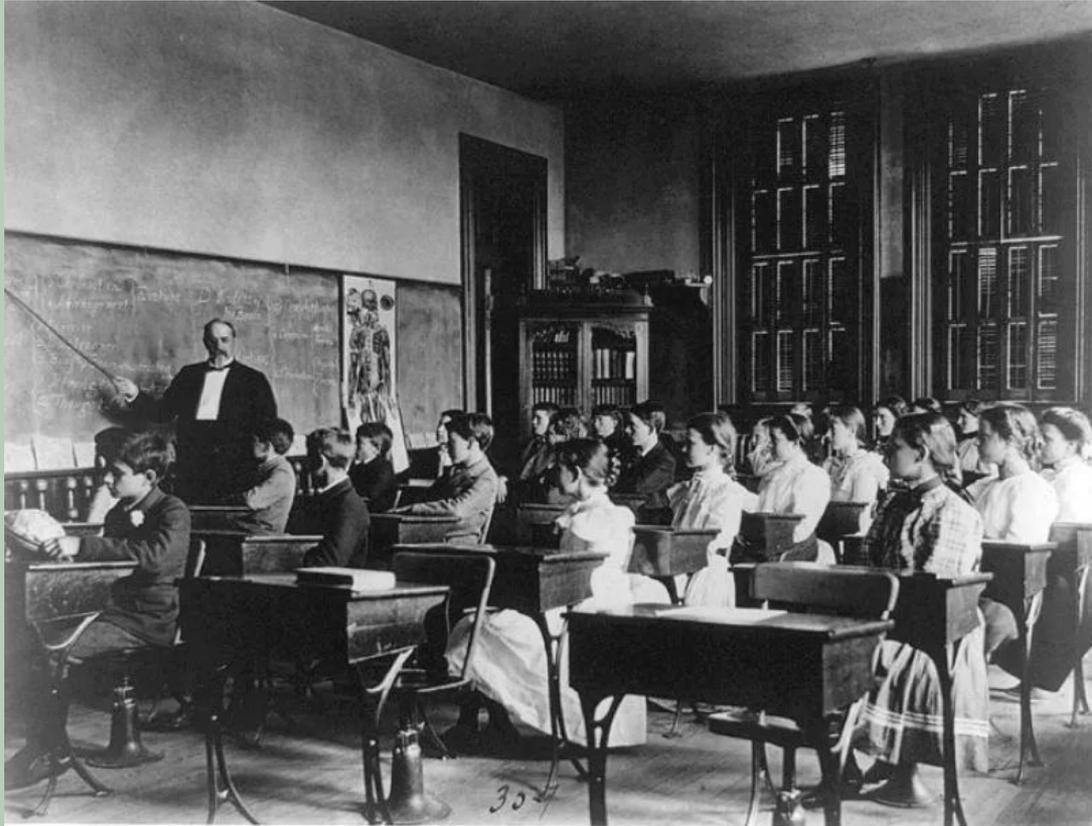
Philosophy underpinning Museum Education

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.

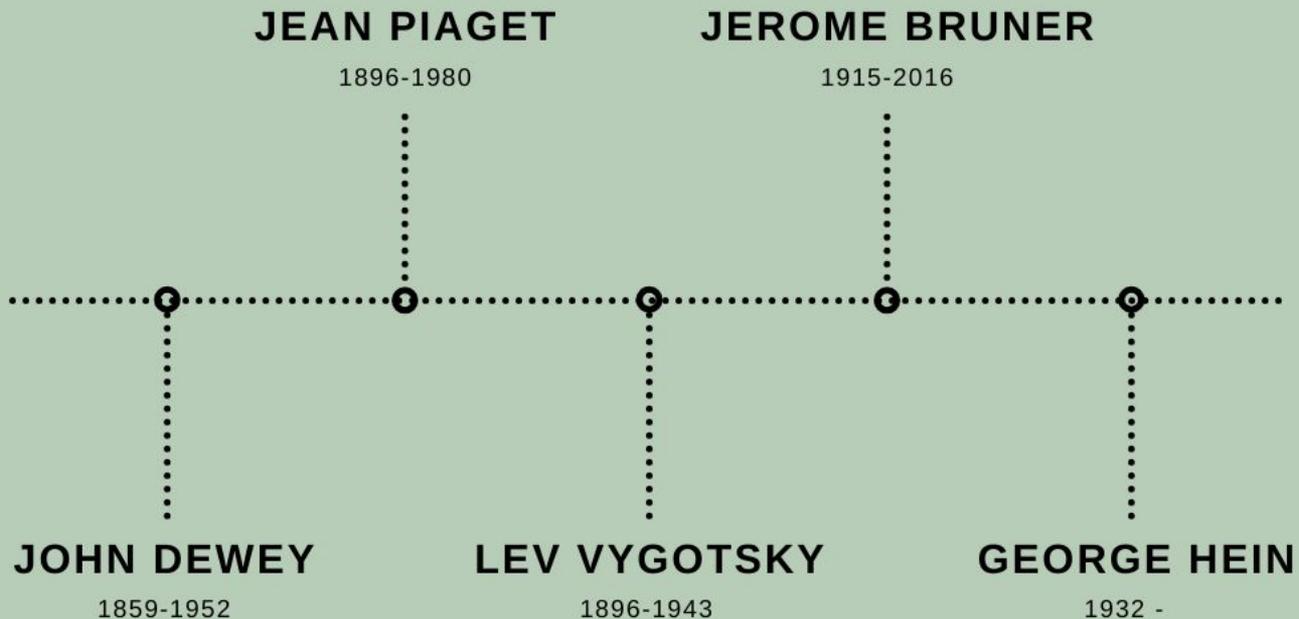What is a Spiral Curriculum?

TOPIC

TOPIC

TOPIC

TOPIC

COMPLEXITY

George Hein

- Brought these progressive, constructivist ideas to museums

Interpretive Philosophy

JEAN PIAGET
1896-1980

JEROME BRUNER
1915-2016

JOHN DEWEY
1859-1952

LEV VYGOTSKY
1896-1943

GEORGE HEIN
1932 -

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
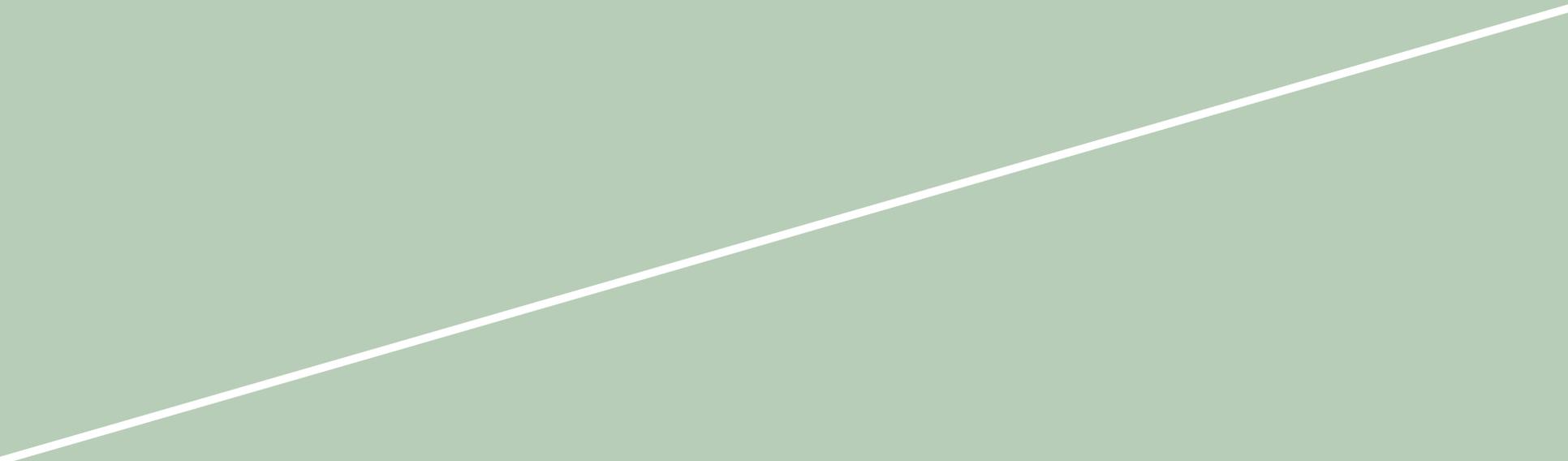
Start with Observation

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?
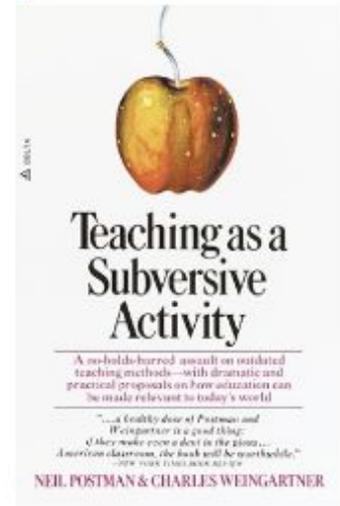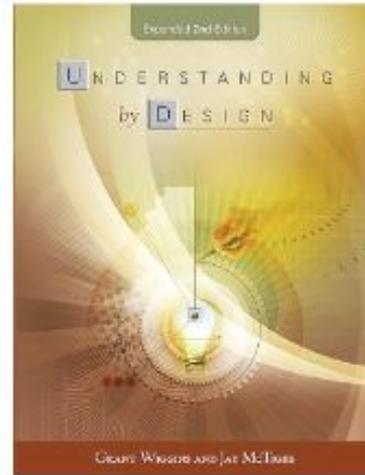
Share information sparingly

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

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