WhatThis is...and Why

This is the first issue of ART ZOO, bringing news from the Smithsonian Institution to teachers of grades three through six. The purpose is to help you use museums, parks, libraries, zoos, and many other resources within your community to open up new learning opportunities for your students.

Our reason for launching a new publication dedicated to promoting the use of community resources among students and teachers nationally stems from a fundamental belief, shared by all of us here at the Smithsonian, in the power of objects. Working as we do with a vast collection of national treasures that literally contains the spectrum from "art" to "zoo," we believe that objects (be they works of art, natural history specimens, historical artifacts, or live animals) have a tremendous power to educate. We maintain that it is equally important for students to learn to use objects as research tools as it is for them to learn to use words and numbers—and you can find these objects close at hand, by drawing on the resources of your own community.

Our idea, then, in producing ART ZOO, is to share with you—and you and us—methods of working with students and objects that Smithsonian education staff members have found successful.

Two pilot issues of Art to Zoo will be published during the second half of this school year. Then, beginning in the fall of 1976, the publication will be made available on a regular subscription basis. Featured in this first pilot issue is an article on the Smithsonian traveling exhibition, Blacks in the Westward Movement, with suggestions for ways in which you can use the show as well as resources in your own community to lend a black perspective to the study of American history. Also included in this first issue is an article from the National Portrait Gallery on "reading" portraits and using them to enrich your own social studies curriculum, and an article from the Chesapeake Bay Center for Environmental Studies, advocating use of your school playground or students' backyards to demonstrate the principles of environmental science.

Indeed, the possibilities for ART ZOO seem as endlessly various as the Smithsonian itself. But in order to test the practicality of our ideas and to ensure that our articles will be responsive to the needs of students and teachers nationally, we need your help.

You are one of approximately two hundred and fifty teachers, in thirty-five schools across the United States, who have been asked to respond critically to ART ZOO, in order to test the practicality of our ideas and to ensure that our articles will be responsive to the needs of students and teachers nationally. You will be sending us your opinions, and then again back in the classroom, they will help you to see relationships between your own experience and the experiences of the individuals and groups under study.

Blacks in the Westward Movement

In 1536, Estevanico, a black Moor of legendary skill, blazed a trail into the American Southwest, enabling Tray Marcus de Nac, who party he guided, to be the first white man to set foot in Arizona and New Mexico.

The contributions made by Estevanico and other blacks to the opening of the American West have been vastly underrated by most history books and the media. Soon, however, a special Bicentennial exhibition from the Smithsonian's Anacostia Neighborhood Museum may visit your community, allowing you and your students to develop new thoughts on this important dimension of our nation's development, from the days of the early Spanish explorers to the settling of the "last frontier."

Entitled Blacks in the Westward Movement, the show is being circulated nationally by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service according to the schedule below. The exhibition shows how black explorers, miners, founders of cities, adventurers, teachers, civil rights leaders, businessmen, soldiers, and lawmakers worked in the face of formidable odds and discriminatory laws to contribute to western expansion. The period covered is from about 1500 to 1930, with emphasis on the fifty years following the Civil War.

To help you make the material in this exhibition meaningful to your third- through sixth-graders, we have developed two different approaches, which you can modify to suit your curriculum. Essentially, these approaches follow a plan derived from evidence (or "clues") that can be found in the photographs, objects, and other materials in the exhibition. Your students will draw tentative conclusions about a key issue raised by you prior to their museum visit; back in the classroom, they will explore the issue further by comparing notes with their classmates and by seeking information to support or refute what they concluded in the museum. You will guide them through this inquiry process by asking leading questions and by posing problems and presenting hypothetical situations that will help them to see relationships between their own experience and the experiences of the individuals and groups under study.

Approach No. 1

The focus of the first approach is the "Black Exodus" from the South, which began in 1879, at the end of Reconstruction. The key issue is migration. In the school classroom, through analysis and class discussion of their own families' experiences with moving, students explore the meaning of migration. Later, in the museum, through study of the silkscreened photographs, and documents of Section IV of Blacks in the Westward Movement, and then again back in the classroom, they study the experiences of a group known as the "Exodusters," who migrated to Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma in the late 1870s.

Before going to the museum, ask each child to consider: When was the last time your family moved? Do you remember the experience? What kind of transportation did you use and how long did it take you to get there? What did you take with you? What were your reasons for moving?

Have the children interview members of their families for help in answering these questions and to find out how parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters felt about moving. Have them draw pictures of their families on moving day, showing the transportation used, the important possessions taken, and the happy, sad, and mixed feelings of different family members.

Now you are ready to visit the museum. In the museum, begin by asking the children if they know the meaning of the term, racial discrimination. The extent of their understanding undoubtedly will vary. By asking them why they think some people in this country are discriminated against and by giving them the chance to talk about their own experiences with discrimination, you can help to bring this issue into focus. Then ask them to imagine:

You are ten years old and black, living in Nashville, Tennessee, after the Civil War. Because of discrimination, your father, a carpenter by trade, is unable to find a job. Your mother works as a laundress to support you and your brothers and sisters. You haven't shoes or warm clothes to wear or even

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of the work; and whether the job is customarily done by both men and women or by one sex only. Have each child draw "portraits" of his mother and father containing clues to these questions. The day before the museum visit, draw up (on a large piece of butcher paper or on the chalkboard) a data retrieval chart—see top of page—which organizes the data for five or six of the most frequently held parental occupations.

In the museum, after reading two or more portraits as a class for practice, have the children work individually or in teams to complete data retrieval sheets patterned after the chart completed in the classroom. Back in the classroom, discuss the information gathered from the museum, once again recording the children's collective data on a retrieval chart. From this information, what conclusions can the students draw about the roles played by blacks in the westward movement? Do any of these conclusions run counter to the ideas they had before visiting the exhibition? Finally, divide the class into seven teams and ask each team to create an exhibition of objects and pictures representative of one of the seven different roles studied in the museum. The idea here is to provide complete, correct, and meaningful aids to get the children involved in the history of black exploration. These two approaches to the exhibition can be inexpensively reproduced by photo-offset and the copies covered with plastic laminate to allow the visuals to be done on the spot, and even if you could, it is highly disjointed experience.

Approach No. 2

This approach explores the wide variety of roles played by blacks in the Westward Movement. The children learn that as adults in our society today play many different roles, black men and women contributed in numerous ways to the opening of the American West. Portraits of many black contributors to western expansion may be found in this exhibition, all of them contrasted to their contemporaries and occupations of their subjects. Among them you meet . . .

James Beckwourth, for trapper and trader and prospector, and his surprising career in the course of a lonely and dangerous lifetime important trails and available through museums exhibiting the show. These activities could be used either in connection with the two suggestions or with a guided tour or other program offered by an exhibiting museum.

However your plans for using the exhibition, we strongly recommend that you discuss them strongly several weeks in advance with a staff member of the museum where you will see the show. The staff member can advise you as to the best time to bring your class and will set up an appointment for you if the museum requires, as many do, that all group visits be scheduled. Staff also will answer any questions you might have about the content of the exhibition and inform you of any special demonstrations, or other events that may have been scheduled to augment the show. As with all museum visits, careful advance planning is your key to success with Blacks in the Westward Movement.

Other Options

Suppose that Blacks in the Westward Movement will not be visiting your community. Is it still possible to lend a black perspective to the study of western expansion? When can a book, a poster, a museum go to your classroom to make this possible? Visuals can be done on the spot, and even if you could, it is highly disjointed experience.

Bibliographies

Two bibliographies—on for you and one for your students—relevant to Blacks in the Westward Movement are available (see address below). Your list contains titles that were particularly helpful in the preparation of this article, either in providing background information in black history or in suggesting the pedagogical direction to take in planning the approaches to the exhibition. The student list, which was compiled for you by the Department of Library Science of the District of Columbia Public Schools, includes books that were used as classroom source materials by teachers who took their elementary classes to see the show during its stay at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum.

To get the free booklet and bibliographies, write to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1163 Arts and Industries Building, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560.
What Can You Do with a Portrait?

Every community in the United States is endowed with a portrait collection. Portraits can be found in museums, in historical societies, in restored houses, and in the homes of citizens. They are reproduced in textbooks, on stamps, and on money. Photo-portraits appear daily in newspapers and magazines. Many commercial products carry likenesses of historical figures on their labels. What you may not realize, however, is that these likenesses present opportunities for new ways of approaching subjects having to do with the thoughts, actions, and creations of human beings.

Portraits are particularly effective in bringing these subjects alive for elementary-age children.

To find out how portraits can be used in the classroom, we went to the Education Department at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, which collects and displays portraits of men and women who contributed to the history and development of the United States, from Pocahontas to Richard Nixon. The Education Department describes one of its goals as putting people back into history. "Too often we learn history as a series of events," said Lisa Strick, associate curator of the department. "We forget that people initiated these events, and people were affected by them. We use portraits to help students learn about people who lived in a different time. Children can learn a remarkable amount about a person just from looking at a portrait of him—if they approach it correctly."

For teachers of elementary-age students, approaching a portrait correctly involves two steps. The first is to teach children how to look at a portrait and draw conclusions from what they see. The second is to involve students in the portrait-making process in some way so that they can appreciate the problems and decisions faced by the portrait artist. Can you do these things in your classroom? Sure you can. Here are a few suggestions, from the gallery, for making portraits come alive.

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Of Beetles, Worms, and Leaves of Grass

John Falk

Adaptation—Predator—Prey. You divide your class into teams and assign each team to a plant to own to study. The children hunt for materials, such as seeds, eggs, insects, and worms, which they think might be food (prey) for animals living in or passing through the area. Then they work with natural materials found on the site and with simple man-made materials (paper clips, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, string) to build devices analogous to the claws, beaks, and jaws of likely predators. More direction can be given to this activity by assigning each child a specific function for his predator device to fill—picking up eggs, or digging up roots are two possibilities. The object is to introduce the predator device as one type of adaptation or feature of an organism that enables it to survive and reproduce.

Plant Hunt. Students work in teams of three to five participants to find as many different plants as possible within a fifteen- to thirty-minute time period. They pick two leaves or pieces from each plant specimen collected, placing one of these pieces in a team-owned container and the other in one of twenty-five or more paper cups (one cup for each type of plant collected) set out in the middle of the lawn. After examining with hand lenses what they have found, the children discuss and try to verify whether each piece of plant in their team's collection is from a different type (or species) and whether each cup in the center of the lawns is uniform in content. This activity helps to develop student interest and skill in sampling plant populations and also demonstrates in very concrete terms the meaning of the concept species.

Some other laws activities that students enjoy—"Inventing" plant adaptations, for example, or studying the plants near a building to determine the effect of a man-made structure on the life surrounding it. The key is to encourage active investigation with real materials by drawing on the resources supplied by the environment—"... in fresh and imaginative ways."

A Child's Drawing Done at the Chesapeake Bay Center for Environmental Studies

For more information about OBIS, write to Dr. John Falk, Chesapeake Bay Center for Environ. Studies, Box 623, Edgewood Maryland 21040.