

# Lesson 1

## Revising the Role of Museums

### Pre-reading Activities

#### **Reading Skills Theory: Background Knowledge (schematic knowledge)**

When people set about to read an article or, more generally, to process new information, they do not approach it as a 'tabula rasa'; they bring with them their prior knowledge of the world, their schemata. A schema is a mental structure that helps people understand the world and the rapidly changing environment. Schemata organize current knowledge and provide a framework for easily absorbing new information. When we read, we organize new information in pre-existing schemata. By activating his prior knowledge, the reader is likely to comprehend a text more thoroughly and quickly. One way of achieving this is by looking at the title, subtitle, pictures, first and last sentence of the text, first sentence of each paragraph, and try to predict what the article will be about.

**Look at the title of Lesson 1. What is it about?**

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.....

**What is your opinion about museums?**

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.....  
.....

**Look at the first paragraph. What is the new trend in museums?**

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**Look at the last paragraph. What is the writer's opinion of this new trend?**

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.....

## 1.1. Reading Text

In recent years, a new generation of museum professionals has begun to create a new, people-centred museum where the visitor has become the focus of every activity. Everything, from the physical layout to the choice of exhibition to the organisation of the collection is assessed in terms of how it will appeal to and stimulate people, to such an extent that it often seems that the original purpose of museums, the collection, study and exhibition of objects, is now **subordinate** to a vast array of other social activities.

**Picture 1.1.** Temporary exhibition at the National Gallery, Athens.



*Source: Syrigos Evangelos.*

Turning museums towards 'The People' in this way is not just a change of direction or an **embellishment** of what went before. It is a total reversal of the meaning and purpose of the museum and puts in question the existence of museums as such. For 200 years, from the creation of the Louvre by the French republican government as the first national museum open to the general public, the central concern of **curators** was the collection, preservation and study of objects **deemed to** be of artistic, historic or

scientific interest. The museum was organised around its collections. Because the collections were held **in perpetuity** on behalf of the public, museums have always had a concern with, and sense of obligation to, society at large. Whatever the ideological bent of those who ran the museum, the fact that it was bound by a clearly defined professional obligation gave its activity some rational purpose. The new museum, by contrast, organised around the ever-changing **presumed** needs of people, lacks any rational behaviour whatsoever. Its functions bends and twists to fit perceived demands, most of which are **arbitrarily** chosen by the government or the museum authorities themselves, and which often have no connection with the original core activity of the museum.

Once a museum puts the perceived needs of the people at the heart of its work, the collection will quite naturally lose its importance and value. A collection is no longer seen as valuable in itself- because it is rare or beautiful, or because it represents something important within a particular field. Instead, its value is embodied in something external to itself: the immediate relationship it is able to establish to the public, how it will help the museum and its officials connect with the public, or how it will lead to observable changes in the lives of the visitors.

**Picture 1.2.** One of the most celebrated works of Hellenistic art is without doubt the Nike of Samothrace, on display at the Louvre since 1884 CE.



Source: Thomas Ulrich, Pixabay

The loss of collections' value can be observed in many aspects of museum practice. Sometimes collections are left to gather dust while muse-

ums get on with more exciting and socially responsible activities. In the Group for Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM) case studies of best practice, museum projects involved **awareness-raising** about teenage pregnancy, or setting up a football team with young vandals. The report argues that a reorientation towards social ends will show why collections 'are worth having in the first place'. But in practice the desired social ends are more easily achieved without bringing artefacts into it. If they are used, the objects become no more than props for the wider social project to which they have no necessary connection.

**Picture 1.3.** The Moco Museum is an independent museum with a wide range of inspiring modern, contemporary, and street art based in Barcelona. After entering its patio and being fascinated by its architecture, the huge sculpture 'Final Days' by KAWS (a Brooklyn-based artist) welcomes the visitors.



Source: Syrigos Evangelos.

Sometimes interactive exhibits replace objects. If the main concern of a museum is to engage the public in particular ways, these aims might be better achieved with animation or interactive technologies than with the raw object. The simple object allows for an open encounter with no pre-determined outcome- the visitor can make of it what he likes. Interactive technology only allows for closed outcomes because the encounter is all programmed in advance by the museum. For museums geared towards building relationships with the people, an open-ended encounter between visitor and object leaves far too much to chance.

[...]

In conclusion, it seems that museums should stick to what they do best- to preserve, display, study and where possible collect the treasures of civilisation and of nature. They are no fit to do anything else. It is this single rationale for the museum that makes each one unique, which gives each its own distinctive character. It is the hard work of scholars and curators in their own areas of expertise that attracts visitors.

## 1.2. Vocabulary Activities

**Activity 1:** Match the words or expressions in bold in the above text to their meaning below:

1. Something easily recognisable because it is different from other things: .....
2. Something that has a lower or less important position: .....
3. An accidental or unexpected meeting: .....
4. Somebody in charge of a museum or a library: .....
5. Somebody who studies a subject in great detail, especially at university: .....
6. Sensitizing people towards understanding a situation or a subject of the present time: .....
7. In a way that is based on chance rather than being planned or based on reason: .....
8. Something added to make something else more beautiful or interesting: .....
9. The logic behind some belief or action: .....
10. Considered or judged in a particular way: .....
11. Believed to be true although not certain: .....
12. For ever: .....



**Activity 2:** Use some of the words above to complete the following sentences:

1. A museum's purpose is the storage of artefacts .....
2. You will recognise her easily. She has a very ..... voice.
3. The individual's needs are ..... to those of the group.
4. He is a distinguished ..... of History.
5. The lecture on the environmental repercussions of the project involved..... of the locals.
6. You can't ..... make the decision to fire me.
7. He tried to explain the scientific ..... behind his work.
8. A museum is at the centre of a ..... 's concerns.
9. The architect added some more ..... to the building to give it an air of art deco.
10. The politician's speech was ..... controversial and sparked a debate.
11. She had an awkward ..... with her ex-boyfriend at the office gathering.
12. In law you are ..... innocent until you are proved guilty.

**Picture 1.4.** The State Hermitage Museum is a museum of art and culture in Saint Petersburg, Russia. It is the largest art museum in the world by gallery space.



Source: Serge Vin, Pexels.

### 1.3. Reading Comprehension Activity

**Activity 3:** Read the above text again and answer the following questions.

1. What is the aim of the new generation of museums?  
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2. Which was the first museum that was open to the public?  
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3. What was the traditional task of curators?  
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.....
4. According to the text, why doesn't the new museum have a logical behaviour?  
.....  
.....
5. Why do collections in new museums seem less important?  
.....  
.....
6. What are the museum items deemed as in the new museums according to the writer?  
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7. What is the difference between simple museum objects and interactive technology?  
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8. What gives each museum its uniqueness?  
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### 1.4. Cloze Exercise

**Activity 4:** Complete the following excerpt with the words provided below:

<i>a. craftsmanship</i>	<i>b. light</i>	<i>c. intrinsic</i>	<i>d. exalted</i>
<i>e. impose</i>	<i>f. conflicting</i>	<i>g. obvious</i>	<i>h. appreciation</i>

Advocates of the people-centred museum argue that collections have no (1) ..... value anyway. Their value lies instead in their relationship to the people. At best, this is a statement of the (2) ..... . Without society, without thought and knowledge, there would be no museums and objects would have no value in meaningful sense of the word. It is true also, that society's understanding and (3) ..... of objects changes through time. However, just because different societies might bring to (4) ..... different or even (5)..... aspects of the same object, does not mean that the aesthetic or scientific value of those objects is arbitrary. Society might impose its tastes upon museum collections -classifying, organising, and interpreting in its own way. But that is only one side of the relationship, because objects also (6) ..... themselves upon society. The Parthenon Marbles did not gain their importance from the whim of Lord Elgin or the British Museum. They hold their (7) ..... place today because of their artistic greatness, the perfection of the (8) ..... and their unique historical significance in relation both to the art of Periclean Athens and to the entire Western tradition.

### 1.5. Tourism Terminology/Academic and Business Vocabulary

**Activity 5:** Match the following terms to their definitions below:

a. <i>gastronomy</i>	b. <i>Restaurant manager</i>	c. <i>catering manager</i>	d. <i>back waiter</i>	e. <i>bartender</i>
f. <i>host/hostess (greeter in Am.E.)</i>	g. <i>sommelier</i>	h. <i>Food and Beverages manager</i>	i. <i>food runner</i>	f. <i>food server</i>

1. An employee who receives guests in a restaurant and shows them to their tables: .....
2. French term for wine waiter in charge of wine service in a restaurant: .....
3. A professional who delivers orders from the kitchen to the customers at a restaurant: .....
4. A professional who is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of a restaurant: .....



5. A professional who plans, organises, and develops the food and beverage services of organisations and businesses: .....
6. They are responsible for helping front waiters by removing empty glasses and plates, filling bread baskets and water glasses etc.: .....
7. Art and science of good eating: .....
8. A professional who is responsible for serving food and beverages in restaurants: .....
9. A professional responsible for planning, organizing, controlling, and evaluating the operations of restaurants, bars etc.: .....
10. A person serving drinks at a bar: .....

**Picture 1.5.** The “Street Market” is a work - a donation by the artist Panagiotis Tetsis to the National Gallery, which welcomes the art-loving public at the entrance of the new Museum, symbolically proclaiming the democratic character of art.



Source: Evangelos Syrigos.

**Picture 1.6.** Natural History Museum in London is a world-famous museum that promotes the discovery and enjoyment of the natural world.



*Source: Pauline Loroy, Unsplash.*