



Engaging young people in design by working
with museums and professional designers:

toolkit

for teachers

V&A
DESIGN FOR LIFE



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This toolkit contains information, well-tested strategies and activity ideas to help secondary school teachers work with museums to deliver design projects. The content is tailored to the Design & Technology curriculum and much will also be applicable to Art and Design. This toolkit will help you organise a visit to a museum or gallery as a starting point for design projects, engage young people in design and work with a professional designer to develop projects further.

The V&A has produced this toolkit in consultation with museums across the country who have taken part in Design for Life, a three-year national project, led by the Victoria and Albert Museum. For more information see www.vam.ac.uk/designforlife The ideas and strategies in this toolkit are informed by the experiences of museum educators, designers, teachers and students involved in the project.

The activities have been devised with art and design collections in mind but many could be adapted to work with natural history, historical or industrial collections.

Cover: Queen Anne Chair, Gareth Neal, 2009, Shipley Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Above: Design Pro special workshop with SeymourPowell and Havering Sixth Form

1 Why use a museum to support the design curriculum?

Museums are an excellent resource for Design and Technology (D&T) teaching. They offer students opportunities to gain inspiration and improve skills in problem-solving and visual analysis. Looking at objects from different times and places helps students to understand the cultural significance and impact of design, both historic and contemporary.

'We use the internet and Google in the classroom to look at products but I think you really have to be in this [museum] environment to see the products, how they are being displayed in the context of the history of design and history of the products. You just can't get that anywhere else.' D&T Teacher, Havering Sixth Form College

Getting Inspiration

The D&T National Curriculum, GCSE and A Level syllabuses specify that students must demonstrate the ability to develop creative designs. Museums offer unique and inspiring starting points for innovative D&T projects. Students can research and develop ideas at the museum as part of their design process. They might look at examples of the type of product they are designing or become inspired by all sorts of different objects and structures in the galleries or the museum building itself.

NB: Professional designers regularly use museums as creative resources. International innovation and product design company Seymourpowell recently used the William Morris collection of textiles and wallpaper designs at the Victoria and Albert Museum to inspire designs for a range of mobile phones for young people.



Furnishing fabric, Strawberry Thief, William Morris, 1883, V&A (T.586-1919)

Nokia l'Amour Phone, SeymourPowell, 2005

1 Why use a museum to support the design curriculum?

Creative problem solving

Investigating museum collections can give students a fresh approach to solving design problems. Evaluating the aesthetics, materials and function of an existing product can help them to generate new design solutions. For example, could the shapes and forms found in a fashion collection hold the key to improving the ergonomics of a laptop? Or could a Japanese travelling tea set inspire the re-design of a cordless kettle?

Product analysis

Making use of museum collections can help students learn how to evaluate products. By studying how a product has evolved over time, they can learn about the factors that have influenced its design and imagine how it could be re-designed in the future.

The [Talking Design](#) film has tips on how to analyse objects in the museum. Link to this from www.vam.ac.uk/designforlife It would be helpful to watch this with

Right: Queen Anne Chair, maker unknown, ca. 1725. V&A (W:44:1, 2-1938)

Far right: Queen Anne Chair, Gareth Neal, 2009. Shipley Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

your students and any supporting staff before you visit the Museum. The Design DNA activity sheet can help students to start asking relevant questions about the design and manufacture of objects. See the [Resources to download](#) section at the end of this toolkit.

Awareness of historical and contemporary design

The D&T National Curriculum, GCSE and A Level syllabuses specify that students must develop knowledge and understanding of past and present designs, which should inform and influence their own design solutions. Museums with art and design collections are fantastic places for students to learn about design processes and practitioners. Collections often include prime examples of work by influential designers. Local museums frequently display objects relating to regional industries and key artefacts which can bring local history to life.

Understanding the cultural significance and impact of design

Museum displays communicate the impact of particular inventions, materials and design movements. They allow students to look at changing trends and products, and develop a critical understanding of the design process from historical and contemporary perspectives. Associate Designer at Seymourpowell, Paula Zuccotti, described the museum environment as, *'a great place for students to visit to understand about different design styles and to understand about iconic products. As a designer you need to go through that. You need to understand history and how time and conventions change.'*



2 Ten practical tips for planning a school visit to a museum

1 Look at the museum's website

Find out if there is information that relates to your project. Not all museums have their entire collections online so it is worth contacting them directly if you are interested in a specific work.

2 Contact learning or education staff at the museum

Talk to the relevant staff about the project you are planning. They can advise which parts of the collection will best support your project and let you know if they are running any related events.

3 Visit the museum before your school trip

Take the chance to see the displays and find out if there are any relevant temporary exhibitions taking place. Chat to staff about activities and check out the facilities.

4 Find and note interesting objects and pieces that you can show to your group on your visit

If you cannot visit the museum in person, look online and where possible use search functions on the museum's website to identify themes and objects relevant to your visit.

5 Bring some props

Although a lot of museums now have objects to touch and interactive gallery displays, it is a good idea to bring your own handling collection or props and make use of everyday

Student drawing in the V&A galleries



things around you to create a more hands-on experience.

6 Plan carefully how you will use the museum collection during your visit

Be specific about what you expect your students to achieve while they are in the museum. Focus your visit and gallery activities on one or two displays or areas. In larger museums, it can be a good idea to follow teacher led activities, for example [Design DNA](#) (Section 5, [Resources to download](#)), with some time for open focussed exploration, drawing and research.

7 Plan gallery activities

Encourage students to examine and compare different objects on display through gallery activities. They might, for example, compare products that they own and use with earlier examples of the same product in the museum collection. For further activities, see [Resources to download](#) at the end of this toolkit.

8 Bring sketchbooks and pencils for your students

Sketching an object that they find interesting can help students to look closely at displays and objects. They could keep these sketches and use them to inspire designs in the classroom.

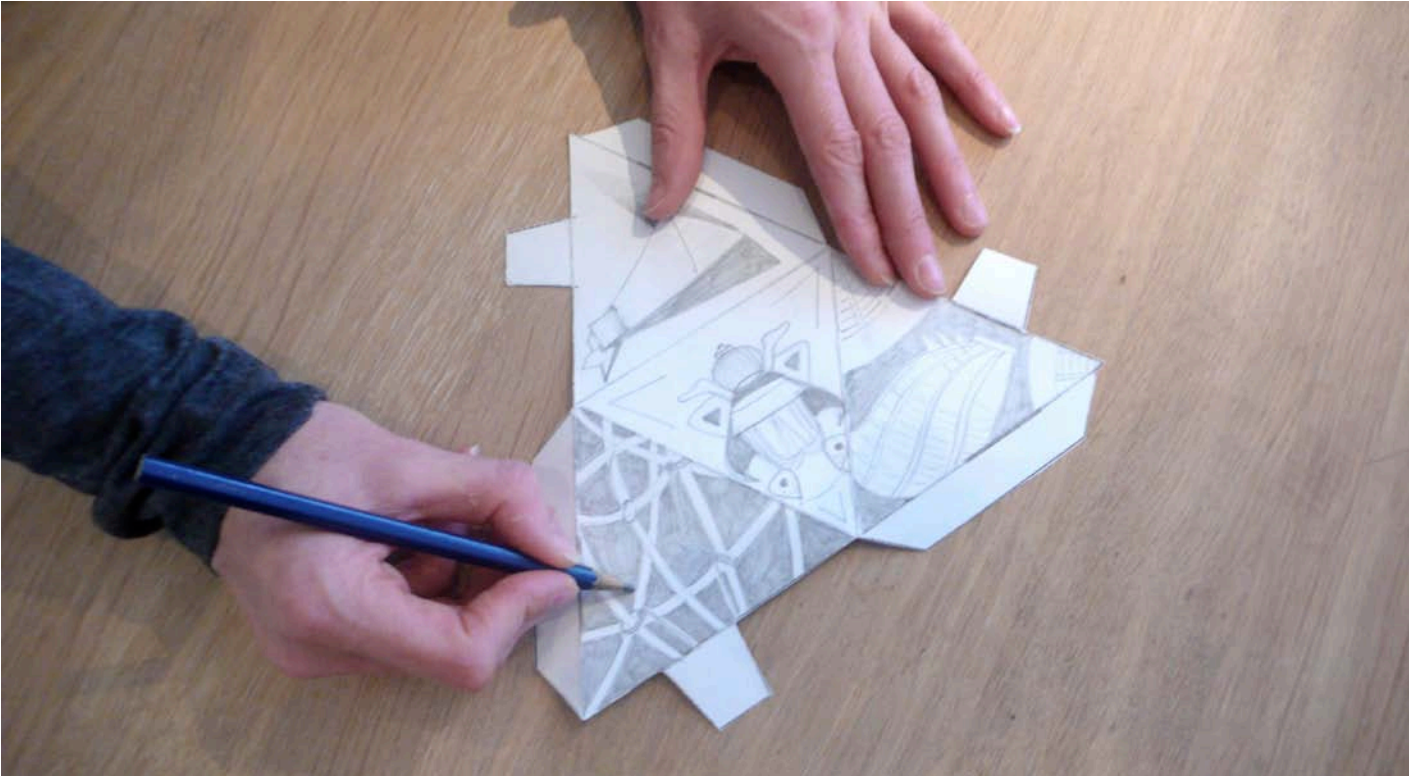
9 Find out the museum's policy on photography in galleries

Using a camera or a mobile phone is a quick way for students to record objects and ideas, if photography is allowed by the museum. They can print out their photos at school and insert them into their sketchbooks.

10 A note on conduct in museums

If your students are new to museums, remind them that most museum objects cannot be touched. Even clean hands leave a small amount of grease which can damage fragile exhibits. It is the museum's responsibility to preserve works in good condition for future generations.

3 Starting points for design projects



Activity: Ideas Collector

Download a drawing activity to gather initial ideas and inspiration in the museum. See section 5 [Resources to Download](#)

Case Studies

The V&A and Design for Life partner museums have some inspiring examples of D&T projects on their websites. For links to these see www.vam.ac.uk/designforlife

- Bag design project using recycled fabric and polypropylene: V&A Design for Life case study.
- 'Trash Fashion' design project using recycled materials: Brighton Museum & Art Gallery.

- Silk screened T-shirt and bag project: Bolton Museum & Archive Service.
- Lighting project using recycled materials: Manchester City Galleries
- Silverware project making sustainable implements to eat take-away food: Museums Sheffield
- Collaborative lighting installation project: Shipley Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Museums

4 Working with a professional designer

V&A furniture design workshop with designer Gareth Neal



Both teachers and students repeatedly emphasise the value of working with a professional designer on projects. Designers provide a taste of the real world of design and encourage students to think outside the box. Involving a designer with a museum project can help students to see objects from new perspectives and better understand the process of creative inspiration.

Consider what kind of designer (e.g. fashion / digital / graphics) would be best suited to your students. It is a good idea to match their design area to your own skill sets so that you can also help the students with their work. Design companies sometimes work with schools for free as part of their social corporate responsibility but individuals working on a freelance basis will usually charge. You should be prepared to find funding ranging between £150 and £300 per day.

Finding a designer

Find out as much as possible about the designer's practice beforehand and assess whether it will transfer well into the classroom. It is helpful to know if they have worked with young people and delivered workshops before, but bear in mind that if they are good communicators and have your support in the classroom, they may not need much experience. Be prepared to co-plan and deliver workshops together. For suggestions of designers to work with, contact your local museums or visit the following online sources:

www.designcouncil.org

Contact the Skills Team for suggestions

www.designdirectory.org

Find designers working in particular media throughout the UK (does not record educational experience)

www.lonsas.org.uk

Check out the Arts Directory and find designers or artists registered with the London Schools Arts Service

www.designersintoschools.org.uk

Case studies from a 2002-2004 Design Council project

Importance of planning

Allow plenty of time to plan the project in collaboration with the designer. This might include a joint visit to a museum to explore relevant objects to look at with museum staff. In addition, a skill-sharing session with the designer can help you and any other staff involved build skills and confidence to support the students. Give the designer freedom to work up some ideas for the project, but be aware that the success of a project depends on setting manageable outcomes with the designer from the start. Explain what you want the students to get from the experience. Discuss with the designer how to transfer their design process into the classroom in a way students will understand. Make sure the designer is aware of the resources and equipment available in the school and the skills and prior experience of the students they will be working with. If possible offer an opportunity for the designer to observe a lesson before the formal start of the project.

Establish clear roles

Students usually welcome the opportunity to work with a designer and learn new, specialist skills. They

4 Working with a professional designer



enjoy interacting with someone who isn't a teacher and learning in ways that are different to normal classroom teaching. Be receptive to the designer's ideas, but help them to make sure that the sessions remain well paced, pitched correctly and structured to ensure your students achieve the project objectives. Be prepared to support the designer in delivering the sessions and communicating effectively to your students. Establish the differences between their role as a visiting designer, and yours as a teacher.

Provide an insight into careers in the Design industry

Ask the designer to talk to the students about how they became a designer, what courses they studied, what work experience they had, who

they worked for, and so on. Why not let students interview the designer and come up with questions? Filming the interview is a useful record for assessment purposes and a great resource for future classes.

Schedule in time for the designer to show how they develop their creative ideas and take them forward. Ask them to bring in their sketchbooks and any prototypes they have made. Students are often surprised to see where inspiration can be found and how much research and experimentation professional designers undertake before finalising a design solution. These design processes can be very different from classroom practice.

Try to visit the designer's workplace or studio. If possible, organise some

Above: Sketchbooks, Gareth Neal, 2010

Right: Prototype for table design, Gareth Neal, 2010

hands-on activities for students in the studio space. You should visit and carry out a risk assessment before any class visits are made.

Building confidence through a 'real brief'

It is important to make the design process 'real' so that the students are able to value their work and have a proper sense of achievement at the end. Make the designer aware that students will value constructive, professional feedback on their progress. This can really boost a student's confidence and make them feel that their work is relevant and important. Arrange a final group 'crit', or critical review, with the designer and students at the end of the project. If possible, mount a display or event to showcase their work.

'Many of our students were lacking in self-confidence and direction with their studies. Working with [the designer] gave them awareness of how designers work and now they view their own studies as contemporary practice with a purpose.' Teacher, Quintin Kynaston School, London



5 Resources to download

Project planning template for working with a museum and a designer

This document can help you with three-way collaborative project planning. It enables you to set down overall aims, outcomes for individual sessions and establish who will lead on activities. It suggests a project format of eight sessions but this can be adapted to suit your own requirements.

Design DNA

This worksheet can be used in any museum or gallery as a group or individual activity. It helps students to analyse key design features in museum objects. They will investigate six key themes – aesthetics, user, function, materials, impact and sustainability. The activity shows students that these themes are all connected and impact on each other.

Ideas Collector

This drawing activity helps students to gather inspiration relating to a theme or specific design project in any museum or gallery. Students choose objects that interest them to draw on each of the four faces of the net of a tetrahedron. They can cut out and construct a 3D shape from this net, and keep it to inspire later designs.

All these resources can be downloaded from www.vam.ac.uk/dfresources

Useful links

www.lonsas.org.uk/artsdirectory.aspx
www.designcouncil.org
www.designersintoschools.org.uk
www.designdirectory.org
www.thedesignmark.org

Design for Life project links

Bolton Museum & Archive Service
www.crescentactivitybank.co.uk

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery
www.brighton-hove-rpml.org.uk/discoveryandlearning/designforlife

Manchester City Galleries
www.manchestergalleries.org/whats-on/community-programmes/current-projects/design-for-life

Museums Sheffield
www.museums-sheffield.org.uk

Shingley Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums
www.twmuseums.org.uk/shingley/designforlife

V&A Design for Life projects
www.vam.ac.uk/dfprojects

Other V&A resources:

Teachers' resources downloadable from www.vam.ac.uk/schools include:
 Drawing in Museums
 Architecture
 Textiles

Find out more about the V&A's collection at collections.vam.ac.uk





department for
culture, media
and sport



This Design for Life resource was developed as part of a national museums' partnership, which sought to engage young people in design through using museums. Led by the Victoria and Albert Museum, project partners included Action for Children, Bolton Museum & Archive Service, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, Manchester City Galleries, Museums Sheffield, the Shipley Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Museums and ten local associate partner museums.

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