Objective:

- Students will know that artifacts within a gallery are displayed and organized to explain about life in different periods of the past.
- Students will choose objects from gallery displays and then explain what they tell about life in early California.
- Students will know and understand how museums use displays to tell about early life and how the artifacts taken together can tell a “story” about that early life.

Pre-Museum Activity

The OMCA History Gallery is divided into different time periods. Students will look carefully at some of the displays within the History Gallery and explain what “stories” the artifacts within the displays tell. To help students understand this concept, start with this activity:

1. Have students make a list of five to seven objects that they own or use (at school and/or outside of school).

2. Have students explain what those objects “tell” us about themselves and their lives in California. For example: If they listed a backpack, a mechanical pencil, some Nike shoes, a computer, and a flat screen television, from this list we would know that they are probably students and they bring or carry several objects. They use modern, electronic technology and they follow current fashion styles.

3. Ask students to add two or three more objects to add to this “story.” If they added a photo of their favorite pet and a Certificate for Perfect Attendance, we would know that their pet and their attendance at school were important to them.

4. Have students share their results within groups, and then have volunteers share their “stories” with the whole class. See if other students can add to the stories by sharing how they would “interpret” or explain what the lists tell us about the students and their lifestyles. The “stories” can be factual or make-believe but should incorporate the objects from their lists and how they give us information about life for the students.

For a second activity:

We have provided photos of these objects for you to share with students. This activity mirrors the one students will be asked to complete at the Museum.
Here is a list of objects from Coming for Gold—1848–1860:

- Silverware (fork, knife, spoon) in leather case
- Brass scales
- Quill pen
- Dice and cards
- Surgeon’s tools

1. Have students make lists of what the items are used for and why they might have been important.
2. Allow time for students (working with partners or small groups) to write a “story” to explain what we can learn about California during this period of history using these artifacts.

Here is one example:

Matt Douglas and his family came to California to find gold. They found a kitchen that was serving food for newcomers. Matt took out his fork, knife, and spoon, because without them he would have needed to either buy silverware or eat without any. He needed a good solid meal after working hard all day at the river mining for gold.

After the meal, he found a group of men playing cards and shooting dice outside the tent areas. His sister was sitting at a table near a lantern writing a letter to her friend. She used a quill pen and some ink to write on the back of a handbill she found on the ground by the kitchen. She missed her friend, and hoped that she might be able to see her soon. The Pony Express driver would deliver the letter to her friend, but she would have to wait for more than a month before she might get an answer.

His mother sat with a group of women, talking about the man who fell into the stream and broke his leg last week. He was lucky that a doctor was close by with his surgeon’s tools, because there were no hospitals nearby. If the doctor had not been there, he would have had to try to find someone to take him five or ten miles into the nearest town to try to find help, or he would have had to try to fix it on his own.

There was a tent nearby where you could buy things you needed, if you were lucky enough to have money. They had scales to measure any gold you found. Not too many people were having much luck, but everyone hoped that tomorrow they would find enough gold to make all of the struggles worthwhile.

Student stories probably won’t have this much detail but should include some sense of how the objects connected to the period of history they came from.

3. You could then ask students what other objects the people might need and how that could add to the “story.” Some possibilities would be wooden clothespins, pistols, bonnets, and photographs (daguerreotypes actually).

Before the Visit

Assign students to work in pairs and/or small groups. Coordinate this with the adult chaperones who will accompany you to the Museum. Students will look at display areas within exhibits of the History Gallery and will collect information to record on the worksheets.
You might want to choose a section within the Museum’s History Gallery for students to visit. The History Gallery is organized by time periods and these are some of the exhibits you will find:

- Before the Other People Came
- Voyages of Discovery
- Spaniards Claim This Land
- Coming for Gold
- Coming for Land
- The Railroad Brings People
- San Francisco: Glorious City of the West
- Seeking the Good Life
- Trying to Escape the Great Depression
- Off to War
- Building Modern California

Within each exhibit are several display cases and display areas. You can assign students (with their adult chaperones) to one of these cases or display areas to begin the lesson, and then allow them to do the same activity at a second case either within the same time period or in a different time period.

For example, within the exhibit called Coming for Gold, there are about five display areas. Students would be assigned to one display area but also be encouraged to look at other items mounted or situated nearby and to take advantage of any relevant audio and/or video information. You could limit or expand their areas of review, based on your students’ abilities and interests.

You should decide how to spread out students initially, based on your course of study or your own and your students’ interests (within one or two exhibits or spread more broadly within the Gallery).

**Vocabulary**

Make sure students understand the following words and ideas that they may see in the Museum and on the worksheet:

- Artifact
- Curators
- Gallery
- Exhibit
- Display
- Viewing public
- Audio/visual
- Interpretation
**Museum Visit**

Give copies of the worksheets to students. *Decide which exhibits students will visit and make assignments.* If you decide to have the whole class working within one exhibit (one time period), assign them to different display cases within that exhibit. You also might want to have students spread out at more than one exhibit. You will need to give the necessary instructions, including if students will be doing Part II and/or writing their stories at the Gallery.

The lesson has two parts, but you may decide to only do Part I, depending on your students’ interests, etc. The lesson asks students to write a story. If you prefer that they write the stories when they return to school, you should make this clear at the beginning. (Make sure students understand the directions and what they are expected to do at the Museum, including where they will be working and what you expect them to complete while at the Gallery.)

Each student should his or her their own copy of the worksheet even though they may be working with a partner or a group. You can decide if each student should make his or her own list or if they should do a group-share lesson along with the assistance of the adult chaperone. You might have them do the first half as a group or partnership and then have them do their own work for the second part.

*The Museum prefers that students use pencils rather than ink pens for recording so please remind students of this before they get started.*

Collect student worksheets at the Museum *before you leave* so that they don’t get misplaced. Students will use their worksheets for activities after you return to school.

**After the Visit**

Have students review their worksheets and their stories from the Museum. If you saved the stories for a classroom activity, give students time to complete them (if they did both parts, students might be allowed to choose which part to write the story for).

Encourage students to discuss their work within groups and make any changes or additions they feel necessary and/or appropriate. Allow some volunteers to share their lists and stories with the class, encouraging feedback from the rest of the students.

Also encourage students to share what they learned about California’s past and how the artifacts helped them to understand about life during these early years. If you have already studied some of the history, have some students explain how the History Gallery visit added to their understanding about life in early California. If you plan to study some parts later, ask students how they think the visit prepared them to learn about these parts of history.

**Projects/Activities**

- Classroom Gallery: Have students put together classroom displays that will tell stories about their own lives using artifacts that are relevant or important in their lives. Students can arrange photographs, objects, maps, pictures, clothing, and other items into displays. The displays can
be mounted on posterboard or easels, can be placed within shoeboxes or other boxes, or could even involve electronic displays, depending on the available resources. Encourage students to use brief descriptions within their displays to explain what the items are, why they are important, how they are used, etc.

- Students can use the information about California they recorded in the History Gallery (on their worksheets) to make posters (8½ x 11 inches or larger) using items they saw at the Museum and explaining how and why these artifacts were important to California’s history and what they tell us about early life in California. Students could draw their own pictures, use magazines or books (and make copies) or computers, or you could check Museum resources to get pictures of the objects they want to include.

- You could collect the stories students wrote into a California History booklet. They could edit and add illustrations or look for more information to add to their accounts.

- Students could write other California short stories using knowledge from their Museum visit. The stories could be factual or fictionalized.

  For example: If students were going to write a fictionalized story about the display on the Gold Rush, they might start with made-up characters who came to California seeking gold. They could decide how they got to California (wagon, steamship, etc.). They could include something about their trip here, who came with them, and then what life was like once they got to California. They could write something about the work required, the opportunities, and also some of the hardships. They might explain that there were many other people here with the same idea. Their story should incorporate some of the artifacts they saw within the Museum and how they were part of the early lifestyles. Students could underline words for the artifacts they saw in the Museum and may benefit from sharing resources with other students who visited other displays nearby.

  The stories could be collected into a class book with illustrations and other ideas that students have. You could “publish” the book and add it to your class library or you could display chapters around the classroom or send them home for more public viewing and enjoyment.