

WHAT IS A CURATOR?

In this lesson you will learn about the role of the Curator in an Art Gallery and their significance in establishing the relationships between;
Artist – Artwork - Audience.

You will also learn about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection, and Yiribana Gallery at the Art Gallery of NSW and how it can be used as a teaching resource.

Time required - 20 minutes

Professional Teaching Standards

2.1.2 Apply knowledge of content and teaching strategies of the teaching area to develop engaging teaching activities

6.4.2 Undertake professional learning programs designed to address identified student learning needs

WHAT IS A COLLECTION

A *collection*, is all of the artworks that are owned by an Art Gallery. A galleries collection is usually broken up into smaller, specialised collections according to categories set by the gallery. These might include categories such as Contemporary, Australian, Asian, etc.

Emily refers to the individual collections at the Art Gallery of NSW. Her job is to *curate* the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Collection*, which is usually, but not exclusively exhibited in the Yiribana Gallery, which is just one of several gallery spaces within the Art Gallery of NSW.

1. How many art works are represented in the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander collection at the Art Gallery of NSW?

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, unlimited attempts permitted)

Correct	Choice
	more than 50
	more than 1000
X	more than 1900 works

Feedback when correct:

That's right! In fact, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entire collection sits at around 1951 works.

2. How many artists are represented in the Yiribana Gallery collection at the Art Gallery of NSW?

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, unlimited attempts permitted)

Correct	Choice
	10
X	about 630
	500

Feedback when correct:

That's right! There are approximately 630 works in the Yiribana Gallery collection.

3. How much of the whole collection would you expect to see on display at the art gallery at any one time?

Correct	Choice
X	10%
	50%
	100%

Feedback when correct:

Correct. About 10% of the Yiribana collection will be on display at any one time.

4. How can I find out what the Curators have currently put on display in any area or collection at the AGNSW?

Correct	Choice
	Visit the AGNSW website
	Visit the AGNSW close to your excursion date
	Ring the AGNSW
X	All of the above

Feedback when correct:

Visit the AGNSW website. It is also a good idea to call the Education staff at the gallery to find out when the collection is being re-hung. The education staff will also assist you with lots of learning resources and can book a guide for your visit.

MEET A CURATOR

Emily McDaniel is the assistant art curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait art at the Art Gallery of NSW

Emily refers to the 'collection' of each category of Art, her job is to curate the collection of Artworks belonging to the Yiribana Gallery, which is just a 'section' or 'category' of many different collections of artworks owned by the Art Gallery of NSW.

ARTWORK – AUDIENCE – ARTIST – WORLD**ARTWORK**

Art galleries are usually very large. Artworks are stored and displayed according to their category or collection area. For example, artworks produced after about 1970 are often included in the Contemporary collection. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection house both traditional and contemporary style artworks.

The Art Gallery of NSW employs a curator and assistant curator for each different category or collection held at the gallery. Sometimes, an artwork could be part of several categories. Think about a Contemporary Aboriginal Photographic work. It all depends on the context of the work and its significance to the rest of the collection it is part of.

The Art Gallery of NSW currently has curatorial teams for each of the following collections; Asian art, Australian art, Contemporary art, Pacific art, Photography, European art and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

AUDIENCE

Curators work with audiences to help them appreciate and understand the artworks and artists represented in the collection.

The curator is a kind of intermediary or conduit between *artists*, *artworks* and *audiences*. The gallery is the place of display, and the curator makes informed, creative decisions about how to best present artworks to an audience. Often they will do this by hanging and presenting several works by different artists together to form, create a thread or conversation between them. The artworks might be based on a similar theme or subject matter, or be made from a similar material.

ARTIST

Artists are the people who engage in the practice of creative activity with the intention to produce art works. They don't do it by accident or as a consequence of something else.

Curators research artists and develop information about the art works within the collection. It is important that the curator has a good understanding of the artist's practice and intentions, particularly when they are called upon to write about an individual work or present a lecture tour.

Within a collection such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection, the curator may make the decision to collect several key works by a particular artist if they are considered to be of significance to the collection and broader art world.

WORLD

An artist's world can be many things. More commonly, an artist's world is: the time in which they live, the environment they choose to make art in (studio, landscape), their own imagination, their own context such as up-bringing, sub-cultures with which they might identify. All, or maybe only some of these things, can have profound influence on an artist's intentions and practice.

It is important for curators to have a good understanding of what the artist's intentions were when they created the work, and the world from which they come.

WHAT DOES A CURATOR DO?

5. Some of the main responsibilities of an art curator would be;

Correct	Choice
	To effectively work with audiences
	To communicate the artist's intentions correctly
	To have an accurate understanding of the artworks held within their collection
	To research and keep up to date information on the artists and artworks in their collection
X	All of the above

CO-ORDINATING EXHIBITIONS

Most exhibitions will have a theme.

- If we then think of objects from within our total collection that can be grouped together under one central theme, then we can start to understand how a curator might start to put together an exhibition.
- Consider how you assemble a music play list.
- If we consider a collection to be a group of objects that work together, within your collection you would aim to have a good range and representation of objects within a specific area. An art curator would aim for this also within their collection of artworks.
- Consider what collections you have? What is a collection? For example, stamps, antiques or maybe toy cars.
- In addition to the responsibilities we have already discussed, a large part of a curators role is to co-ordinate exhibitions of works from the greater collection of art works.

COMPARING TWO ARTWORKS

Ngak Ngak and the ruined city 1998

Ginger Riley Munduwalawala, circa 1936 - 01 Sep 2002 Australia

and

Nyamiyukanji, the river country 1997

Ginger Riley Munduwalawala, circa 1936 - 01 Sep 2002 Australia

6. What is the name of the exhibition Emily has curated at the Yiribana Gallery?

Correct	Choice
X	"Our Spirits Lie in the Water"
	Landscape and Water
	Recent Aboriginal Art

7. The Curator has assembled artworks in this current exhibition based upon the notion of.....

Correct	Choice
	How water has appeared in Aboriginal Dreamtime stories.
X	Ways that artists think about the idea of water.
	Contemporary Aboriginal art practices.

8. Why did the curator place these two art works by Ginger Riley Munduwalawala next to each other?

Correct	Choice
X	The artworks show the landscape in different seasons, one the 'wet' season and one the 'dry' season which fits with the exhibition theme of 'water'.
	Both artworks feature a river in the center of the artwork.
	The colours in each artwork go together.

EXPLORING AND EXAMINING CURATORIAL PRACTICE WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Weblink – *Artsets*, AGNSW website

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/artsets/>

TIPS, HINTS and IDEAS

You don't have to visit the Art Gallery of NSW. Most Regional Art Galleries hold regular, curated exhibitions. Find out if there is a *Regional Gallery* in your local area. They are often run by your local Council.

Next time you visit an art gallery with your students, consider structuring and guiding their learning experience based on the intentions of the Curator;

Why are these artworks chosen for this exhibition?

Why are certain artworks hanging next to each other?

What are the common threads / themes and conversations between the artworks?

Is there more than one artwork by the same artist? If so, what is the significance of this?

Encourage students to be the detective and look for themes in the exhibition as they view it. Share their ideas with each other.