From Cylinder Seals to Ceramic Analysis: New Middle East K–12 Programs

The Middle East Galleries offer great connections to school curricula about ancient Mesopotamia! K–12 school groups can explore the galleries on hour-long guided tours or Storytime Expeditions book readings to understand more about Mesopotamia and the Middle East. Newly developed interactive workshops provide hands-on opportunities to connect with objects and ideas from ancient times, from Make a Lasting Impression: Cylinder Seals (Grades K–4) to Ceramics Lab: The Science of Craft (Grades 9–12). In middle school and Unpacking the Past groups, students can craft their own interpretations of ancient jewelry informed by a simulated dig site in We Are What We Wear: Adornment in the Ancient Middle East (Grades 5–8). The International Classroom program will offer cuneiform workshops with our archaeological experts, along with talks about aspects of life within the Fertile Crescent. A Mesopotamia Artifact Loan Box will provide hands-on object opportunities within schools. For those too far away to visit, a Mesopotamia-themed Virtual Workshop will span continents, providing access to our fantastic objects and research. Teachers will also have many opportunities to build their knowledge through Middle East-themed professional development sessions.

Rise and Shine with the Penn Museum

The Museum is often a bustling place for school children, Penn students, and families alike. For individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities and their families, Learning Programs and Public Programs teamed up to offer a free early Museum opening at 9:00 am on Saturday, March 10, called Archaeology in the A.M. This program allowed for exploration during quieter hours. Participants took part in a drop-in craft activity and introductory hieroglyph lesson, donned fashions of the ancients at a dress-up station, and joined in an interactive storytime. Touchable replica artifacts, paired with educators to explain them, were accessible in many of our galleries. This pilot program proved to be a great resource for families with special needs. Stay tuned for upcoming opportunities at www.penn.museum/family-access-programs.
Learn from a Person Who Has Lived There

Through an innovative new program called Global Guides: Immigrant Stories Tour Program, the Museum has embarked on a 36-month pilot project to provide more diverse perspectives in our renovated signature spaces. Through the Global Guides program, the Museum has hired and trained area immigrants and refugees to tell personal stories when interpreting the galleries that showcase collections from their countries of origin. Speaking from “lived” perspectives, these guides will combine first-person narratives and present-day connections to make ancient material more accessible and relevant to general visitors, while also extending Museum connections to local communities. Global Guides will receive training in storytelling best practices and participate in the same comprehensive educational and content training as traditional gallery interpreters. The program offers not only paid work, but paid training on widely applicable skills such as public speaking, storytelling, and tour methods. Community partners including HIAS Philadelphia and Nationalities Service Center see a great need for the program, which offers humanizing opportunities for refugee and immigrant populations.

The Museum has hired four Global Guides for the Middle East Galleries. Yaroub Al-Obaidi, Abdulhadi Al-Karfawi, and Ali Arif have resettled from Iraq, while Moumena Saradar hails from Syria. Tying in with the Penn Museum’s ambitious Building Transformation project over the next three years, this program begins with the new Middle East Galleries, and continues into the Mexico & Central America Gallery and Africa Galleries.

The program also provides cultural competency trainings for current Museum staff, sponsored Museum visits for community groups represented in the featured galleries, and special community gallery receptions. The Global Guides program was generously supported by The Barra Foundation’s Catalyst Fund, which invests in innovation to inspire community-strengthening change in the Greater Philadelphia region.

Museum visitors can enjoy free public tours with the Global Guides on weekends starting in May 2018, or book a group experience by contacting grouponline@pennmuseum.org.

Educators Deepen Knowledge at the Penn Museum

Over the spring semester, local teachers had opportunities to build both their instructional techniques and content knowledge at the Museum. In January, local middle and high school teachers got an in-depth, STEM-focused view into the analysis of the Nippur slipper coffin through Museum expertise in conservation and petrography, sponsored by Penn’s Middle East Center. In March, teachers explored both the Cultures in the Crossfire: Stories from Syria and Iraq and Bearing Witness: Four Days in West Kingston exhibitions, and completed units on the Middle East and Genocide from Brown University’s CHOICES program. During each month of the Spring semester, educators were also provided with a free behind-the-scenes experience at the Museum through Unpacking the Past-sponsored teacher talks. A May 14 Educator’s Open House will welcome teachers and professors alike to preview the Middle East Galleries and gain deeper insight into key artifacts and topics with the help of graduate students and other experts. For more information, visit www.penn.museum/pd.