

A Curious Cabinet

This resource is designed to be used while or after students explore an interactive, virtual representation of the *Display Cabinet*, a 17th-century cabinet of curiosities. Collectors from the early 1600s would have used cabinets like this one to store and display rare and exotic objects such as medals, gems, or shells.

The interactive is available online at www.getty.edu and also at the Getty Center in the Museum's North Pavilion, Gallery N102, next to the *Display Cabinet* itself. Using the interactive, students in grades 6–12 can learn about this unique cabinet's materials, iconography, decorative designs, structure, and socio-historical context.

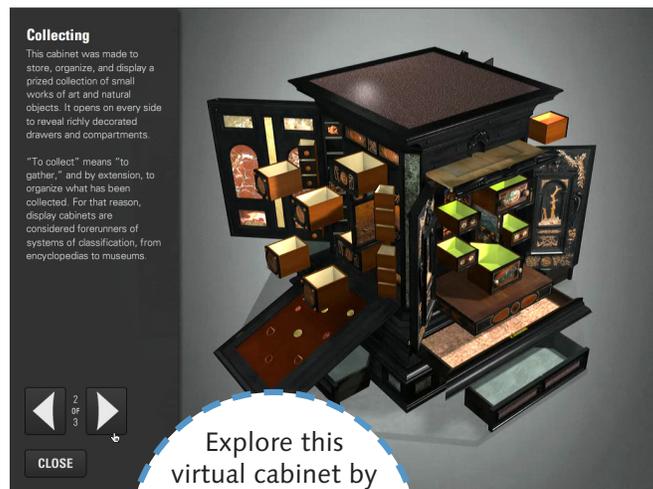
Use the activities in this guide to reinforce or extend student learning. We also provide additional activities on a downloadable worksheet, *A Curious Cabinet: Student Guide*.

Questions for Teaching

Invite students to work individually or in pairs to explore the virtual representation of the *Display Cabinet*. Using the interactive, students can open the cabinet's various drawers and panels, and read information about the history of the cabinet, the materials used to make it, and the imagery that adorns its surfaces. Then ask students to respond (orally or in writing) to some of the following questions:

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- Compare and contrast this 17th-century cabinet to a cabinet or chest of drawers you have seen in a home. What is similar or different?
- What do you notice about the decorative designs on the cabinet? How are patterns formed through the placement of shapes, colors, lines, textures, or materials?
- This cabinet would have been kept in a private home. Look closely at the cabinet's structure. Based on what you see, what do you think was the purpose or function of this cabinet?



Explore this virtual cabinet by opening its drawers and clicking on arrows at the bottom of the screen.

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IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

- Explore the various images used to decorate the cabinet and consider the information provided in the interactive about the cabinet's iconography and symbolism. What kinds of stories are told through these images? What are some themes you see running through these depictions?
- Cabinets of curiosity were often customized for princes, merchants, and scholars. The imagery on this cabinet likely expressed the interests of its owner. What might the symbols and scenes say about the owner's interests or identity?
- The images on the cabinet were intended to inspire contemplation about the themes that the scenes depict. Review the information provided in the interactive about the images. Based on this imagery, what ideas or concepts do you think viewers were invited to contemplate?

COLLECTIONS IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

- Consider what was happening in 17th-century Europe (i.e., colonization and trade around the world, increased use of the printing press, the scientific revolution, the invention of the telescope). What would have sparked an interest in collecting objects that were considered rare and exotic (i.e., shells, fossils, gems)? Based on the time period in which the cabinet was made, the images that adorn its panels, and the size and shape of its drawers, what do you think was stored in this cabinet?
- Cabinets of curiosity were forerunners of the modern-day museum. In their cabinets, owners stored and classified their collections of exotic and rare objects. What do you collect? How do you organize your collections? How are your collections similar to or different from the collections of a museum?



Art-Making Activities

After students have explored the *Display Cabinet* interactive, try any of these art-making activities:

Crafting Cabinets, Modern-Day Guilds. The *Display Cabinet* was made by several different people working in guilds, or organizations for artisans practicing the same craft. Have students work in teams to create modern-day cabinets of curiosities. Each group's cabinet should inspire contemplation about a specific concept and have a practical function. Have one student choose and organize the objects that will be stored in the cabinet, another design its structure, and a third paint scenes. When the cabinets are finished, have groups describe the function and design of their cabinets to the class.

Comparing and Creating Patterns. Discuss how patterns on the cabinet are formed by the repetition of lines, shapes, colors, textures, and the arrangement of materials. Compare the geometric patterns on the *Display Cabinet* to the ornate, organic patterns on cabinets designed in the Baroque style, such as André-Charles Boulle's *Cabinet on Stand* (www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=6328). Today's

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designers often reinvent design motifs used in earlier eras. Have students use graphic design software such as Adobe® Photoshop® or Illustrator® to create 21st-century patterns inspired by either of these 17th-century cabinets. Students can decide how their patterns could be used to decorate a piece of furniture.

Engraving Scenes. Many of the images that decorate the cabinet are reliefs, made by incising or carving a design into wood or stone. The images depict biblical, allegorical, historical, and mythological subjects. Have students create reliefs by carving a character or setting from literature, history, or mythology into linoleum blocks or Styrofoam.

Making Miniatures. Most of the scenes on the cabinet's drawers are very small (under four inches). These tiny images are called "miniatures." Have students create miniature paintings using thin paintbrushes while looking through magnifying lenses. Students can affix their paintings to small containers such as matchboxes or jewelry boxes, or decorate cases for smart phones or iPods—modern-day "containers."



Cross-Curricular Connections

Before or after students have explored the *Display Cabinet* interactive, try these activities to make connections to your History and Social Studies, or English and Language Arts curricula:

Connect to Ancient Greece and Rome. The goddess Juno is depicted on an enamelled medallion on the right side of the cabinet. A figure that may be the goddess Fortune appears behind the central moss agate door on the back of the cabinet. Tie the cabinet into a unit studying the long-lasting impact of Greek and Roman art and literature by reading myths related to Juno and Fortune. Have each student choose a goddess to illustrate, then compare and contrast students' drawings with the images that adorn the cabinet.

Connect to Creative Writing. The cabinet has a drawer for storing writing implements. It also includes a hidden shelf that may have been used as a writing surface. Have each student imagine that he or she is the owner of the cabinet and is using the writing surface. Tell students to write a letter from the perspective of the cabinet's owner. Using facts included in the *Display Cabinet* interactive, they should each write a letter to a friend that recounts a day when guests were shown the cabinet and its contents.

Connect to Literature. Have students consider the themes of death, faith, and eternity, which are evoked on the front of the cabinet; or the cycles of nature, which are depicted on the cabinet's left and back sides. Read literary works that explore one or more of these themes. Have each student choose one theme and write an essay describing how the theme was represented in images and text.



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Related Content Standards for California Public Schools

Visual Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

Grade 6	Artistic Perception 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 Creative Expression 2.4, 2.5 Aesthetic Valuing 4.1
Grade 7	Artistic Perception 1.1 Creative Expression 2.3 Aesthetic Valuing 4.2
Grade 8	Artistic Perception 1.1 Creative Expression 2.5 Aesthetic Valuing 4.3
Grades 9–12 (Proficient)	Artistic Perception 1.1 Creative Expression 2.1 Connections, Relationships, Applications 5.2
Grades 9–12 (Advanced)	Creative Expression 2.1



English— Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

Grade 6	Reading: Reading Comprehension (Focus on Informational Materials) 2.7 Writing: Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics) 2.1
Grade 7	Reading: Literary Response and Analysis 3.5 Writing: Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics) 2.1
Grade 8	Writing: Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics) 2.1
Grades 9–10	Reading: Reading Comprehension (Focus on Informational Materials) 2.5 Writing: Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics) 2.1
Grades 11–12	Writing: Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics) 2.1

History— Social Science Standards for California Public Schools

Grade 6	World History and Geography: Ancient Civilizations 6.7: 8
Grade 7	World History and Geography: Medieval and Early Modern Times 7.1: 1