



Group Self-Guide

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Table of Contents

The Exhibit	3
Pre-Visit Activities	4
Instructions for the Day of Your Visit	7
Exhibit Guide.....	8
Post-Visit Activities	12

Introduction

The San Diego Museum of Man welcomes you to *Cannibals: Myth and Reality*. Thank you for bringing your group to this provocative and engaging exhibit.

During your visit, students will gain a greater understanding behind the history of cannibalism, work on their critical thinking skills, and discuss the issues related to colonialism, ethnocentrism, and human behavior.

If you have any further questions after reading this packet, please email education@museumofman.org.

How to use this guide:

This guide will help prepare you and structure your visit to ensure a smooth-running and fascinating exploration of the gallery.

- 1) Please read this packet in advance of your visit.
- 2) Divide up your group so that they can travel through the exhibit with only 5-10 other participants.
- 3) Discuss the exhibit with your group prior to visiting the museum. Pre-visit discussion questions and activities are on pages 4-5.
- 4) Make copies of the exhibit guide (on pages 8-11), enough for each group to have one packet.

The Exhibit: *Cannibals: Myth and Reality*

In this thoughtful (and gore-free) exhibit, you'll discover that cannibals aren't who you think they are. They're warriors from many cultures, European kings and queens, American and European sailors, American colonists, accident survivors, victims of war, and more.

The purpose of this exhibit is to dispel myths and assumptions about cannibalism, a practice that spans centuries and crosses continents. Where did the word come from? What is a cannibal? Who are cannibals? Are there cannibals today? These are all questions your students will discover and discuss during their self-guided visit.

The exhibit is split into three distinct sections.

The first section focuses on cultural cannibalism throughout early European exploration. Marco Polo (author of a well-known travel book) and Christopher Columbus were involved in creating and (pushing into society) the use of the word *cannibal*. In this section, students will focus on how Europeans and Americans used the term *cannibal* to justify certain actions.

The second section focuses on medicinal uses of human body parts in Europe, which occurred at the same time Europeans were labeling people as cannibals in far off lands. Their cutting-edge medical advancements involved human flesh, blood, etc. Here students will dig deeper into the possible reason for this type of medical cannibalism in the mid-late 1700s.

The third section allows students to put themselves in the shoes of people who choose cannibalism to survive. If stranded on the California Trail with the Donner Party or stuck in the Sierra Nevadas for months, would you eat someone to survive? Where do we as a society or as individuals draw the line on cannibalism? Is biting your nails cannibalism, or is it so only if you eat the nail? Does consuming breast milk as a child make us cannibals?

Pre-Visit Activities

1) Pre-Visit Questions

Have your students discuss what they already know or think about cannibalism in partner groups.

- i. Where do we find cannibals?
- ii. Who are they?
- iii. Are there cannibals today?
- iv. Why would someone or groups of people be cannibals?
- v. What is the definition of a cannibal?
- vi. Was there cannibalism in our (America's or home country's) history?

During their partner conversations create a T-Chart on the board or on butcher paper. Label one side “prior knowledge” or “before” and label another side “learned knowledge” or “after.”

- Have a class discussion to share what the groups discussed. Add what students believe they know about cannibals to the “before” or “prior knowledge” side.
- Leave the other side blank

2) Cannibals in Popular Culture

(Please note these references to cannibals in pop culture are not suitable for young kids and may have explicit language.)

- a. Ask your students to find and bring to class references about cannibalism in our society: books, TV shows, movies, songs, memes, etc.
 - i. Examples of cannibalism in media:

1. Movies:

[*We Are What We Are* \(2013\)](#)

[*The Silence of the Lambs* \(1991\)](#)

[*Fried Green Tomatoes* \(1991\)](#)

[*The Hills Have Eyes* \(1977\)](#)

[*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* \(1974\)](#)

2. TV Shows:

[*South Park*, Season 5, episode “*Scott Tenorman Must Die*”](#)

[*American Horror Story*, Season 2, episode “*Dark Cousin*”](#)

3. News:

[*Man on Drugs Bites Face Off of Man*](#)

[*Mike Tyson Bites Competitor’s Ear*](#)

[*Jeffrey Dahmer Modern Cannibal*](#)

4. Songs:

[*Rolling Stones*, “*Too Much Blood*” \(lyrics\)](#)

[*Ke\\$sha*, “*Cannibal*” \(lyrics\)](#)

- b. Allow students to share their findings with the entire class.
 - i. Are these references from present day or the past?
 - ii. From our culture or another?
- c. Have a group discussion focusing on why society/media has a fascination with cannibals.
 - i. If desired, allow students to make a collage with their pop culture references and their conclusions on the fascination of cannibalism with our society.

3) Drawing-the-Line Writing Assignment

- a. Introduction: People choose to be vegetarian, vegan, pescatarian, etc., although humans have practiced eating mammals for thousands of years. We as humans are mammals but it is not socially appropriate to eat other humans. A line of acceptability gets crossed when people eat other people. We cannot eat our loved ones' ashes or eat our enemies' hearts, yet swapping saliva while we kiss is not looked down upon. Similarly, some parents ingest their babies' placentas and, worse yet, children (and occasionally adults waiting at stoplights) eat their boogers. Is this not cannibalism? Do you agree or disagree with these lines that have been drawn in our society?
- b. Assignment: Write two paragraphs with your opinions on the issue of cannibalism. In the first paragraph, argue for your own personal definition of cannibalism, and in the second, discuss what human behaviors fit into this category and which do not.

4) Optional "Big Idea" Questions

- a. These questions address three of the major themes of the exhibition. You can ask your students to think about them in advance of their visit, as "bus ride" questions that you ask on the way to the museum, or as journal-writing prompts.
 1. Under what circumstances could I understand another culture's practice of ingesting human flesh?
 2. If I had to eat human flesh to survive, would I do it?
 3. Do I ever inadvertently or otherwise ingest any parts of a person?

Instructions for the Day of Your Visit

Before you arrive

- Break students into groups of 5-10
- Assign each group to a chaperone
- Print the Exhibit Guide for each chaperone
- Remind chaperones the guide is broken into three distinct sections
- Ask them to read each question out loud to the group
- Allow time for discussion in the gallery

While in the Exhibit

During your visit, gallery educators will be stationed throughout the exhibition to help with wayfinding, answering questions, and interpreting the objects and interactives. You can identify the staff by their uniform shirts and name badges. Please encourage your group to ask them any questions they have about the museum or the exhibit.

Using this Guide

On the Exhibit Guide, this marking () denotes a suggested “must-see” place to stop in the gallery. Encourage your chaperones to find the object or text in the exhibit and share the important information or questions with your students.

The guide is structured to lead you through highlights of the entire *Cannibals* exhibition, but feel free to look at the other artifacts and text that are not pointed out on this guide.

Once you reach the end please exit and do not backtrack because this will disrupt other groups' exploration.



Exhibit Guide

Cultural Cannibalism



Pop Culture Intro Wall

- ❖ Take 1-3 minutes to watch the videos and read the posters at the entrance of the exhibit
 - Why are societies so fascinated with cannibalism?
 - Can you categorize the occurrences of cannibalism referenced on the wall into genres? (i.e. horror, humor, adventure, etc.)
 - Why is the idea or the act of cannibalism put into these categories?



Encounters

- ❖ Find the text panel entitled Encounters: Creating the Myth
 - Naming a group of people or a person as a cannibal was a way to label people who looked and behaved differently from the Europeans. It allowed them to categorize “others” in a way to justify poor treatment and enslavement.

- ❖ Once every student in your group reads the first text pane, go around the corner to find the Enslaving Cannibals section. Each student should read the entire text.



- Ask your group to look around the rest of the “cultural cannibal” exhibit and find other cultural objects. To what extent did these artifacts demonstrate people were cannibals?
- Challenge your students to find all three objects
 1. Find the Huxwhukw Mask.
 - A. While Europeans and Americans explored the Pacific Northwest they came across the Hamat’sa tribe in British Columbia, Canada.
 - B. They had the “man-eater” dance, which was called “cannibalism” by the explorers.
 - C. In the dance, who is “eating the man”?
 - D. To what extent did they demonstrate they were cannibals?
 2. Find the Canine and Human Teeth Necklace.
 - A. Is there enough evidence to verify cannibalism was occurring in Papa New Guinea?
 - B. How were Europeans perpetuating these stories or facts?
 3. Ota Benga (please do not use flash when taking pictures of the bust)
- Read the text panel entitled Ota Benga: A Cannibal in St. Louis, to the right of the bust
 1. Was this story hard to read or imagine?

- A. What were peoples' reactions to Ota Benga?
- B. Why was he put into the Monkey House?
- C. He was the "other." Do we still treat "others" in this manner?

For chaperones: Please take a moment to mention that here the exhibit is transitioning from cultural cannibalism into medical cannibalism. At the same time Europeans were labeling people as cannibals in far off lands, they were also using human remains or body parts in their cutting-edge medical advancements.

Medical Cannibalism



- ❖ Look through the *Book of Remedies* and find the one recipe that uses the cranium. What



ailment did the cranium supposedly cure?

- Why were human ingredients used in medicine at this time?
- What was happening in Europe around the mid-1700s?
- Looking through the supposed cures to serious and everyday ailments, what is the scientific support during this time?

For chaperones: Before your group walks through the black curtain into the movie, please mention the exhibit is now transitioning from medical cannibalism into survival cannibalism. When humans are driven to their breaking point what will they do to survive? What would you do to survive?

Survival Cannibalism

 Shipwrecked!

- ❖ Read the text panel entitled Shipwrecked! Who would you choose?
 - After reading enter the room on your right as a group
 - Follow instructions to do the activity or a gallery educator will help guide you through it.
 - What are your thoughts on the ethics of survival cannibalism?
 - Should law and decency be suspended when a person's survival is at stake?



 Where do you draw the line?

- ❖ Find the activity entitled “Where do you draw the line?” and use the magnets to decide what is cannibalism and what is not.
 - After the group decides where each magnet belongs then students take pictures of their consensus then post them online using #MuseumofMan.
 - If students are not allowed to have phones, then please ignore the instructions above.



Exit the Exhibit

Upon exiting you may take your group to get **ONE BUTTON** from the podium and then please wait for the rest of the group outside. **Do not re-enter the exhibit.**

Post-Visit Activities

1) Review Questions

- a. Have your students discuss what they believe about cannibals after their experience in the exhibit.
 - i. Where do we find cannibals?
 - ii. Who are cannibals?
 - iii. Are there cannibals today?
 - iv. What is the definition of a cannibal?
 - v. How does cannibalism factor into our (America's or home country's) history?
- b. Write down their ideas about cannibalism in the “after” or “learned knowledge” column.
- c. Have a group discussion comparing the two columns, before and after.

2) Narrative Writing Assignment:

- a. Have your students write a short first-person narrative about a person's encounter with a very different (or “other”) kind of person. The situation can be about travel, exploration, or invasion. The story should answer the question, “How do people behave in the presence of cultural or behavior practices that are very different from them?”

3) Optional Group Walkabout

- a. Write these three questions on giant Post-its or on butcher paper.
 - i. How do I react when confronted with cultural practices that are different from my own? (examples: different foods, religious practices, etc.).
 - ii. What is the most difficult choice I've ever had to make with respect to my health or well-being?
 - iii. What is it about cannibalism that fascinates people so much (and has for so long)?
- b. Post them in three different sections of your room.
- c. Give students a few minutes to quietly think about their answers.
- d. Then give each student 3-5 Post-it notes. Have them go around the room and post their answers onto each question. Take a walk around the room to observe and/or discuss all the answers.

The San Diego Museum of Man thanks you for visiting our exhibit *Cannibals: Myth and Reality*. We hope your students were able to look closer at the meaning, history and instances of cannibals throughout centuries and continents with an anthropological lens. If you have any questions or comments, please contact education@museumofman.org.