

# Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

## A DAY IN THE LIFE: AN ARCHIVE

Grade: 6-12

**SUMMARY:** Through an exploration of Georgia O'Keeffe's online archive, students will critically analyze the nature, construction and purpose of an archive while designing, creating and curating a personal archive that documents and interprets their daily lives. *This lesson is meant to be flexible. Please adapt for the level of your students and your individual curriculum.*

### **GUIDING QUESTION:**

*What is an archive?*

*How can you organize an archive to tell a story?*

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

Students will...

- Gain an understanding of the function and responsibilities of an archive
- Learn how to search online archives and museum collections
- Create an archive using objects they encounter or use on a daily basis
- Curate their archive to represent themselves and design a method of presentation

### **INSTRUCTION:**

#### **Engage:**

Reflect on your visit to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and/or Research Center and Archives. *What objects did you see? What text did you read? What did the text and objects tell you about O'Keeffe, her life and her art?*

Discuss with a partner how the exhibition constructed a narrative or a story about Georgia O'Keeffe and her artwork. *What is the story? Who is telling this story? Why?*

Check back in as a class and compare your stories. *Were your stories similar or vastly different? Why might that be? What would you change if you could tell the story?*

#### **Build Knowledge:**

1. *What is an archive? What might you find in an archive? Why do we have archives?*
  - a. An archive is a collection of important objects and/or documents that provide information about a place, person, family, community, nation, business or institution (etc...). An archive can also be a digital collection of data stored on the internet.
  - b. *Is there an archive in your town? In your school?*
  - c. *How do you find things in an archive? (Think about a library card catalogue or hashtags on platforms like Twitter or Instagram.)*



Georgia O'Keeffe artist materials, 2001  
Photography by Matthew Marston  
Gift of Juan and Anna Marie Hamilton  
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2. The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum has an archive (both physical and digital) of O’Keeffe’s artwork, personal belongings, many different natural objects that served as her inspiration, her paint brushes, letters that she wrote and received from her friends as well as all of the books that she had in her “book room”. The Museum keeps all of these things in their collection and archive, much of which has been digitized and put online. You can search through the Museum’s online collection and archive here: <http://contentdm.okeeffemuseum.org/cdm/>
3. Review Georgia O’Keeffe’s archive online. *What stories surface as you sift through the archive? What questions arise?* Based on what you learned at the Museum or know about O’Keeffe, choose five objects that you think best represent or tell an interesting story about the artist. Share these objects with a partner and describe how they represent O’Keeffe. Explain why you chose these objects instead of the others.

### **Apply:**

1. Look at the work of artist, [Jenny Odell](#)- particularly her [Bureau of Suspended Objects](#). Odell is an artist who collects, tags and catalogues imagery online in order to highlight today’s networked experience. In essence, she tells the story of modern society through an archive or a series of networks that exist between objects and imagery. *What story is Odell choosing to tell with her work? What does it say about Odell? What does it say about the community that Odell is a part of or the life that Odell leads?*
2. *What do the objects in your life say about you, your family and your community?* For this project you will collect and document objects that you interact with on a daily basis. Beginning from the moment you wake up, take a picture, do a quick sketch or find your own way to record the objects that you touch, consume, wear, throw away, or use in any other way. This might be your alarm clock, your toothbrush, a cereal box, a tea bag, etc....
3. Once you have a collection of items, choose how you would like to display them. *How will you organize them? Will they be categorized by function? By color? By name? Will they be arranged on a timeline?* Try many different ways of arranging your archive. Subtract items. Add new items. Once you have decided on an arrangement that you like, share it with your peers. This could be in a form of an exhibition (digital or physical), a presentation, a performance, or a publication.

### **Reflect:**

*What does your archive say about you? How did you curate the objects? How did you make choices about what to include, what stories to tell? Do you feel like your representation is accurate?*

### **ASSESS:**

Assess students on the completion of the following tasks:

- Establishing an archive of objects
- Choosing a selection of objects from their archive that tell a story or communicate a concept
- Designing a method of display for their selection or exhibition
- Articulating their archive’s narrative or concept to peers

### **Additional Resources:**

[How the Art World Caught Archive Fever](#)- Artspace (2014)

[Object Lessons: The New Museum Explores Why We Keep Things](#) - NY Times (2016)

[What is an Archives?](#)- Society of American Archivists (2016)

[Say What? Talking Points on the Value of Archives](#)- Society of American Archivists (2016)

[Andy Warhol’s Time Capsule 21](#)

[Archives of American Art](#)