

Collectibles:

Preserving the Past and Present for Future Generations



Life Skills Development:

Critical Thinking: asks questions before, during and after acquiring information

Keeping Records: begins to sort and classify

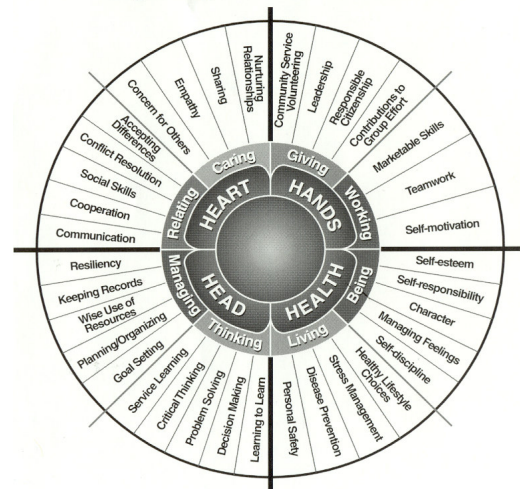
Planning/Organizing: does simple sorting and categorizing

Decision Making: identifies alternatives; able to choose among a few selected alternatives

Marketable Skills: gets exposure to a variety of job roles in community; learns math, reading, speaking, manual dexterity; takes field trips to explore careers; processes information with adults

Stress Management/Healthy Lifestyle Choices –stimulate creativity, cognitive development and opportunities for positive mental health

Targeting Life Skills Model



It is exciting to discover a hidden treasure in the attic, garage, basement, barn or even in grandma’s closet. A so called treasure, can be defined by ones interests, hobbies, heritage and even personal taste. It could be that we enjoy the item for its aesthetics, novelty, use, history or value.

We begin collecting when something or someone peaks our interest to learn. We want to learn more about the item, its intended use; the artisan, manufacturer or company who produced the product; how it was made and what was used in its construction; and even its place in a historic context.

This interest often leads to collecting. As a collector we make a considerable investment of both time and resources so it is important to protect and preserve our collections. Archeologists and historians have learned that the most well preserved treasures are protected from the elements – air, light, temperature, humidity and insects. Unfortunately we can’t store our treasures in an Egyptian tomb, but we can learn how to best care for and preserve our collectibles, heirlooms and prized possessions.

As a collector and conservator it is our responsibility to learn the best practices for handling, cleaning, restoring

and protecting items being stored or displayed. Each antique or collectible has its own unique set of characteristics – such as the material from which it was constructed (glass, wood, metal, textiles, clay, plastic, etc.) to the method by which it was constructed. For example not all metals are physically and chemically the same – iron, tin, brass, aluminum, steel, gold, silver, copper, etc. A collectable made from certain metals could be ruined and even destroyed during cleaning, restoration or storage if we don’t possess the knowledge or resources to identify the metal compound and the finishes used on that metal.

Avoid Ruining Collectibles

There are some general practices for collectors and conservators of paper, metal, glass, ceramics, plastic, wood and textiles. There is a lot of biological, chemical and physical science involved with becoming a junior museum curator.

Light – Light is damaging. All light, but especially ultra-violet light, speeds up the chemical reactions which cause organic materials to decompose or break down over time. All collections should be kept out of direct sun light and receive limited indirect light to protect color and moisture level. Light can cause materials to become dry and brittle, as well as helping to control humidity.

Humidity – Humidity is the amount of moisture in the air. Balance is important to collectors. Too little moisture causes wood, paper and paint to shrink, crack and become brittle. Too much humidity will cause rust, mold and mildew and encourage insect infestation. Typical locations for storing our treasures include the attic, where it is too hot and dry, or the basement, which is often too damp and mildewy.

Temperature – Extreme temperatures are not good for collectibles and antiques. Year-round temperatures of 64 degrees are ideal. Gradually move items from one extreme temperature to another. Rapid temperature changes can cause thermal shock. This stress causes cracks and fractures.

Handling – Handling is the act of touching, moving or operating something with the hands. Oil, salts, acid and even soil transferred from our skin to a collectible can cause deterioration or staining, much like a salad oil stain which cannot be removed from a tie or shirt. The white cotton gloves museum curators wear are for the protection of the antique.



Restoration or Preservation?

There are pro's and con's to both restoration and preservation. As a collector and curator of your collection there are choices to make. It will require thought and research to make the best choice for the collectible and the reason it is being saved – historical integrity or sentimental value.

Restoration is the physical manipulation or repair of objects.

Preservation is protecting the item with as little change as possible to the true nature of the item.

Williams, senior conservator of the Smithsonian Institute, and Jagger (2005) state in the book *Saving Stuff*, "You have choices with your collectibles. You can preserve them with no changes for as long as possible, or you can choose to restore and repair them. On the plus side, restoring compensates for any damage or deterioration that has occurred. On the con side, restoration changes your object permanently and often lessens its inherent value. Can you restore and preserve? Yes. If you restore a piece, you still need to prevent any future degradation by following preservation strategies."

What you can do in this 4-H project?

- ✿ Pick a hobby or start a collection that interests you.
- ✿ Learn the difference between preservation and restoration.
- ✿ As a collector and conservationist learn the best practices for handling, cleaning, restoring and protecting items being stored or displayed.
- ✿ Learn to assess the value of your collection as an investment for the future.
- ✿ Organize a hobby show for clubs in your area.
- ✿ Teach a friend or club member how to become involved in the hobby of collecting.

Cleaning – Know your collectible before beginning any cleaning or restoration. Carefully consider the use of chemicals, detergents, cleaning products and professional/commercial cleaners. The chemicals and actual cleaning process can be much too harsh for fragile items such as textiles, jewelry, fashion accessories, toys and dolls.

To protect and preserve your collectibles and antiques, always do your homework before starting the cleaning or restoration process.

Some simple tools: an assortment of bristled brushes (soft to firm), cotton swabs, distilled water and moisture free canned air. Distilled water is the best choice as it does not have chemicals and minerals which can stain or damage.

Insects and Rodents – Stored items are natural havens for insects and rodents. To minimize long-term damage, consider all of the previous elements, each can contribute to the inhabitation of insects and rodents. Knowledge and a plan are your best weapons against these critters.

Contaminants – The environment in which we live and store our collectibles can be contaminating within itself. It is hard to avoid physical deposits and chemicals contained in the air. They leave a film that may or may not be seen by the human eye.

Other times contaminants come from the things we carefully wrap around items for protection. Examples: The sulphur in a wool cloth will corrode silver and bronze. The oxygen in air reacts to the surface of silver, brass and bronze causing oxidation – the formation of silver and copper oxide on these metals. Chemicals in ordinary plastic kitchen wrap are corrosive agents for metals and do not allow textiles to breath. Acid in wood and wood pulp paper cause damage to textiles and paper products. Chemicals/detergents remaining in a towel or sheet can be damaging to some antiques and collectibles.

Once again, always do your homework before making a decision about where and how to store your precious collectibles and antiques.

 **To learn more check out other related Centennial project materials.**

References:

Williams, D. and Jaggar, L. Saving Stuff – How to Care for and Preserve Your Collectibles, Heirlooms, and other Prized Possessions. Simon & Schuster, 2005. ISBN 0-7432-6416-9

Levenstein, M. K. and Biddle, C. F. Caring for Your Cherished Possessions – the Experts' Guide to Cleaning, Preserving and Protecting Your China, Furniture, Clothing, Paintings and More. Crown Publishers, Inc. 1989. ISBN 0-517-57087-4

Sagraves, B. A Preservation Guide – Saving the Past & the Present for the Future. Ancestry Incorporated, 1995. ISBN0-916489-59—0

Simpson, M. T. and Huntley, M. Editors. Sotheby's Caring for Antiques – The Complete Guide to Handling, Cleaning, Display and Restoration. Simon & Schuster, 1992. ISBN 0-671-75105-0

Katz-Schwartz, J. Protecting Your Collectable Treasures: Secrets of a Collecting Diva. Martin-gale & Company, 2001. ISBN 1-56477-388-4

Related 4-H Project Areas:

Health, Recreation, Arts and Hobbies, any project area of interest can become a hobby for collectables.

Other Related Centennial Fair Exhibit Project Materials:

- 4H•HLTH•402 Collectables
- 4H•HLTH•403 Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textile Products – Part 1
- 4H•HLTH•404 Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textile Products – Part 2
- 4H•HLTH•405 Storage and Display of Heirloom Textiles in the Home
- 4H•HLTH•406 Preserving Photographs, Books and Paper Documents
- 4H•HLTH•407 Preserving Metal, Wood and Plastic Collectibles (not available)
- 4H•HLTH•408 Preserving Memorabilia
- 4H•HLTH•409 History Mysteries Part 1– Recording and retelling the history of 4-H and its people through stories
- 4H•HLTH•410 History Mysteries Part 2– Writing the Story – your treasures - from Clues
- 4H•HLTH•411 Documenting and Cataloging Collectibles (not available)
- 4H•HLTH•412 Displaying Collections and Collectibles (not available)
- 4H•PDL•111 Personal Development – Documenting our Heritage
- 4H•HLTH•413 Authentication Card