



Program Descriptions and Standards

What does “inquiry-based” mean?

Inquiry-based learning is a learning process that engages students by making real-world connections through exploration and high-level questioning. We are encouraging students’ curiosity and encouraging them to engage with the subject matter through whatever avenue is most interesting to them. This learning method encourages students to make observations, draw connections, evaluate ideas, and come to evidence-based conclusions. As facilitators for inquiry-based learning, it is the job of our docents to ask prompting questions and allow students to draw conclusions. Some background information is provided at the front of a program, but mostly students are to be allowed to explore the objects and work together to form conclusions.

State Social Studies Standards

Standards relate as content is described. If you are looking for a specific standard relating to Tennessee or American history, please reach out to the Education team and we will work to include it. The standards listed below each program are not comprehensive.

Gallery Program

Voices of the Land: The People of East Tennessee

Through this signature exhibit, students will explore over three centuries of life in East Tennessee. With a museum docent, students will engage with the exhibit by identifying and answering questions about key artifacts and images that range from the pre-historic inhabitants of what is now Tennessee through the frontier period, statehood, the Civil War, post-war industrial growth, and into to the modern era of TVA, Oak Ridge, and tourism in East Tennessee. The gallery program can be adapted to focus on specific areas within your grade’s curriculum standards.

*This museum program is included in every visit.

Education Programs

Discovery Boxes: Exploring Early Tennessee’s People, Culture, and Trade

This group activity consists of nine Discovery Boxes, each containing a selection of artifacts relating to an individual on the East Tennessee frontier around the time of Tennessee statehood. By working together in small groups, students examine the collection of artifacts in each box to determine the identities of the individuals represented by the boxes. The boxes contain artifacts related to the following individuals: an enslaved person, a farmer, a long hunter, a Cherokee, a lawyer, a blacksmith, a frontierswoman, a child, and a trader.

At the end of the designated discovery period (25-30 minutes), the students will be asked to share their findings and reveal the “identity” of the person they have explored—explaining their conclusions with clues gleaned from the objects. This program is inquiry-based; students will lead the discussion with the museum educator providing additional context and information. The museum educator will work with the students’ explanations to paint a picture of each person’s unique culture, the community they resided in, and how economic factors determined each individual’s possessions.

This program is designed for K-3 but can be adapted to 4th and 5th if requested.

This program covers State Standards: K.03, K.04, K.06, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 1.05, 1.06, 1.08, 2.01, 2.02, 3.22, 3.29, 3.30, 3.31, 4.01, 5.28, 5.36

Objects Over Time

Students, in groups of two or three, handle an unusual collection of objects and “read” them for answers to the following questions: what material is it made of; how does it function; who would have used this; do I have something like this; and ultimately, when was it used? The program is designed with inquiry methods in mind: students observe the objects, answer questions about the objects, and share their conclusions, all before the museum educator provides the answers. The educator facilitates the process for students by asking guiding questions and supporting the students’ efforts.

Once the students have placed their objects, the educator responds to the conclusions drawn by the students and builds on their answers to address the overall content and instructional goals. The outcome is a learning experience where students are encouraged to observe, question, construct and share an argument for what an object is and why they believe it belongs at a certain place in time. The educator works with student answers to share the rest of the object’s story. The finished product is a student-constructed artifact timeline chronicling three centuries of East Tennessee and American history.

This program can be adapted for grades K – 12.

This program covers State Standards: K.01, K.17, 1.07, 1.23, 1.23, 1.25, 2.05, 2.09, 2.31, 3.14, 3.16, 3.18, 5.14, 5.22