Script

Inclusion in Museum Collections and Display: Strategies for Creating a Culturally Inclusive Visitor Experience

Introduction and Course Overview

Slide 1: Welcome

Text:

Welcome to Inclusion in Museum Collections and Display: Strategies for Creating a Culturally Inclusive Visitor Experience!

[Button] Introduction to the Course

Slide 2: Introduction to the Course

Text:

Introduction to the Course

What does cultural inclusivity mean to you?

What role do you think it plays in today's museums?

How can we as museum professionals find ways to make our institutions and their collections more culturally inclusive?

This course provides you with a roadmap to help find answers to these questions. Focusing on cultural inclusivity in museum collections and display, together we will:

- explore the current situation in museums in Ontario
- look at what's working and what isn't
- consider some concrete strategies for making meaningful change

To navigate through the course, click the button in the lower right-hand corner of the screen. Click the back arrow if you want to return to the previous slide.

[Button] Course Structure

Slide 3: Course Structure

Text:

Course Structure

The course is divided into three modules that explore key topics, with reference to various examples and case studies:

Module 1 - The Flexible Museum: The Importance of Cultural Inclusivity for Museum Visitors in Ontario

Module 2 - Problems in Collecting and Display Practice, and Proposed Solutions

Module 3 - Inclusive Terminology and its Place in Cultural and Historical Interpretation

Each module ends with an evaluation activity. There's also a final evaluation at the end of the course. Don't worry! You are not going to be graded on your responses. These exercises are meant to encourage you to engage with the course content and reflect on its meaning to you as a museum professional. Completion of each exercise is a requirement to pass the course, but the most important thing is to participate. This is an opportunity to learn and actively contribute to an ongoing conversation.

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- explain the significance of cultural inclusivity to the Ontario museum visitor's experience
- diagnose the key problems in current display and collecting practice
- identify possible solutions that you can put into action
- recognize best practices in the use of culturally inclusive terminology
- apply culturally inclusive terminology to specific display contexts and types of communication

Let's get started

[Button] Module 1: The Flexible Museum: The Importance of Cultural Inclusivity for Museum Visitors in Ontario

Module 1. The Flexible Museum: The Importance of Cultural Inclusivity for Museum Visitors in Ontario

Slide 4: Module 1. The Flexible Museum: The Importance of Cultural Inclusivity for Museum Visitors in Ontario

Text:

Module 1. The Flexible Museum: The Importance of Cultural Inclusivity for Museum Visitors in Ontario

In this module we'll consider:

- what a culturally inclusive museum looks like
- what "cultural inclusivity" means for Ontario
- why cultural inclusivity matters to Ontario museums, with reference to an interesting case study

[Button] The Culturally Inclusive Museum

Subtopic 1: The Culturally Inclusive Museum

Slide 5: The Culturally Inclusive Museum

Text:

The Culturally Inclusive Museum

What does a culturally inclusive museum look like?

This important question lies at the heart of current discussions about display and collecting practices, in museums in Ontario and around the world.

In this section we'll look at how cultural inclusivity is being defined within Ontario. We'll consider some of the people impacted and look at one example that shows why cultural inclusivity matters.

[Button] Cultural Inclusivity in Ontario and Canada

Slide 6: Cultural Inclusivity in Ontario (1)

Text:

Cultural Inclusivity in Ontario

What do we mean by "cultural inclusivity"? And what does this phrase mean in the context of museums in Ontario?

We use the word "culture" to refer to a variety of different aspects of human identity. These can be unique to an individual or shared by a group. But when we say "culture" we usually mean:

> A set of shared, non-physical characteristics agreed upon and shared by a group of people (such as beliefs, customs, thoughts, behaviours, language, and forms of artistic expression) who live in one place at a specific moment in time or historical period.

"Culture" is sometimes confused with "race" or "ethnicity," but these terms mean different things:

> Race is a term used to categorize people according to *physical* traits or ancestry.

> Ethnicity is a term used to categorize people according to shared *cultural* characteristics, including national identity, language, practices, beliefs, or traditions.

It's important to remember that "culture" can have different meanings for different individuals and groups. There is no single definition that applies in every instance. A person may identify as having various cultural identities at once.

When we talk about "culture," then, we need to adopt a flexible and open-minded attitude. Since "culture" is a term used to *categorize* groups of people, it is inherently divisive. When we talk about "cultural inclusivity" we're not just talking about a process of "including" lots of different cultures. We're also recognizing—and acknowledging—the complexity of the concept and the importance of grounding our usage of the term in knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity.

So, why does cultural inclusivity matter to Ontario museums?

[Button] Continued . . .

Slide 7: Cultural Inclusivity in Ontario (2)

Text:

Why does cultural inclusivity matter to Ontario museums?

The Ontario Museum Association's "Inclusion 2025" initiative offers us various important reasons.

Take a moment to read the following passage carefully, and think about what it might mean to you as a museum professional:

[this text will feature an audio accompaniment that the user can play]

> "Museums are meaning-making institutions. They play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world, our communities, and our relationships through the knowledges they share and stories they tell. While best efforts are made to engage diverse audiences, the stories told and how they are shared are heavily influenced by an institution's 'status quo'.
>
> These explicit and implicit standards of practice are often rooted in legacies of power and oppression that persist within our institutions. These legacies tend to privilege the white male experience and ultimately reinforce Euro-centric ableist narratives of patriarchy, exploitation, colonization, and heteronormativity.
>
> Unconscious bias and a lack of cultural competence further perpetuate these narratives within our institutions. Museums need to look inward in order to understand how the internal practices and legacies of power impact *who museums are for* and how they may be failing to reflect diverse audiences.
>
> That is, by addressing how and by whom cultural institutions are designed, museums can begin to *critically reflect on whose experiences are acknowledged, whose are not*, and how this may impact audience and community engagement."

Ontario and its lands are occupied by a diverse and constantly changing spectrum of cultural groups and individuals. The results of the most recent census (2016) showed that the province is home to people who identify their ethnic origin as Arab, Black, Canadian, Chinese, Dutch, East Asian, East Indian, English, First Nations, Filipino, French, German, Irish, Italian, Jamaican, Jewish, Latin American, Métis, Pakistani, Russian, Scottish, South Asian, Vietnamese, and West Asian. And that's not a complete list!

The largest visible minority ethnic group in Ontario is South Asian. The largest Indigenous population in Canada is in Ontario, and between 2006 and 2016 grew by 54%, comprising a total of 2.8% of the province's entire population.

Less important than the numbers, however, is the very *fact* of the cultural diversity of the peoples that Ontario museums seek to engage. This diversity demands that cultural institutions reflect, embody, and engage the many different groups of people they represent and serve.

Citations to be included at bottom of slide:
Marie Lalonde, et al., "A Letter from our Project Leads," Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museums (2022). Ontario Museum Association: https://members.museumsontario.ca/inclusion2025 [accessed 30 January 2022].
2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 9, Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017): https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-9.html#:~:text=Top%2010%20Ethnic%20Origins%2C%20Ontario&text=The%20top%20origin%20was%20Canadian,%2C%20East%20Indian%2C%20and%20Dutch [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Why Cultural Inclusivity Matters: An Example of Action and Impact

Slide 8: Why Cultural Inclusivity Matters: An Example of Action and Impact

Text:

Why Cultural Inclusivity Matters: An Example of Action and Impact

Let's look at one example that shows the impact of *taking action* to create culturally inclusive experiences in Ontario museums: Museum Windsor's initiative, "Making Indigenous Collections Accessible: A Collaboration with Nin Da Waab Jib":

> Museum Windsor, a municipal museum administered by the City of Windsor, sits on the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg people of the Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa). Incorporating an early 19th-century colonial homestead—Francois Baby House—and the more recently founded Chimczuk Museum, the museum has a mandate to preserve, display, and promote learning about the natural, social, technological, and cultural history of the region.
>
> *The problems:*
> The museum had two specific cultural inclusivity challenges:
>
> 1. how can we increase access to Indigenous materials for the collection?
>
> 2. how can we display those materials in a way that's both culturally respectful and collaborative?

The strategy:
Learning from the mistakes of the past, the museum actively collaborated with local Indigenous community members to find solutions to these problems. Through meetings, roundtable discussions, and public surveys, the team reconceptualized the collection to incorporate Indigenous approaches to collecting, storage, and display.

A partnership was formed with the nearby Walpole Island Heritage Centre (WIHC), which houses a large collection of Indigenous books and oral interviews. Materials from both the Museum Windsor and the WIHC were reclassified according to an Indigenous system, digitized, and incorporated into a shared database accessible to the institutions, local Indigenous communities, and the public.

The project also provided for repatriation as a possible outcome, which in this case did not occur but was an important accommodation to embed within the collaborative process.

The impact:
Founded in a process of collaboration, the project resulted in new partnerships and created a cross-cultural dialogue. The database was conceived as an evolving record, to be added to by future collaborators. The project has resulted in an increased accessibility to Indigenous materials, both for the institutions involved and local Indigenous communities—the latter of whom were overwhelmingly positive about the project's outcome.

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
"Museum Windsor: Making Indigenous Collections Accessible: A Collaboration with Nin Da Waab Jig," Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museums (2022). Ontario Museum Association: https://members.museumsontario.ca/inclusion2025/inclusioninaction/museumwindsor [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Lessons Learned

Slide 9: Lessons Learned: Considerations for Ontario Museums

Text:

Lessons Learned: Considerations for Ontario Museums

What can we learn from this case study? What might we apply to other Ontario museums and their collection and display practices?

Working toward the culturally inclusive museum can succeed if the project:

- involves everyone and prioritizes shared expertise; a culturally inclusive and collaborative process that takes account of many voices
- is action based: identifies and takes specific and concrete actions
- incorporates culturally diverse approaches to collaboration or other methods of working
- encourages a flexible, ongoing dialogue that allows for differing opinions
- makes room for necessary change and development along the way, and into perpetuity

[Button] Module 1 Summary and Key Takeaways

Slide 10: Module 1 Summary and Key Takeaways

Text:

Module 1 Summary and Key Takeaways

Let's review! Here are the key takeaways from Module 1:

- adopt a flexible and open-minded attitude toward definitions of "culture": remember that this concept can have different meanings for different individuals and groups

- Ontario is occupied by a diverse spectrum of cultural groups and individuals, requiring our cultural institutions to reflect, embody, and engage the people they represent and serve

- a successful cultural inclusivity project:
    - involves everyone and prioritizes shared expertise
    - is action based
    - incorporates culturally diverse approaches to working methods
    - encourages a flexible, ongoing dialogue
    - makes room for change and development

[Button] Evaluation 1: Self-Assessment Activity

Slide 11: Evaluation: Self-Assessment Activity

Text:

Evaluation: Self-Assessment Activity

What do you think is the value of cultural inclusivity to Ontario's museums and their visitors?

Take a moment to write down a few lines that sum up what you've done—or would like to do—to actively contribute toward the culturally inclusive museum. Put your response to one side. You will need it again at the end of the course!

[Button] Module 2: Problems in Collecting and Display Practice, and Proposed Solutions

Module 2. Problems in Collecting and Display Practice, and Proposed Solutions

Slide 12: Module 2. Problems in Collecting and Display Practice, and Proposed Solutions

Text:

Module 2. Problems in Collecting and Display Practice, and Proposed Solutions

In this module we'll consider:

- the key problems in current display and collecting practice in Ontario museums
- some of the proposed solutions, and whether these are successful
- best practices for museum professionals to adopt, going forward

[Button] What are the Problems?

Subtopic 3: What are the Problems?

Slide 13: What are the Problems?

Text:

What are the Problems?

There are 4 key problems that contribute to a lack of cultural inclusivity in Ontario museum collecting and display practices:

1. a lack cultural diversity among museum professionals responsible for collections and curatorship

2. a lack of cultural diversity within collections themselves

3. uncertainty or ignorance about the appropriate way to interpret or display culturally sensitive materials

4. inadequate or ineffective systems of communication or outreach that engage culturally diverse audiences with materials and generate productive, collaborative conversations around them

Citations to be included at bottom of slide:
Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museums (2022). Ontario Museum Association: https://members.museumsontario.ca/inclusion2025 [accessed 30 January 2022].
Marian Carpenter, "View from the Field: The Challenges to being Inclusive in Museum Collections," The Inclusive Historian's Handbook (June 2019): https://inclusivehistorian.com/view-from-the-field-the-challenges-to-being-inclusive-in-museum-collections/ [accessed 30 January 2022].
Renaud Proch, "If Museums in the US want to be more inclusive, they first have to recognize—and unlearn—old habits and biases," Artnet News (June 2020): https://news.artnet.com/opinion/renaud-proch-ici-changing-museums-1889284 [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Problems 1 and 2: A Lack of Diversity in Staff and Collections

Slide 14: Problems 1 and 2: A Lack of Diversity in Staff and Collections

Text:

Problems 1 and 2: A Lack of Diversity in Staff and Collections

Let's take a closer look at those first two problems:

Problem 1: a lack cultural diversity among museum professionals responsible for collections and curatorship

One of the biggest factors contributing to the slow progress of making museum collections culturally inclusive is the lack of diversity among the people responsible for those collections.

The most recent results of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion's "Diversity Census Tool," which annually gathers data from the museum industry to measure diversity and inclusion, found that among the Ontario museum professionals who responded:

- 96.2% identified as Non-Aboriginal
- 88.1% identified as white
- 76.2% identified as women
- 82.3% identified as heterosexual
- 37.7% identified as Christian (the dominant percentage among the groups identified)

Problem 2: a lack of cultural diversity within collections themselves

The collections housed in Ontario museums frequently don't adequately represent or reflect the broad cultural spectrum of the communities they serve. This results from two factors:

- a lack of access to culturally diverse materials
- a collecting process governed by either personal biases or institutional classifications

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
"Executive Summary: Diversity Census Tool," Final Insights Report. Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, 2014: https://members.museumsontario.ca/sites/default/files/members/Executive%20Summary.pdf [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Problems 3 and 4: Interpretation and Communication

Slide 15: Problems 3 and 4: Interpretation and Communication

Text:

Problems 3 and 4: Interpretation and Communication

Problems 3 and 4 on our list are equally important:

Problem 3: uncertainty or ignorance about the appropriate way to interpret or display culturally sensitive materials

Materials in Ontario museums are not always displayed in a way that adequately or appropriately expresses their cultural value to diverse groups of people. The correct terminology or language is either overlooked or used incorrectly, or maintains outmoded or even offensive cultural biases.

Problem 4: inadequate or ineffective systems of communication or outreach that engage culturally diverse audiences with materials and generate productive, collaborative conversations around them

Museum professionals don't always know how to (or make the effort to) encourage a greater diversity of visitor engagement with collections. There is uncertainty, unawareness, or inexperience around the ways to seek out and incorporate a more diverse group of perspectives. The nature and extent of engagement on the part of a more culturally diverse audience, who can help to demonstrate the inclusive efficacy of a collection, is also impacted by factors such as entrance-fee admissions, which have been shown to disproportionately exclude cultural minorities from the opportunity to engage.

[Button] Problems in Collecting and Display: An Example

Slide 16: Problems in Collecting and Display: An Example

Text:

Problems in Collecting and Display: An Example

Let's look at an example of a problematic display, to get a better idea of what's at stake: the 1989 exhibition of African materials at the Royal Ontario Museum, *Into the Heart of Africa*.

For many years, the ROM's collection of African materials was selected, organized, classified, and displayed in the museum according to terms and practices that reflected a Western and European set of cultural biases. In 1989, a group of activists protested the exhibition organized by the museum, *Into the Heart of Africa*, which featured materials from this collection—an event whose impact is still felt by the museum today.

Silvia Forni, Senior Curator of African Arts and Cultures at the ROM, summarizes the problems for us in a 2017 study:

[this text will feature an audio accompaniment that the user can play]

"[. . .] what was intended to be a self-reflexive and critical exhibition on the colonial origin of the museum's collections from Africa became yet another instance of colonial oppression toward an African Canadian community [. . .]."

"Though the curatorial intent was not racist, the exhibition's design and interpretive shortcomings allowed for a very different reading on the part of the African Canadian public who came to see the exhibition. From the title *Into the Heart of Africa* (changed from *Into the Heart of Darkness* after last-minute consultation) to the use of ironic framing in quotation marks of the racist statements of military

and missionary collectors, the exhibit exuded white liberal smugness with silences that were as problematic as some of the charged images it reproduced."

"The museum failed to acknowledge how colonial oppression was not a thing of the past but a predicament that in many ways still affected black communities in many parts of the world, certainly including, at the time, Toronto. Even if its intellectual positioning was meant to be critical of the colonial mind-set, the exhibition did not present an explicit critical stance in the gallery text. [. . .]"

"For many, the tone set by the images and statements reflecting the colonial mind-set of early collectors made the exhibit another instance of violence whereby Africa was once again framed through the eyes of the colonizers. Regardless of the curatorial intent, the exhibition reiterated a static and contrived notion of Africa that could not provide a basis for a dialogue with African Canadians fighting for recognition and respect in a society that continued to keep them at the margin."

"On these premises, a group of young activists who self-identified as the Coalition for the Truth about Africa (CFTA) started picketing the ROM on a regular basis and demanding that action be taken to redress the racist tone of the exhibition."

Forni's account of the exhibition and the display practices used make clear some of steps that the ROM's curatorial team could have taken to avoid this.

Case studies like this one therefore have a lot to teach us about possible solutions to problems of collecting and display.

So, what are some of these solutions?

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
Silvia Forni, "Engaging Dialogues: Reframing Africa at the Royal Ontario Museum," *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* 5 (2017): 197-210: doi:10.3167/armw.2017.050116 [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] What are the Solutions?

Subtopic 4: What are the Solutions?

Slide 17: What are the Solutions?

Text:

What are the Solutions?

There are various steps that Ontario museum professionals can take to address the kinds of problems we've identified so far.

Let's look at some of the solutions and best practices that have been proposed within the industry, and consider the degree to which they might be useful to our own practices:

Problem 1: a lack cultural diversity among museum professionals responsible for collections and curatorship

Proposed Solutions and Best Practices:

- identify key areas where the cultural diversity of museum professionals can better align with the cultural makeup of the collections
- create and put into action a strategic plan that introduces greater cultural diversity to curatorial teams (this plan should ideally also apply across the institution and incorporate all roles, from administration and management to and board membership)
- prioritize the hiring of neglected or minority cultural groups, or those with important or self-declared relationships to museum collections
- introduce and allocate funding for scholarships and fellowships that support the education of a greater cultural diversity of museum professionals

Problem 2: a lack of cultural diversity within collections themselves

Proposed Solutions and Best Practices:

- identify gaps in collections and seek out opportunities to fill them; create an action plan that lays out a feasible, manageable strategy for culturally inclusive collection development
- establish partnerships and collaborations with individuals, groups, or institutions who will help to expand access to either materials themselves or engage in knowledge-sharing
- introduce safeguards to prevent collecting or curatorial choices governed by either personal biases or outmoded institutional classifications

Citations to be included at bottom of slide:
Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museums (2022). Ontario Museum Association: https://members.museumsontario.ca/inclusion2025 [accessed 30 January 2022].
Marian Carpenter, "View from the Field: The Challenges to being Inclusive in Museum Collections," The Inclusive Historian's Handbook (June 2019): https://inclusivehistorian.com/view-from-the-field-the-challenges-to-being-inclusive-in-museum-collections/ [accessed 30 January 2022].
Renaud Proch, "If Museums in the US want to be more inclusive, they first have to recognize—and unlearn—old habits and biases," Artnet News (June 2020): https://news.artnet.com/opinion/renaud-proch-ici-changing-museums-1889284 [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Continued . . .

Slide 18: What are the Solutions?

What are the Solutions (continued)

Problem 3: uncertainty or ignorance about the appropriate way to interpret or display culturally sensitive materials

Proposed Solutions and Best Practices:

- adopt new terminology and erase old ones and the biases they perpetuate

- introduce new voices and perspectives, to help overturn outmoded narratives and encourage a more productive and culturally relevant engagement with collections
- actively seek out and incorporate new stories, new forms of knowledge, and new ways of sharing them

Problem 4: inadequate or ineffective systems of communication or outreach that engage culturally diverse audiences with materials and generate productive, collaborative conversations around them

Proposed Solutions and Best Practices:

- solicit and make use of a more diverse group of perspectives, by establishing collaborations and building meaningful relationships with diverse communities, such as special exhibitions based in cultural partnerships
- bolster outreach and educational programs that appeal to and involve a greater variety of audiences
- encourage visitor engagement by reducing or eliminating entrance-fee admissions to allow everyone the opportunity to engage
- make audiences co-creators in the storytelling process; introduce opportunities for visitors to share in the creation and discussion of museum content and interpretation

Each of these solutions and best practices requires careful thought, time, and investment. This is not meant to act as a definitive list, but to provide you with the basis for future discussion and development.

Citations to be included at bottom of slide:
Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museums (2022). Ontario Museum Association: https://members.museumsontario.ca/inclusion2025 [accessed 30 January 2022].
Marian Carpenter, "View from the Field: The Challenges to being Inclusive in Museum Collections," The Inclusive Historian's Handbook (June 2019): https://inclusivehistorian.com/view-from-the-field-the-challenges-to-being-inclusive-in-museum-collections/ [accessed 30 January 2022].
Renaud Proch, "If Museums in the US want to be more inclusive, they first have to recognize—and unlearn—old habits and biases," Artnet News (June 2020): https://news.artnet.com/opinion/renaud-proch-ici-changing-museums-1889284 [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Module 2 Summary and Key Takeaways

Slide 19: Module 2 Summary and Key Takeaways

Text:

Module 2 Summary and Key Takeaways

Let's review! Here are the key takeaways from Module 2:

There are 4 key problems behind the lack of cultural inclusivity in Ontario museum collecting and display practices:

1. a lack cultural diversity among museum professionals responsible for collections and curatorship

2. a lack of cultural diversity within collections themselves

3. uncertainty or ignorance about the appropriate way to interpret or display culturally sensitive materials

4. inadequate or ineffective systems of communication or outreach that engage culturally diverse audiences with materials and generate productive, collaborative conversations around them

Do you recall some of the suggested solutions and best practices we've covered so far? Let's do a short activity that allows us to reflect on these.

[Button] Evaluation: Visitor Complaint Response Activity

Slide 20: Evaluation: Visitor Complaint Response Activity

Text:

Evaluation: Visitor Complaint Response Activity

Imagine that you have received the following complaint from a visitor to your museum. Identify the key problem(s) at the root of the complaint and write down two possible solutions you could adopt to address it.

Thinking back to the various solutions and best practices we've covered in this module, which ones do you think might be the most useful in this scenario? (You can return to the earlier slides if you want to review them by clicking the back arrow.)

Visitor complaint:

"I visited your museum today because I was really excited to see the exhibition *Art of East Asia*, but I was shocked to find that it only included Chinese and Japanese objects. Why were there no examples of Korean art?"

[Button] Module 3: Inclusive Terminology and its Place in Cultural and Historical Interpretation

Module 3. Inclusive Terminology and its Place in Cultural and Historical Interpretation

Slide 21: Module 3. Inclusive Terminology and its Place in Cultural and Historical Interpretation

Text:

Module 3. Inclusive Terminology and its Place in Cultural and Historical Interpretation

In this module we'll consider:

- what culturally inclusive terminology is
- the guidelines for culturally inclusive and terminology and usage, relevant to cultures in Ontario
- some specific examples of culturally inclusive language and its use

[Button] Words Matter! Inclusive Terminology in Museum Display

Subtopic 6: Words Matter! Inclusive Terminology in Museum Display

Slide 22: Words Matter! Inclusive Terminology in Museum Display

Text:

Words Matter! Inclusive Terminology in Museum Display

Paying careful attention to the terminology that museums use in all their communications—whether it's an exhibition label on a wall, an instruction on a touchscreen experience, a catalogue entry on a website, or a pamphlet with information about a display—is essential to achieving cultural inclusivity.

Language can present a significant barrier for visitors, whether it's the language* itself or the specific words being used.

Challenges can also arise when we're writing about people in a historically interpretative context. How do we use culturally inclusive terminology and maintain historical accuracy at the same time, particularly when the two might seem to be incompatible?

Let's take a closer look at some of the culturally inclusive terminology guidelines we can adopt as part of our own best practice.

*In this course we focus on terminology and usage rather than languages. For a useful set of guidelines around language, translation, and linguistic accessibility in museum display, see the resources on the Ontario Museum Association website at: https://members.museumsontario.ca/resources/news/item/cmog-standards-resources

[Button] Culturally Inclusive Terminology Guidelines: An Overview

Slide 23: Culturally Inclusive Terminology Guidelines: An Overview

Text:

Culturally Inclusive Terminology Guidelines: An Overview

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) provides museums in Canada with a useful set of Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines. These guidelines outline the terminology museums should adopt in all forms of communicative content.

These guidelines apply to:

- Indigenous/Aboriginal Peoples
- ethnic or racial groups or nationalities
- persons with disabilities
- people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
"Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines: 6.4. Inclusive Language," Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) (2017): https://id.humanrights.ca/text-writing-standards-for-exhibits/inclusive-language/ [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Terminology and Usage

Slide 24: Terminology and Usage

Text:

Terminology and Usage

The terminology of cultural inclusivity is vast! It can be overwhelming, especially if it's new to you or you are uncertain about the right way to use it. The most important thing is to be aware and to take a proactive approach if you have questions or need help.

Thankfully, there are many useful resources available to museum professionals to help us. These resources offer guidelines specific to the cultures served and represented by Ontario museums.

Before we get to those resources, let's look more closely at a specific example of terminology and usage.

[Button] Terminology and Usage: An Example

Slide 25: Terminology and Usage: An Example

Text:

Terminology and Usage: An Example

The following example is taken from the CMHR's Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines:

References to Indigenous/Aboriginal Peoples

References to Indigenous peoples are context-specific. The following describes the usage that has been adopted by the CMHR:

In an international context, the English term most widely used is "Indigenous." In a Canadian context, the terms Indigenous person/Indigenous Peoples or and Aboriginal person/Aboriginal Peoples, rather than Aboriginal(s) or Aboriginal Canadian(s), are used. The Museum gives priority to the term "Indigenous Peoples" or "Indigenous person" in exhibit text and other written communications for visitors based on current cultural and terminological practice. The word "Aboriginal" is still used in legal contexts.

These terms include the following three groups:

- First Nations Peoples or First Nations communities
- Métis or Métis people
- Inuit (the singular term is Inuk)

In English, when referring to First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples, the CMHR uses the more specific terms rather than Indigenous or Aboriginal.

NOTE: Because the term Inuit means "the people," do not use "the" or "people" with Inuit. Also, neither "Inuk" nor "Inuit" should be pluralized with an "s."

Correct: Inuit are resilient.
Incorrect: The Inuit are resilient.
Incorrect: The Inuits are resilient
Incorrect: Inuit people are resilient.

First Nations' names are generally preceded by the article "the," for example, the Gwich'in, the Sahtu Dene and the Iroquois. This is not a hard and fast rule; articles can be dropped in certain sentence structures.

The term "Indian" is only used in conjunction with discussions of The Indian Act or when it is in the official name of a group or organization.

This is a good example of a detailed set of guidelines about one set of terms relevant to a particular selection of cultural identities. But it isn't exhaustive!

Take the time to familiarize yourself with the terminology relevant to various cultures, and make note of any terms that are new to you or that you want to find out more about.

As a starting point, take a look at the following useful resources:

Inclusive Language Resources, Equity and Inclusion Office at the University of British Columbia
Canadian Museum for Human Rights Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines
Canadian Style Guide: Elimination of Stereotyping in Written Communications
The Diversity Style Guide
The Acrolinx Inclusive Language Guide

Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museum Glossary

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
"Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines: 6.4. Inclusive Language," Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) (2017): https://id.humanrights.ca/text-writing-standards-for-exhibits/inclusive-language/ [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Terminology and Usage: The Bigger Picture

Slide 26: Terminology and Usage: The Bigger Picture

Text:

Terminology and Usage: The Bigger Picture

Spelling, capitalization, and the use of correct pronouns are all important. But they aren't the only considerations! Cultural identity does not exist in a vacuum: it's contextual. We need to pay careful attention to the overall communicative context—the "bigger picture"—of culturally inclusive terminology.

For instance, returning to the example of Indigenous Peoples, the grammatical structures we impose—such as the use of the possessive or the passive tense—can have a significant impact on the overall connotation of the identities, experiences, or agencies of the people in question. Let's look at what the *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples* has to say about the impact of grammar:

> "It is a common error to use possessives to describe Indigenous Peoples, as in 'Canada's Indigenous Peoples,' or 'our Aboriginal Peoples,' or 'The First Peoples of Canada.' These possessives imply that Indigenous Peoples are 'owned' by Euro-colonial states. Indigenous Peoples assert sovereignty and many do not identify as Canadian."
>
> Using the passive voice instead of the active voice can be equally problematic: "Colonial language communicates paternalism—the idea that Indigenous Peoples are not capable of thinking and acting for themselves. [. . . for example:] 'The fur trade swept up Indigenous Peoples in a new economy [. . .].' This wording suggests Indigenous Peoples were *acted on*, instead of *acting*."

And language is always changing, too! It's important to keep pace with any new developments in language and usage to ensure that we are always being inclusive. Linguistic inclusivity is a dynamic, evolving process in which we are all participants.

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and About Indigenous Peoples* (Toronto: Brush Education Inc., 2018), 76, 91.

[Button] Strategies for Using Culturally Inclusive Terminology

Slide 27: Strategies for Using Culturally Inclusive Terminology

Text:

Strategies for Using Culturally Inclusive Terminology

There are various ways that museums can incorporate culturally inclusive terminology in their communications.

Seema Rao, CEO of Brilliant Idea Studio (BIS), provides us with a useful set of guidelines for planning and creating forms of interpretation that are culturally inclusive:

- take a visitor- (rather than museum-) centred approach to historical interpretation; take the time to assess each object and determine which layers or types of information will be most meaningful to your visitors, considering their implications for different visitors
- remember that each visitor comes to the content with different needs, aptitudes, and expectations, so avoid overly academic language and keep texts simple and straightforward
- avoid singular narratives that focus on exceptionalism, or the things that make an object unusual, at the expense of revealing what makes them relatable to lots of different kinds of people
- don't use exclusionary phrases that make assumptions about the audience (for example, saying "when a man marries a woman" assumes that all readers are heterosexual)
- approach historical interpretation as storytelling: each object has a history with many layers of stories
- evaluate the current nature of your interpretations, and replace instances of singular interpretative emphasis with broader narratives that embrace a greater variety of people and perspectives (for example, do most of the interpretations focus on white men?)
- make the process a collaborative one: create cross-disciplinary teams to generate a conversation around best practices that involve a variety of viewpoints

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
Seema Rao, "Inclusive Interpretation Tips," *History News* (*AASLH: Technical Leaflet. A Publication of the American Association for State and Local History*, #282) 73:2 (2018), 1-8: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26975006 [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation

Subtopic 7: Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation

Slide 28: Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation (1)

Text:

Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation

Museums should always use the correct and appropriate terminology. But there are two exceptional cases when it might be necessary to use what we would otherwise consider to be problematic terms:

1. Quotations: when quoting another source, the original text should not be changed to be made inclusive

2. Historical context: when writing about people in historical context, it's appropriate to use the terminology relevant to that period: for example, the gender-biased term "lumbermen" would be inappropriate in a 21st-century context but is acceptable in an exhibition about 18th-century tools. In the context of that earlier period, women were not hired to cut trees.

Texts that are required to address historical context can often present potential problems when requiring us to negotiate the cultural terminology of the past. What should we do when the requirements of historical interpretation seem to be at odds with our preferred terminology?

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
"Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines: 6.4. Inclusive Language," Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) (2017): https://id.humanrights.ca/text-writing-standards-for-exhibits/inclusive-language/ [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Continued . . .

Slide 29: Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation (2)

Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation (continued)

A group of historians at Harvard University put together a useful set of "Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description" for incorporating culturally inclusive terminology as part of historical interpretation:

Before writing anything, we should ask ourselves the following questions:

- will the words you choose either perpetuate or combat cultural stereotypes or marginalization?
- who might be harmed by or benefit from the words you choose?
- in the interest of clarity and equity, what should be brought to the forefront to appropriately contextualize the material or object?
- who or what might you be leaving out?
- how have colonialism, racism, sexism, or other forms of hegemony impacted the origins of the materials you're describing?

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
Charlotte Lellman, et al., "Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description," *Center for the History of Medicine: Policies and Procedures Manual* (May 2020). Center for the History of Medicine, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, MA: https://wiki.harvard.edu/confluence/display/hmschommanual/Guidelines+for+Inclusive+and+Conscientious+Description [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Continued . . .

Slide 30: Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation (3)

Inclusive Terminology and Historical Interpretation (continued)

Here are some of the specific guidelines the Harvard historians suggest:

- when a person is publicly recognized by an identity marker (like race or gender), it's appropriate to describe them that way: for example, if a historical name contains outdated or offensive terminology, you shouldn't revise it but include it in brackets to make it clear that the term is being used in an explicitly historical context

- when describing a person who belongs to a marginalized group use the terms preferred by that person; do your research: politely ask relevant communities about preferred language for identities or terms that are unfamiliar to you

- avoid venerating creators or using superlative language, especially based on family relationships or reputation; steer clear of value judgments and leave interpretation to the visitor

- identify and describe any "hidden" figures who played a role in the history of the object or material—people who previously may have gone unnoticed or unacknowledged

- avoid using the passive voice to inadvertently deprive a person or group of agency; use language that neither glorifies a dominant group nor hides or misrepresents members of a marginalized group

- avoid exclusionary terms like jargon or complex terms that not everyone knows; describe materials using language that's accessible to a wide variety of visitors. Use clear and direct language, and simple and straightforward formatting.

- if you're unsure of something, use qualifying language; be clear about the uncertainty, rather than hiding it

- for content that's emotionally challenging, offensive, or disturbing, provide an introductory note with a clear and straightforward description of the challenging material. This allows the visitor to decide whether they really want or need to view these materials, or at least, to mentally or emotionally prepare themselves to view the materials.

    For example:
    Please note: This exhibition includes graphic images of Holocaust and possibly Dutch Famine survivors and victims, as well as graphic animal research images.

Again—this isn't a complete list! It is meant to offer a useful starting point for coming up with your own set of institutional guidelines for using culturally inclusive terminology. Take a moment to think about what these guidelines might look like. Does your museum have guidelines in place? Are they useful or do they need some work? Are they being put into action?

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
Charlotte Lellman, et al., "Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description," *Center for the History of Medicine: Policies and Procedures Manual* (May 2020). Center for the History of Medicine, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, MA: https://wiki.harvard.edu/confluence/display/hmschommanual/Guidelines+for+Inclusive+and+Conscientious+Description [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Case Study: Exhibition Labels

Slide 31: Case Study: Exhibition Labels

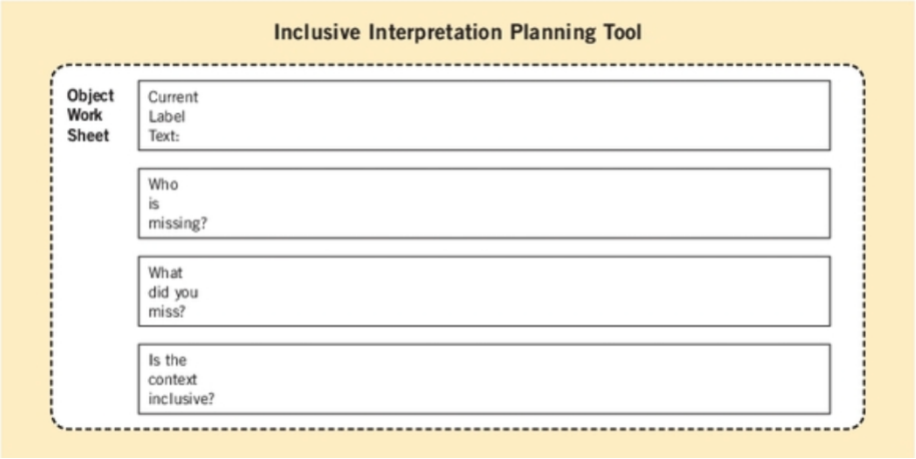
Case Study: Exhibition Labels

Let's look at one example of museum communications that presents specific challenges for cultural inclusivity: exhibition labels.

Exhibition labels are one of the most important points of contact with museum visitors: they are often the only types of textual information with which visitors engage.

This means that careful thought must be given to their content!

How do we make exhibition labels more culturally inclusive?



We can use the template above, provided by Seema Rae, to rethink our approach to exhibition label content. The template can be used to revise existing labels and create new ones. It prompts us to ask four questions:

- What is the current label text?
- Who is missing?
- What did you miss?
- Is the content inclusive?

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:

Seema Rao, "Inclusive Interpretation Tips," History News (*AASLH: Technical Leaflet. A Publication of the American Association for State and Local History*, #282) 73:2 (2018), 1-8: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26975006 [accessed 30 January, 2022].

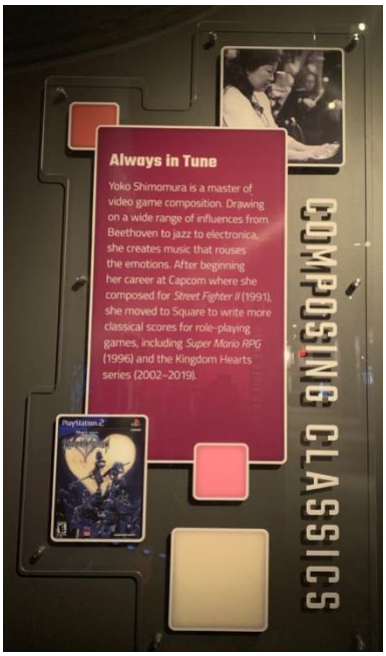
[Button] Case Study: Exhibition Labels - Examples

Slide 32: Case Study: Exhibition Labels - Examples

Case Study: Exhibition Labels – Examples

Here are two examples of exhibition labels written with these questions in mind. They were created for very different types of exhibitions, but they share a culturally inclusive approach to their subjects.

Take a close look at both examples. In what ways do they reflect the forms of best practice we've explored so far?



Take the time to evaluate the exhibition labels in your museum. Are they culturally inclusive, or do they need some work? What can you and your colleagues do to make them more inclusive?

Remember: there isn't one, single solution to the best way to incorporate culturally inclusive terminology into interpretation. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Make the process a collaborative one and—most importantly—do your part to actively promote the use of culturally inclusive terminology.

Citation to be included at bottom of slide:
Brienna Johnson-Morris, "Exhibition Labels: Language, Accessibility and Inclusion," Thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2020 (Appendix): https://scholarworks.rit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11571&context=theses [accessed 30 January 2022].

[Button] Module 3 Summary and Key Takeaways

Slide 33: Module 3 Summary and Key Takeaways

Text:

Module 3 Summary and Key Takeaways

Let's review! Here are the key takeaways from Module 3:

- language and terminology can present visitors with barriers, excluding them from engaging with collections
- familiarizing yourself with and learning how, when, and where to apply the culturally appropriate and inclusive terminology is essential to creating a culturally inclusive museum; seek out the relevant guidelines and apply them as part of your practice
- be aware of context: terminology is part of a larger set of ideas about people and their identities
- keep pace with new developments in language to ensure you are always being inclusive
- be informed about the best practices for incorporating culturally inclusive terminology alongside historical interpretation
- ask questions, collaborate with others, and be an active promoter of culturally inclusive terminology

[Button] Evaluation: Vocabulary Activity

Slide 34: Evaluation: Vocabulary Activity

Text:

Evaluation: Vocabulary Activity

Let's practice using culturally inclusive terminology. Look at the following sentences and select "correct" or "incorrect" to indicate whether you think the cultural terminology has been used correctly or not:

Aboriginal Canadians

☐ Correct ☐ Incorrect

The Inuits are resilient

☐ Correct ☐ Incorrect

the Iroquois

☐ Correct ☐ Incorrect

Ontario's First Peoples

☐ Correct ☐ Incorrect

[Button] Course Summary and Key Takeaways

Slide 35: Course Summary and Key Takeaways

Text:

Let's review! In this course we've explored:

- the nature and importance of cultural inclusivity in Ontario museums
- some of the problems in current collecting and display practice
- various possible solutions to these problems, and examples of best practice
- the terminology of cultural inclusion, and some of the ways to actively incorporate this into collecting and display practices

Let's take a moment to pause and reflect on what we've covered in the course and do one final activity together:

[Button] Final Course Evaluation: Self-Reflection Activity

Slide 36: Final Course Evaluation: Self-Reflection Activity

Text:

Final Course Evaluation: Self-Reflection Activity

Take another look at your response to the Self-Assessment question you were asked at the start of the course. Consider the following questions, in the light of what you've learned:

- Have your ideas changed?

- What do you think is the value of cultural inclusivity to Ontario's museums and their visitors?
- What is meaningful about the contributions you've made so far?
- What steps will you take to contribute to cultural inclusivity in the museum?

Share your responses with your colleagues and use them as a starting point for learning, conversation, and action. Make the process a collaborative one that builds cultural inclusivity into the museum workplace: as Seema Rae puts it, "inclusive interpretation grows from inclusive work practices."

[Button] Conclusion and Resources

Slide 37: Congratulations on Completing the Course! Here are Some Resources for Future Reference

Text:

Conclusion and Resources

Congratulations on completing the course! You've taken the first important step toward making meaningful change for your visitors.

Here are some additional resources to help you and your visitors thrive on your journey toward creating a culturally inclusive museum:

Inclusion 2025: A Practitioner's Guide to Inclusive Museums
Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Diversity and Inclusion at the OMA
Diversity Census Tool and Inclusion Survey
The Inclusive Museum (International Conference)
The Inclusive Historian's Handbook - View from the Field
Canadian Museum for Human Rights Inclusive and Accessible Design Guidelines
Guidelines for Inclusive and Conscientious Description
Interpretation and Education – Ontario Museum Association