Pre and Post Workshop Activities

Curious and unexpected treasures from the State Library’s collections have been brought together to encourage you to unleash your imagination to answer questions such as, “What is it?” and “Why?” From the largest elephant folio to the smallest pocket dictionary and photographs of aluminium cans transformed into miniature furniture, the selection of objects displayed includes the big, the small and the very strange.

This guide aims to help you navigate the exhibition and engage with the artworks. Like every journey, you will bring your own life experiences to the art exhibition. Your own responses, interpretations and forks in the road may vary from others’.

We wish you an enjoyable experience at the State Library of Western Australia and hope you enjoy Very Big, Very Small, Very Strange.

Pre Visit

- Make a display in the classroom of items that are very big, very small and very strange.
- Incorporate a mystery box into your class news telling by asking students to bring a strange object from home. Students work out what the mystery object is by asking questions.
- As a class, make lists of synonyms of the words: ‘big’, ‘small’ and ‘strange’. Students choose one synonym from each list and create a subject for a narrative, eg: The Petite Farm Mouse, the Enormous Carrot and the Extraordinary Day.
- Explore ways to measure size and distance (arbitrary and non-arbitrary). What are the different tools we use to measure size and distance? Measure a set of items using these tools.
- Collect a set of items that students can look at under a microscope. Students describe and draw what they see.

In the exhibition space

- Introduce the exhibition and explain to students what they are about to see and what you hope they will gain from the experience. Outline your expectations of appropriate behaviour and remind students that there may be more than one school group and other members of the public there.
- Divide into small groups. Each group should start in a different art place to avoid congestion.
- Ask students to look closely at each artwork, photograph and object and discuss their responses to the decal questions with their peers or parent helper. Encourage differing ideas and responses.
- Find a space to complete the art activity within the exhibition. Students can take their work home or add it to the growing display on the wall.

The Song Master Shaun Tan
Reflecting on the exhibition

- Find a quiet spot to sit and reflect on the exhibition, in groups or as a whole class.

Suggested debriefing questions:
- What is your response to the exhibition?
- Which of the artworks was your favourite and why?
- How may this have inspired you to create strange and wonderful creatures for your story writing?
- Ask each parent helper to find a space for their group and read a Shaun Tan book from the copies provided. It is useful to begin with a discussion of what students think the story is about. Focus also on the illustration style of Shaun Tan. Are the artworks in the exhibition similar or different?

Post Visit

- One of the photographs in the exhibition was of a miniature furniture set made from recycled aluminium cans. Research how people and companies are recycling items and turning them into something new. Present your research to the class.
- Using recycled materials, clay or a combination of both, make a 3D Shaun Tan inspired creature. Make a class display of the items and encourage class mates to guess its name.
- Read the Shaun Tan book, *The Oopsatorium*. Discuss the concept that all innovation begins as a daring act of imagination. Encourage students to use their imaginations to develop the idea for a new invention. Design a prototype for this invention and role play an episode of Shark Tank in which students pitch their invention and the teacher decides which innovation they are willing to invest in.
- Research the very big, very small and very strange transport inventions that have been created over time. Make a pictorial timeline of your findings.

Curriculum links:

**Skills:** Questioning, evaluating, communicating and reflecting.

**English:**
- Language - evaluative language.
- Literacy – listening and speaking interactions.

**The Arts (Visual Arts):**
- Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas.
- Responding to and interpreting the arts.

**HaSS (History):**
- Present and past family life; the past and the present.

**Mathematics:**
- Using units of measurement (using direct and indirect comparisons).

Other Shaun Tan books:
- *The Viewer* (1997);
- *The Rabbits* (1998);
- *The Red Tree* (2001);
- *The Lost Thing* (2000);
- *The Arrival* (2006);
- *Tales From Outer Suburbia* (2008);
- *Eric* (2010);
- *Lost and Found* (2011);
- *TheOopsatorium* (2012);
- *Rules of Summer* (2013);
- *Cicada* (2018);

Recommended websites:
- [www.shauntan.net/](http://www.shauntan.net/)