

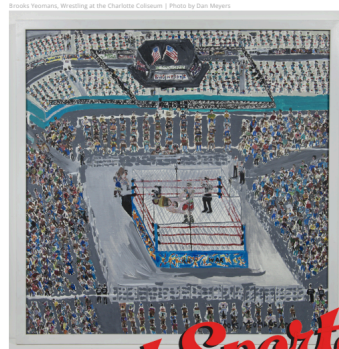
What's the Big Idea?

Grades 9 thru 12

Inspired by: *Good Sports: The Wisdom of Fun & Fair Play*

It takes a big, highly collaborative team to pull off a big exhibition at a museum. At the center of this process is a big idea the museum's curator researches and selects work to explore. The curator also writes interpretive text for the walls of the museum expanding upon the big idea.

In this lesson, students are provided a few clues about AVAM's current exhibition *Good Sports* and asked to collaboratively define the big idea. Students will be invited to engage in reverse exhibition planning where they support the big idea right there in the classroom: by both creating an original artwork and curating a group show. This experience asks students to engage with exhibition development, create an artwork within a set of parameters, and challenges them to practice their interpersonal communication skills.



Good Sports
THE WISDOM & FUN OF FAIR PLAY
October 13, 2024 – August 31, 2025

Objectives

- Students will infer meaning based on text.
- Students will recall and apply understanding of stages of the exhibition development process.
- Students will create an original artwork within a set of defined parameters.
- Students will curate a group of artworks based on a big idea.

Critical Questions

How is an exhibition in an art museum curated?

What is a BIG IDEA, and how is it used in exhibition development?

Activities

1. **Introduce.** Share with the class the intro panel wall text for AVAM's 2024-25 exhibition Good Sports (see resources at end of lesson).
 - a. **Contextualize:** What is a curator? How is an exhibition developed? (Share framework in resources at end of lesson).
 - i. [According to the Smithsonian Institution Exhibition Development Guide:](#) The curator or other subject-matter specialist (such as a scientist, historian, etc.) advocates for the subject matter [of the exhibition]. They provide research and expertise, select assets (including objects, images, and quotes), and ensure that the exhibit's content is accurate.
 - ii. Exhibits start with a "**BIG IDEA**" This is the overarching message that visitors should understand upon leaving the exhibit. It is the basis for all the artwork, text, videos, etc presented.
 - iii. After the BIG IDEA is selected, the curator and exhibition developers decide on the **KEY MESSAGES**. The **KEY MESSAGES** are a small number of take-away statements that directly support the big idea. They provide a conceptual framework that helps curators choose work and write interpretive labels.

- iv. Supporting the **KEY MESSAGES** are the **CRITICAL QUESTIONS**. The critical questions support the key messages. These are the questions that the exhibit should answer for visitors.
2. **View, Learn, Discuss.** As an example of exhibition development, and selecting work to explore a BIG IDEA and answer CRITICAL QUESTIONS share [this video from the Sun Valley Museum of Art featuring curator of Visual Arts, Courtney Gilbert](#).
 - a. In this video, Gilbert talks about the exhibition *I Need To Tell You Something: The Lost Art of Letter-Writing and Communication Today*. She shares two critical questions that guided the making of this exhibition:
 - i. What happens to our personal histories when we stop writing letters?
 - ii. Are we really connecting with each other, or are we actually lonelier than we've ever been?
 - b. And a few 'themes' (KEY STATEMENTS) artwork falls under:
 - i. Letters are documents of personal history, and objects that connect us and help us build relationships (Tucker Nichols, Joe Thurston, Elena del Rivero)
 - ii. Our communications can be kept public or private in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. (Gail Tarantino, Andrew Bush)
 - iii. The types of care / thought we put into our communication can influence their intended meaning and audience's interpretation (Charles Gute, Marc Dombrowsky).
 - c. Gilbert doesn't share the BIG IDEA - have students hypothesize after watching. What might the BIG IDEA be for this exhibition? For example:
 - i. One to one communication is changing.
 - ii. Handwritten letters are a valuable mode of communication that is being eclipsed by newer forms of digital communication.
3. **Dive Deeper.** Assign the three passages from Good Sports' wall text to small groups of 3 or 4 students. Students read through the passages and discuss ([see note-taking resource at end of lesson](#)):
 - a. What kinds of subjects do you expect to see on display in this exhibition?
 - b. Name three questions or stories you hope are explored by the work selected for this exhibition.
 - c. Based on our readings, hypothesize: what is the big idea (theme/topic) of this exhibition?
4. **Create: Backwards Exhibition Planning.** Based on both the Good Sports text passages shared, and students' own observations, students each develop a small artwork they think would fall under the BIG IDEA's umbrella or answer one of it's critical questions (taken from previous group work). This is the *opposite* of how exhibitions are typically curated. Usually artwork that has already been created is selected from a museum's collection, or borrowed from a lender, then included in a show. In this assignment, students are working backwards to create a work that fits the BIG IDEA and show text.
 - a. They may brainstorm in their small group to decide what kind of artwork they could create that might be included in an exhibition like this. Students are encouraged to create independently using a medium of their choice. ([See back of note-taking resource for a planning tool](#)).
5. **Critique and Curate.** After students complete individual works, hang up in front of the class for discussion. Ask:

- a. Based on what we have created as a group, what is the BIG IDEA of this exhibition?
 - b. What subjects or ideas are repeated? Why do you think this is?
 - c. What subjects or ideas are unique (only seen once)? Ask artist: What was your thought process behind including these subjects / ideas?
 - d. Lastly: Ask entire class to work together to select 5-7 artworks from this group as their “Good Sports” exhibition. The works must explore or express the same BIG IDEA but in different enough ways to create an interesting exhibition.
 - i. It may help to assign a leader and co-leader and help institute a ‘system’ for voting, or speaking (taking turns via talking stick, etc).
 - ii. It may also help for them to re-write a common BIG IDEA or CRITICAL QUESTION for all to see before they curate the ‘exhibit.’
 - iii. Remind students this selection isn’t based on *quality* of work, but rather how the artworks fit together to deliver a cohesive message.
6. **Compare.** [Share with your class several of the works that are in AVAM’s Good Sports exhibition.](#)
- a. **Debrief/Exit ticket:** How is the real Good Sports exhibition similar and different to the class’ imaginary Good Sports show? Why did some groups come up with different big ideas than others?

Materials

- Provided readings
- Provided note-taking organizer
- Pencils
- Selection of art materials (collage, paint, colored pencils, EZ cut, liquid glue, clay, reusable materials, hot glue, etc)
- Magnets / push pins

Modification/Extension

Modification: Walk through provided exhibition texts and discussion questions as a class. Teacher helps define the BIG IDEA for the whole class prior to art making. Limit choices for artistic medium to lessen burden of choice making.

9-12th Grade Maryland State Visual Art Standards Addressed

Anchor Standard 5 Develop and refine artistic work for presentation.

- E:9-12:1: Analyze and evaluate the reasons and ways an exhibition is presented.

Anchor Standard 6 Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

- E:9-12:2: Curate a grouping of objects, artifacts, or art to impact the viewer’s understanding of social, cultural, and/or political experiences.

Anchor Standard 8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

- E:9-12:1: Construct and justify meaningful interpretation of an artwork or collection of works supported by evidence through describing and analyzing feelings, subject matter, formal characteristics, art-making approaches, contextual information, and key concepts.

HIERARCHY

When planning a new exhibit, SIE recommends creating an interpretive hierarchy to focus the exhibit's main messages and provide a structure for content. This is generally done during the Interpretive Master Plan phase.



Exhibits start with a “**big idea**.” This is the overarching message that visitors should understand upon leaving the exhibit. It is the basis for all the content presented.

The **key messages** are a small number of take-away statements that directly support the big idea. They provide a conceptual framework that drives content development.

The **critical questions** support the key messages and shape the content goals for the experience. These are the questions that the exhibit should answer for visitors.

Once you have established an interpretive hierarchy, it's time to decide how to organize the exhibit. Should the content be presented chronologically or thematically? How many sections are needed to tell the story? What are the potential themes and subthemes? These are questions that should be considered as the project enters the Concept phase.

Good Sports

THE WISDOM & FUN OF FAIR PLAY

Introduction

The games we play, whether on a playground, a field, or a casual tabletop, serve as more than just recreation; how we play reveals who we are. Games are an opportunity to learn important values like fairness, teamwork, and leadership—at any age. At their core, both play and competition are twin forces, and for some inseparable. How we treat “rivals” offers a greater perspective on how we treat people in every setting. In this exhibition, we celebrate the capacity of competition to impart vital lessons of fairness and civility—such as being a gracious winner and never a sore loser. In a world increasingly inclined towards instant gratification and passive consumption, sports ground us in humility, emphasizing the hard work required to achieve personal bests. It is this drive towards a singular vision that resonates with our artists. Fiercely passionate, our artists spend their lives perfecting just a few skills to tell their story to the very best of their ability. Wielding the perspectives of artists, athletes, fanatics, and storytellers of all kinds, this exhibition celebrates wisdom hard-earned from the cradle to the coliseum. Ultimately, we all want to be respected, admired, and appreciated. We want to know that even when we fail—our effort is commendable. It is my hope that in some small way this exhibition encourages people to treat any field of engagement—from a race for the last parking spot in the lot, to a race for the gold in the Olympics—with grace. The nature of life is competition, but it is our respect for dignity and fairness that allows us to have a civil society.

—Gage Branda, Curator

Other excerpts from *Good Sports: The Wisdom and Fun of Fair Play* wall text

ShadowBall

These works by Morgan Monceaux are from the series titled ShadowBall. Shadow ball was a game of pantomiming baseball; going through well-timed and believable motions that give the illusion of actually playing the game. In the first half of the 20th century, players in the Negro League warmed up for games, and ran half-time shows by playing shadow ball, to the delight of crowds.

In Ken Burns' *Baseball*, narrator John Chancellor remarks, “They threw an invisible ball around

the infield so fast, hit, and fielded imaginary fly balls so convincingly, and made close plays at first and diving catches in the outfield so dramatically that fans could not believe it was not real.”

The phrase “Shadow Ball,” has become recognized as an unintended metaphor for the Negro Leagues and the exclusion of tremendous players relegated to the “shadows” of major league baseball.

Pinball Panic

Pinball evolved from 18th-century bagatelle, a game of shooting balls using a cue stick into holes on an inclined table. Originating in France, Bagatelle was likely brought to the U.S. during the Revolutionary War by French soldiers allied with the U.S. By the mid-20th century, pinball was its own unique game, complete with bells, whistles, and a spring-loaded plunger. During the Great Depression, pinball’s low cost provided an accessible escape from daily hardships, and companies like Lindstrom, Northwestern, and Gotham Pressed Steel produced themed tabletop versions that captured American interests, from sports to wartime heroes. At the same time, electronic, coin-operated pinball machines found in bars and arcades became notorious, with critics associating the game with gambling and criminality. Cities across the U.S. outright banned pinball in the 1940s. The prohibition endured until the 1970s, when the game was legally recognized as one of skill rather than chance.

Lucha Libre

Lucha libre literally translated as free-fight, is a form of professional wrestling, and Mexico's second most popular sport after soccer. Lucha Libre is more than just wrestling—it is a living mythology. Rising to prominence during the Mexican Revolution, it provided an exciting escape for a nation fatigued from their fight for sovereignty. The masked luchadores, with their epic battles of good versus evil, became folk heroes who embodied the aspirations, resilience, and identity of the people.

One of the most striking examples of lucha libre's folk hero tradition is Fray Tormenta aka Friar Storm a Catholic priest who became a masked wrestler in the 1970s to single-handedly support his orphanage, La Casa Hogar de los Cachorros de Fray Tormenta. For more than two decades, he fought not for personal glory but to provide for over 270 children in need. His convictions as a priest and luchador made him a symbol of selflessness and resilience, inspiring movies, video games, and documentaries across the world. Fray Tormenta has since retired from wrestling, however he occasionally delivers sermons in his mask.

instructions

Read the three passages of wall text from AVAM's 2024-25 exhibition, *Good Sports: The Wisdom of Fun & Fair Play* individually or as a group. Discuss the following questions as a group and make notes about your conversation.

summary

Name & Date	
Subject matter	What kinds of subjects do you expect to see in the artwork of this show? why?
Critical Questions	Name at least 2 questions or stories you hope are explored by the work selected for this exhibition.
Big Idea	Based on clues from these readings, and the intro text, take an educated guess of st the exhibition's BIG IDEA. Remember: This is <u>broad enough</u> to include many different artists, stories, and perspectives, but <u>narrow enough</u> to contain in a gallery and have visitors leaving with the critical questions answered. 1-2 sentences max.

turn over for art-making invitation + planning

Based on both the Good Sports text passages, and your group's conversation, you will develop a small artwork you imagine would be on the wall in this exhibition. The artwork must:

- *fit into the exhibition's BIG IDEA's or answer one of it's critical questions (noted during your discussion).*
- *completed independently*
- *be an original work*
- *use a medium of your choice*

Consider...

What part of the BIG IDEA or CRITICAL QUESTION will you explore in your work?

Below, list subject matter below that might fall under this BIG IDEA/ answer this CRITICAL QUESTION

What other research do you want to do to inform your making? (i.e. what will you Google) +
Go do it!

Thumbnail sketching...

What medium makes sense for this work?