

HOW TO MAKE A POP UP MUSEUM AN ORGANIZER'S KIT



HOW TO MAKE A POP UP MUSEUM-AN ORGANIZER'S GUIDE

Written by Nora Grant

Edited by Nina Simon

Illustrations by Iris Gottlieb

Design and Layout by Caroline Webster

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FOREWORD

The desire to uplift, inspire, and empower is an integral part of my identity. I created the Pop Up Museum in 2011 in an effort to lift up the unique perspective of the individual, inspire participants to listen, and empower people to share their stories. It was my mission to amplify commonalities and make connections across all ages and walks of life. Through conversation, this simple tool where all participants'

contributions are equally valued, I believe we can bridge gaps that are seemingly impossible to span. Through talking, and objects, and stories, we can discover what it is in all of us - and each other - that binds us to the breadth of human experience.

I am so pleased to see the Pop Up Museum evolve to be of service to communities on a greater scale. I wish you all the best in your own journey.

-Michelle DelCarlo

WHAT'S A POP UP MUSEUM?

A Pop Up Museum is a temporary exhibit created by the people who show up to participate. It works by choosing a theme and venue and then inviting people to bring an object on-topic to share, like a community show-and-tell. Each participant writes a label for his or her object and puts it on display. A Pop Up Museum usually lasts for a few hours on one day, and focuses on bringing people together in conversation through stories, art, and objects.

There are many ways to have a Pop Up Museum. And anyone can have one.

This is a Pop Up Museum Organizer's Kit. It offers a step-by-step guide on how to create a Pop Up Museum. At the end of the kit you will find Pop Up Museum Supplies, which can help you design your Pop Up Museum. But remember, the Pop Up Museum is not a one-size-fits-all event. Have fun discovering what makes YOUR museum pop.

HOW TO MAKE A POP UP MUSEUM STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

BEFORE

Sometimes a Pop Up Museum begins with a theme. Sometimes it begins with a conversation. The early planning stages may vary. These steps can help you think about where to begin.



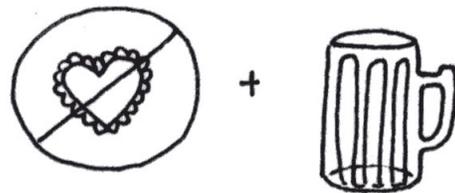
CHOOSE A THEME

The theme sets the tone for a Pop Up Museum. Once a theme is chosen, people bring objects on that topic to share. Here are some questions to consider when brainstorming a theme:

WHO'S YOUR AUDIENCE?

You want a theme that is appropriate and attractive to your intended audience. If it's a public Pop Up Museum, be mindful to different sensitivities.

*We threw a Valentine's Day Pop Up Museum on the theme **F my Ex** at a popular bar during happy hour. People brought objects from failed relationships to share. Fun and a bit daring, this Pop Up Museum was geared towards a young adult crowd. Attendees loved the event, where they shared intimate stories with friends and strangers. However, some older members of our museum were upset by the irreverence and provocation of the theme. This disparate response shows how each Pop Up Museum can have its own culture and audience. Pop Up Museums can open doors to distinct communities--but be mindful of who else is watching and listening.*



IS THE THEME CONCRETE? CAN YOU PICTURE SOMETHING TO BRING?

Because Pop Up Museums center on objects, it helps to have a concrete component to the theme. *Tools, Toys, Scrapbooks, or Collections* are some examples. The more abstract the theme, the more challenging it may be for a prospective participant to think of something to bring.

IS THE THEME NARRATIVE?

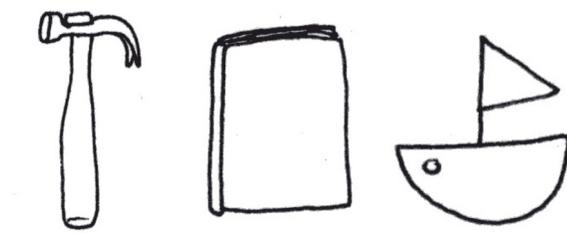
The Pop Up Museum is a way of storytelling through objects. Does the theme prompt a story? Themes like **Objects of Conflict** or *Growth and Decay* offer evocative possibilities for different forms of participation.

DOES THE THEME EXCITE YOU?

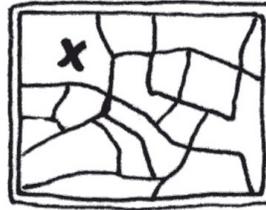
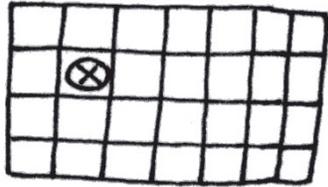
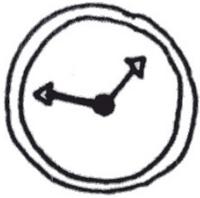
One of the best ways to choose a theme is to think about what excites you. If you're passionate about a theme, others will most likely share your enthusiasm.

NEED A THEME? HOW ABOUT ONE OF THESE?

- *Homemade*
- *Trash or Treasure*
- *Ordinary Miracles*
- *Taking Risks*
- *Lost and Found*



CHOOSE A TIME, DATE, AND LOCATION



The date and time of a Pop Up Museum will depend on your schedule, venue, and goals. When are people most likely to participate? Is there a time when a community is already ready to engage? It's often easiest to plan a Pop Up Museum for a time and place when people are already naturally congregating.

WHEN THINKING ABOUT A LOCATION, ASK YOURSELF:

- *Is it public or private?*
- *Who owns or manages the site?*
- *How many people can it accommodate?*
- *Is it handicapped-accessible?*
- *If it is outdoor, what will weather be like?*
- *Can it accommodate food or music?*
- *Can it accommodate tables and chairs?*
- *Is there parking?*
- *Will it invite walk-in traffic, or will it be an intimate affair for people who already know to attend?*



*You can pop up somewhere as intimate as your living room or as public as a park. Why would you want to have a private Pop Up Museum? We held a private Pop Up Museum on **Taking Risks** during a happy hour at a co-working space. It was a nice way for an intact group of people who work alongside each other to bond more closely in the context of a social experience.*

Planning to pop up at your own facility, museum, or library? It can be appealing to plan Pop Up Museums in conjunction with exhibitions or museum events. Just be aware that not everyone who likes to visit your museum also wants to share their objects. Doing Pop Up Museums in museums has the benefit of validating peoples' objects as "museum worthy," but it also can be more intimidating or less exciting than Pop Up Museums in non-traditional venues, like bars or barber shops.

REQUEST PERMISSION TO USE THE LOCATION

Once you've decided on a location, contact the site owner either with email or phone, and set up an in-person meeting. To see tips on effectively communicating with potential collaborators, see **Work with a Collaborator**.

WORK WITH A COLLABORATOR (OPTIONAL)



You can host a Pop Up Museum on your own, but collaborating with another group can be a way to reach new audiences, form new partnerships, and get extra hands to help run the event.

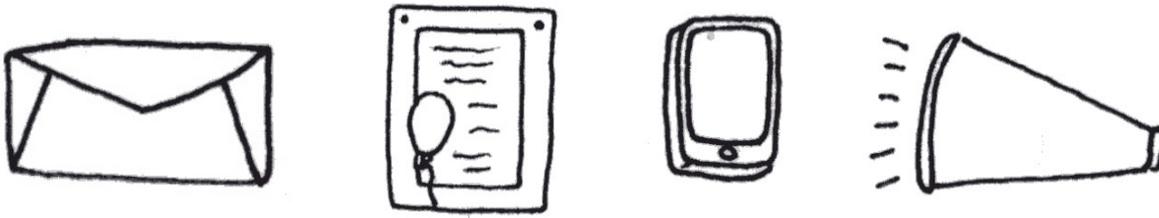
The MAH is focused on creating opportunities for social bridging and bonding through culture in our local community. We almost always develop Pop Up Museums with partners. The events enable us to connect with other local groups and organizations, as well as bringing together the diverse communities represented by their constituencies. We typically meet with a collaborator first and then brainstorm a theme together.

IF YOU WANT TO COLLABORATE WITH ANOTHER GROUP, HERE'S WHERE YOU CAN START:

- *Research groups you might want to work with.*
- *Contact them to set up an in-person meeting.*
- *At the meeting, introduce yourself, the Pop Up Museum, and your goals and expectations.*
- *During the meeting, try to establish the time, date, location, and theme for the Pop Up Museum. It's also helpful to delegate tasks and next steps.*
- *Stay in touch throughout the planning stages.*

*Working with a collaborator can yield unexpected outcomes. Maintaining clear, respectful communication is the key to a smooth collaboration. We wanted to have a Pop Up Museum on Growth and Decay with a local arboretum. However, the folks at the Arboretum were concerned “Decay” would invite unwanted fungal plants. After a few conversations, we agreed to skip the “Decay” element, and go forward with “Growth.” The Pop Up Museum on **Growth** turned out to be a vibrant gathering. Nobody brought fungal plants and the collaborators were happy.*

INVITE THE PEOPLE



How do you get the word out? That mostly depends on the nature of your Pop Up Museum and who you are trying to reach. In the best case scenario, you and any collaborators have specific ideas in mind about who might participate and the forms of communication that will work best for them.

If you are working with a collaborator, it is incredibly important to learn who their community/audience is and how they communicate with them. Sometimes, a collaborator goes into a Pop Up Museum expecting you to bring the people. It's important for them to understand that this is an event for and with them and their constituency, and that everyone is part of getting the word out. That might mean different communication platforms, languages, or approaches to promotion.

Here are some ways you can promote your Pop Up Museum:

SOCIAL MEDIA

facebook, instagram, twitter

YOUR INSTITUTION'S WEBSITE AND NEWSLETTER

Blast a brief description of the event through your institutional website and/or newsletter. Make sure your collaborator is prepared to do this as well.

CONTACT LOCAL PRESS

Send a press release to local press and ask them to write a story or blurb on the event.

FLYERS AND SIGNS

Make and distribute flyers around town. It helps to have an indicating mark, like an A-frame sign, outside of the event.

WORD OF MOUTH

There's nothing more simple than good ol' word of mouth. Tell your friends. Tell your friends to tell their friends.

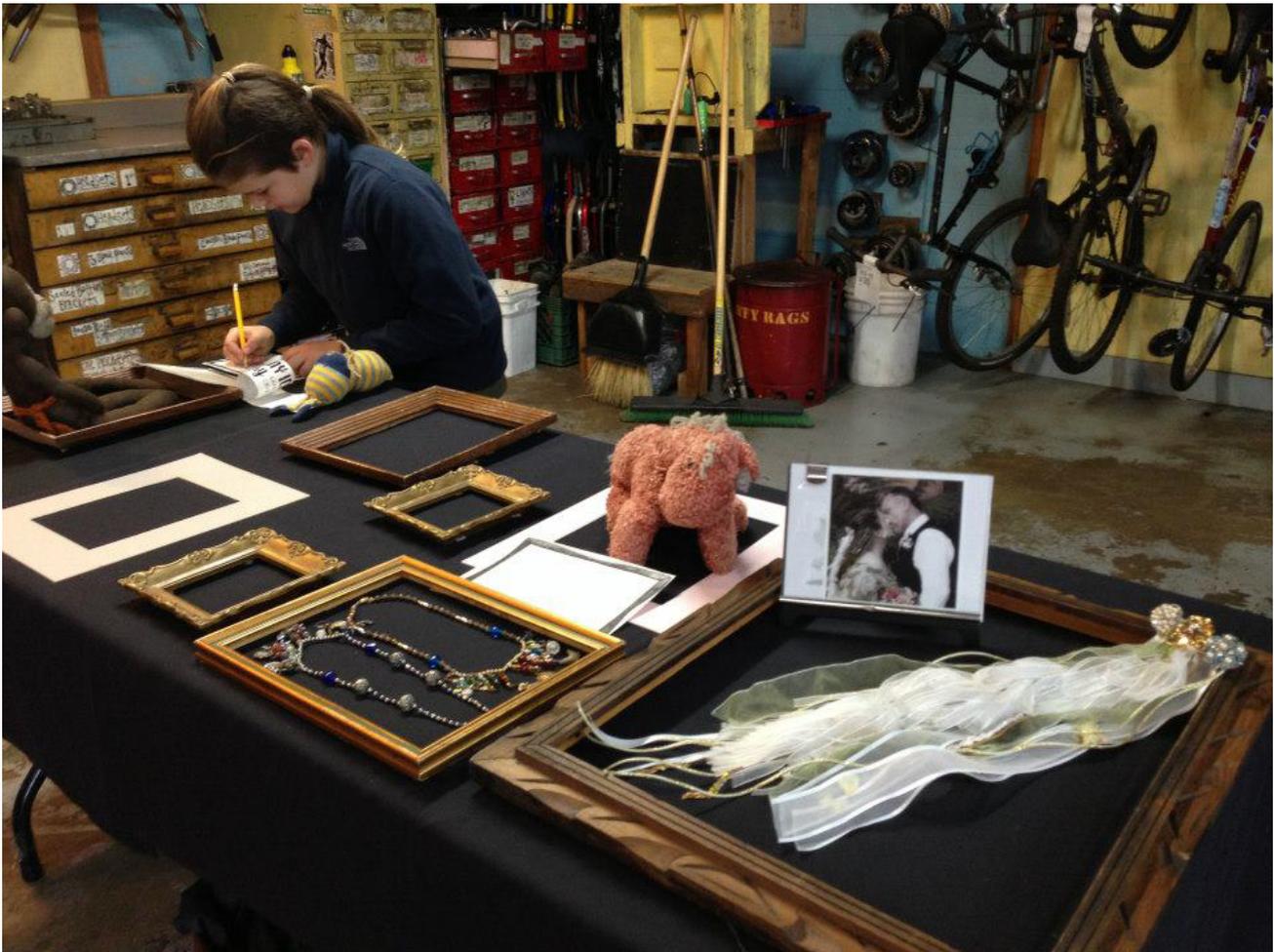
ASK YOUR COLLABORATOR(S) TO PROMOTE THROUGH THEIR RESOURCES

Share promotional material and promote the event together.

*Pop Up Museums are alternative, creative events. This means they can have alternative forms of promotion. We “planted” promotion for a Pop Up Museum on **Wild Things** by attaching handbill flyers to artificial flowers, and sprinkling these flower-flyers around a college campus. The flyers looked fantastic and buzz for the Pop Up Museum grew.*

DURING

Now that you've picked a theme, found a location, set the date, and advertised the event, it's time to pop!



SET-UP

The Pop Up Museum is temporary, so it helps to have an easy set-up. We use folding tables and chairs, and if it's outside, a pop up tent. If working with a collaborator at their site location, be sure to explain the Pop Up Museum and its space/material requirements to everyone on staff.

These materials are inexpensive and create a homey feel:

FOLDING TABLES AND CHAIRS

Folding tables make good display surfaces. Depending on the venue, you can sometimes use their tables and chairs.

POP UP TENT

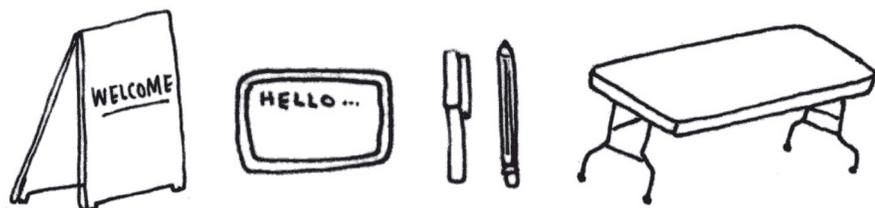
If popping up outside, a pop up tent creates a cozy space and platform for displaying signage. We use a 10 x 10' Pop Up tent.

TABLECLOTHS

Black tablecloths are neutral, appealing to photograph, and easy to keep clean.

BLANK LABELS

When people arrive, they can write a story about their object on a **blank label**. You can keep the label completely blank or make a simple template to make the experience a bit more special. You can experiment with using prompts on the labels, but sometimes it's nice to keep things open-ended so people don't feel like they have to follow your format.



PENS AND PENCILS

Some people like to use pencils so they can erase mistakes.

WELCOME AND INSTRUCTION SIGN

A welcome sign lets people know they're in the right place. You can write **instructions** on this sign, as well as a blurb about the chosen theme.

*We held a Pop Up Museum on **Her Story** in celebration of Women's History Month. During the event, a woman said she was confused about the theme and whose story she should tell. We had assumed people would quickly understand the theme based on the title alone. After the woman voiced her confusion, we started writing blurbs (brief curatorial statements) on each theme to inspire conversation.*

SAMPLE OBJECT(S)

Having a couple of objects to seed the display helps initiate conversation. Write a label for this object and use it as a prompt for others. When writing the label, be sure to use the same label format as the others, so the sample object doesn't look special.

We sometimes bring items from our museum's collection and archive to Pop Up Museums. Not only do these objects work as visual prompts and examples, they bridge institutional and community-created content. By sharing the same space, we're illustrating how one's personal object can have just as much story value as a more traditional museum object. We choose museum objects that are safe for people to handle so we do not compromise the integrity of more delicate or precious objects. Often these more humble artifacts never see the light of day in museum exhibitions and get their moment to shine at a Pop Up Museum.

FRAMES OR PEDESTALS

You can buy cheap frames from thrift stores and lay them out on a table. People can put their objects in a frame and POP, it's an instant museum. We have also painted cardboard boxes white to make light, portable pedestals for objects.

SNACKS

Snacks make people feel welcome and can be inexpensive if bought in bulk. Pretzels, cookies, juice, and fruit are some good ones. Depending on the theme, you can have thematic snacks. We have a local cookie company who was happy to be the “snack sponsor” for all of our Pop Up Museums.

*During a Pop Up Museum on **Her Story**, we held a historical bake sale in which students from a local high school baked sweets inspired by famous women in Santa Cruz history. These thematic sweets complemented the Pop Up Museum's theme and shared women's stories in creative, delicious way.*

ALCOHOL

Alcohol can loosen or liven up a gathering but it can also distract people or influence the social interaction. If using alcohol, consider how much you want to offer, what kind, if you're going to charge, whether under-aged people will attend the Pop Up Museum, and if the venue can accommodate alcohol. We usually find that alcohol is only a useful addition when working in very specific venues or communities that expect it (like a bar).

MUSIC

Do you want music? What kind? Do you have a way to play it? Will it interfere with the conversation? Conversation can be the best backdrop to engagement, but again, there are some venues where music helps break the ice and set the tone.



FACILITATION

EXPLAIN THE POP UP MUSEUM TO VISITORS AND PARTICIPANTS

This is a new concept. People might be confused. You can set up an information booth or you can simply answer people's questions. We try to greet people warmly and invite them into the experience without being overbearing. We also provide **pocket-size take-away descriptions** of the Pop Up Museum.

HAVE FUN AND BE RESPECTFUL

We don't have a formal dialogue plan. Instead, conversations tend to evolve organically. People come and go, chat, read and ponder, listen, and share stories. Unlike traditional museum settings, we encourage participants to touch the exhibited content. This tactile intimacy can lend itself to deeper connections amongst participants and the exhibited content.

*During a Pop Up Museum on **Homemade**, in which people were invited to share homemade objects, a few participants reflected on their pop up museum experience:*

"I just love that this [pop up museum] is very inclusive. You can touch everything. And I love that you write [the labels] cause sometimes you look at art and you're like, 'What was the person thinking?' And they say what it is and you're like 'Huh.' Everyone's descriptions in their own words is very accessible."

"I loved meeting the people who made the project and having them explain how they came across or made it themselves."

DOCUMENT

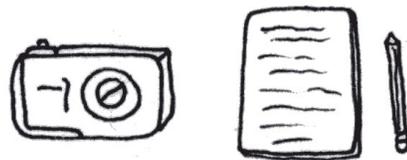
TAKE PICTURES

Sometimes people are shy in front of the camera. You can set up a fun photo booth or take candid pictures. You can also photograph the objects and labels and make a digital archive of the Pop Up Museum.

*We've created a **Pop Up Museum Archive** on Pinterest. We take a picture of each object and transcribe the labels. This way we can document what people brought and share their stories with a broader audience.*

TAKE NOTES

What's the mood like? Are people talking? Laughing? Being shy? Take notes on conversation or anything that sparks your interest. Taking notes in the moment will help you reflect later.



AFTER

Pop Up Museums are bite-size events. As one participant said, “They’re quick and light, kinda like a pop tart.”

Though Pop Up Museums are ephemeral, they can ignite meaningful experiences and spark long lasting connections. You can sustain the Pop Up Museum’s life by reflecting and sharing your experience with others.



EVALUATE

We like to reflect on **past pop up museums** by keeping an online journal of sorts, which is open for any pop up museum maker to use. Reflecting on and evaluating your Pop Up Museum will give you insight into planning future events.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- *How did it go?*
- *What worked well?*
- *What could be improved?*
- *What surprised you?*
- *Did participants seem to be enjoying themselves?*
- *Were they engaging in the way you had hoped or expected?*
- *If working with a collaborator, would you like to work with them again?*

STRUCTURAL OBSERVATION

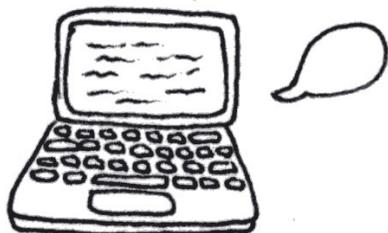
You can observe the pop up museum using our **structural observation template**, which enables you to track participant behavior in time intervals.

EVALUATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

The more feedback you get, the more you will learn about what to do next time. You can ask willing participants to share their thoughts on the event with a quick **questionnaire**.



SHARE YOUR POP UP MUSEUM EXPERIENCE



You can share your experience through social media, friends, blogging, and our website.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Upload photos to facebook, flickr, and instagram, and share them with friends.

SPREAD THE WORD

Tell your friends about your pop up museum. Stay in touch with your collaborators.

OUR WEBSITE

We'd love to hear about your pop up museum. Share your thoughts on the Pop Up Museum website by clicking **Share Your Pop Up Museum** in the top right corner.

POP UP MUSEUM SUPPLIES

- **Pop Up Museum Instruction Sign**
- **Pop Up Museum Flyer Template**
- **Pop Up Museum Label Template**
- **Pop Up Museum Take-away Description**
- **Evaluations Questionnaire**
- **Structural Observation Form**

WELCOME
TO THE

POP UP MUSEUM

HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE?

WRITE A BIT ABOUT YOUR OBJECT
OR STORY ON ONE OF THE LABELS.

PLACE YOUR OBJECT AND LABEL
SOMEWHERE IN THE ROOM.

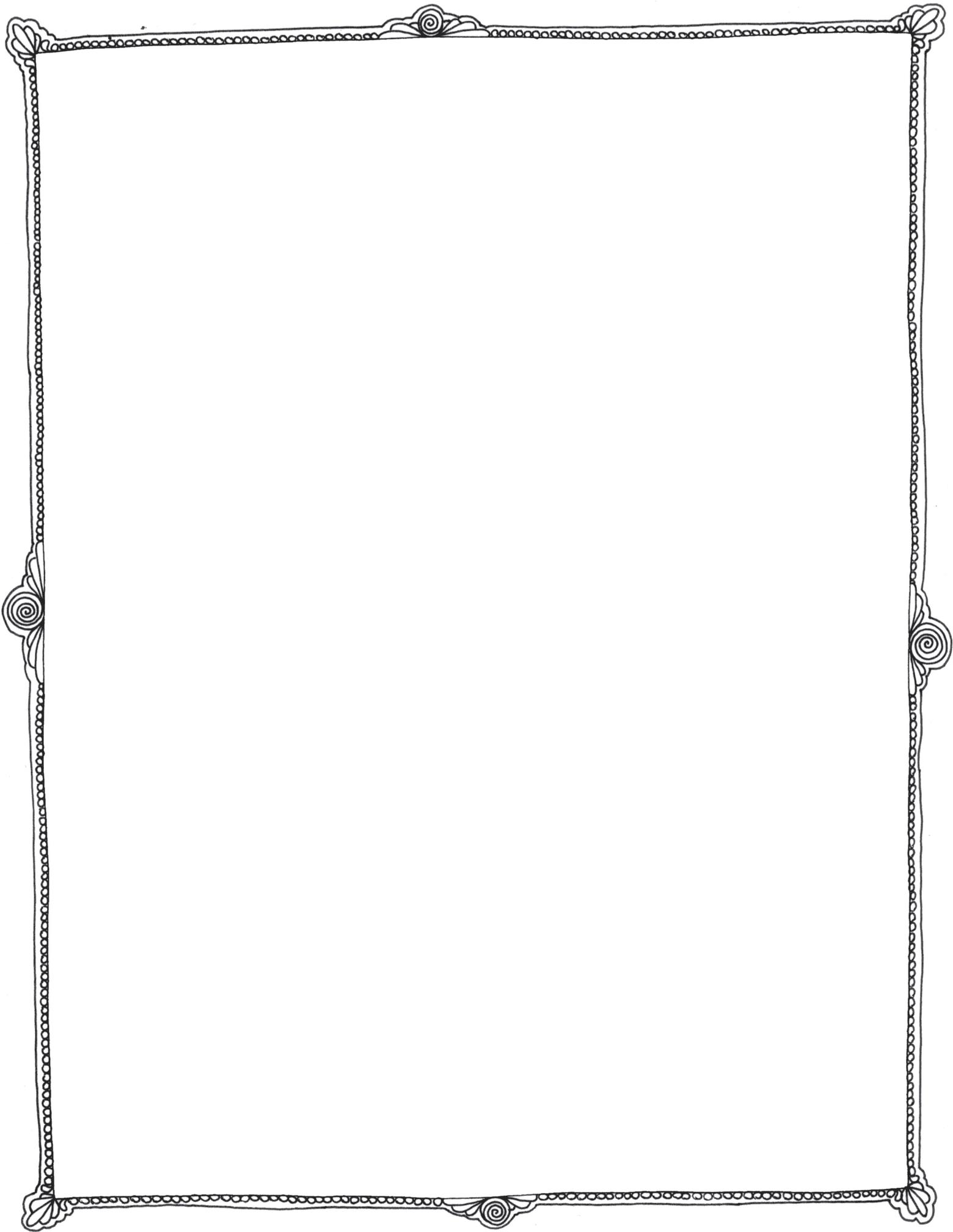
LOOK AT OTHER PEOPLE'S OBJECTS,
LISTEN TO THEIR STORIES, AND
SHARE YOURS!

POP UP MUSEUM ON

WHAT'S A POP UP MUSEUM?

A TEMPORARY SHOW
CREATED BY YOU. WE NAME
THE THEME AND DATE. YOU
BRING SOMETHING ON-TOPIC
TO SHARE WITH OTHERS.
IT'S THAT EASY.

MAH



WHAT'S A POP UP MUSEUM?

A POP UP MUSEUM IS A TEMPORARY EXHIBIT CREATED BY THE PEOPLE WHO SHOW UP TO PARTICIPATE. IT WORKS BY CHOOSING A THEME AND VENUE AND THEN INVITING PEOPLE TO BRING AN OBJECT ON TOPIC TO SHARE. PARTICIPANTS WRITE A LABEL FOR THEIR OBJECT AND LEAVE IT ON DISPLAY. A POP UP MUSEUM USUALLY LASTS A FEW HOURS. IT CAN HAPPEN ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, AND WITH ANY COMMUNITY.

POP UP MUSEUM

Pop Up Museum Evaluation Questionnaire

1. Did you bring something to exhibit?
2. What did you particularly enjoy or find inspirational?
3. Please complete the following phrases about your experience with the Pop Up Museum:
 - a. I was surprised by...
 - b. I was most interested in...
 - c. I was disappointed by...
 - d. I was bored by (or not interested in)...
4. What difference do you think that taking part in or visiting has made to you?
5. Please describe anything that is new or different that you are likely to do in the future as a result of your experience at the Pop Up Museum

