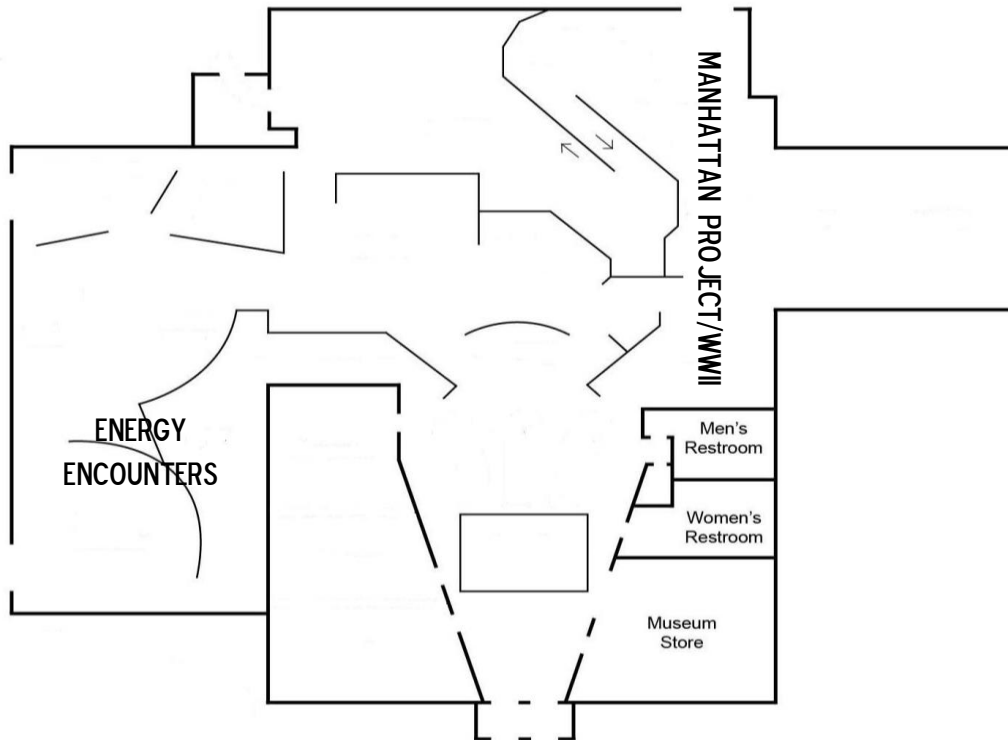


MINING THE NUCLEAR MUSEUM

“Mining the Museum” was artist Fred Wilson’s 1992 exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society (MHS). Wilson worked with the collections at MHS to create his own exhibit that unsettled the comfortable white, middle-class narrative of the museum. He juxtaposed 19th century armchairs with slave shackles as he questioned what truth and whose truth the museum claimed to tell.

Research across a variety of museums in the US and abroad indicates that the public has a very high level of trust in museums. Have museums earned that trust? Do they deserve it? Make your way through the exhibits and think critically about the narratives that are presented. Whose stories are being told? What groups or individuals have been left out? What events have been given more space and time? Who may have designed these exhibits and what biases may they bring to the table? Who provided the funds for the exhibits? Are there any potential conflicts of interest? What should museums be? Who should they be for? Is this museum on the right track?

The following questions are meant to help you think critically about the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History and the stories it tells. Although many of the questions focus on two specific exhibits (Manhattan Project/WWII and Energy Encounters), please explore the other exhibits as well.



Manhattan Project/WWII

Whose stories does this exhibit tell?

Whose stories does this exhibit leave out?

What questions do you have about the groups of people who were excluded?

What effect does the choice to tell some stories and not others have on the exhibit? Why does it matter?



Energy Encounters

Find the name of a company/organization that has sponsored a museum exhibit.

What does the company/organization do? What exhibit did they sponsor?

Should museums always take money from companies for exhibits? Why or why not? Where should they draw the line?



Are museums neutral?

What is bias? How could it manifest itself in a museum exhibit?

Does bias matter? Why or why not?

Can you find any examples of bias in this museum?

What does neutrality look like in museums? Is total neutrality possible?

Is this museum neutral? Why or why not?



Name some advantages and disadvantages to trying to be neutral.

What might a non-neutral museum look like? What are the advantages and disadvantages? How can you not be neutral without betraying public trust?

Should museums strive for neutrality?



National Museum of Nuclear Science and History 2.0

You're in charge of revitalizing an exhibit at the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History. What exhibit would you choose? What approach would you take? How would it differ from what's on display currently? What biases would you bring to the exhibit development? Describe/draw what you would display, how you would display it, and what you hope this exhibit would accomplish.

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Do you think the museum lives up to its potential? Is there room for improvement? Let us know by filling out a comment card! Museum comment cards are located in the vestibule at the front of the museum. We would love to hear any thoughts about the museum you may have. Please fill one out after your visit!



Teacher Resources

This gallery activity can be greatly enhanced with a class discussion after your visit. Here are some resources on museums, public trust, and neutrality that may be helpful to your discussion.

https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/42009/Wood_washington_02500_18742.pdf?sequence=1

