

Labradorite: The Secrets Within

Object

Labradorite

Maniry, Madagascar

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis Collection

2017.132.1



Educational purpose

There is no argument that one of the primary responsibilities (and joys) of a museum is to connect visitors with the objects and stories of their collection. Often the focus is on objects with significance due to its representation of a specific memory or event, or it was made, owned, or used by a human being. But what about the objects that exist independently from human influence, like fossils or minerals? Without the context of a person's emotion, triumph, or struggles, what story and emotion can an object convey? How can museums create displays with the potential to forge emotional connections with visitors about objects from the natural world?

The techniques employed by visual thinking strategy (VTS) and object contemplation (Williams, 1992) enhance museum literacy skills, particularly contemplation and reflection. These instructional theories were developed with novice art museum visitors in mind, employing techniques to elicit conversation and reflection, and hone observation skills visitors can learn to examine objects and find their own meaning in things that may be unfamiliar (Rice and Yenawine, 2002). This case layout and plan will illustrate the theory that an adaptation of these methods can be used not only for viewing and responding to visual art, but for natural world specimens as well.

This method should stimulate thinking that is simple and enjoyable as opposed to laborious or taxing, as a museum visit is viewed as leisure and respite (Rice and Yenawine, 2002). A person is provoked to further explore one of the paths presented through the many voices and viewpoints in the object world. Because they feel comfortable and willing to explore, and to contribute to the shared authority of knowledge about the object, visitors not only create their own meaning for themselves but to share it with others as a way to better understand an object personally or culturally (Wertsch, 2002). The labradorite's objectworld will be expanded upon by considering the concept of objects of conversation (Duensing, 2002) and pairing the mineral with related objects and images. By encouraging discourse through posing open ended questions and encouraged sharing of responses, visitors are encouraged to be part of the objects' story. It also would not withhold information that may be the natural curiosity of the person looking at something entirely new to them. Ideally this would help guide the visitor into curiosity, make them feel comfortable and empowered to explore the intangible a little further.

The goal of this case is to model techniques for museum literacy: methods for contemplation and reflection, and ultimately encouraging discourse. This is a lot to ask of a

single display, to teach methods that must be practiced often to become comfortable and adept. However, this model could be used as a regular entry point to an exhibition, with gateway objects, or throughout a museum. Visitors would encounter the consistent format and hopefully become accustomed to the flow of knowledge, questions, and the value of the shared information they have to offer.

Visitor Objectives

Main Message

Contemplating unfamiliar objects from nature can stimulate the imagination.

Methods, or “how to help the visitors dig deeper”

VTS strategy

1. What observations can you make by looking at this object?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What else can you find?

Museum literacy- providing tools for contemplation (Williams, 1992)

1. Looking
2. React
3. Consider a cultural context
4. Judging art

Alternative step for this application: Reflection and conversation about related or unrelated experiences or ideas.

Case Layout

The FLORES score (Wood, 2015) indicates this object is slightly below average, with 18 points out of a possible 35. Bright colors and the labradorescence feature making it aesthetically pleasing, likely apt to catch the eye of a visitor, but any information beyond the material makeup is limited. It is important to accentuate the “sparkle” of the labradorite as its key feature that can draw and hold visitors’ attention.

Full display case dimensions: 36”w x 36”d x 60”h

Object mounted height: 40”

Riser: Square-based pyramid. Flattened top for object display and sides used as label surfaces.

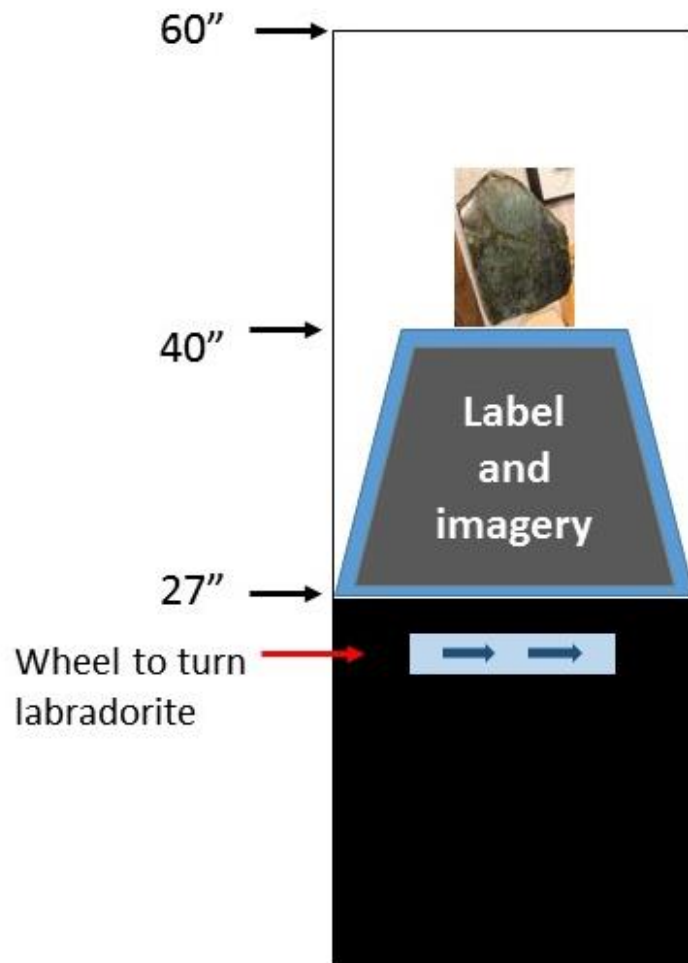
Interactive components:

1. Object mount is connected to a mechanism that allows visitors to turn the specimen slowly to see the changes in appearance based on light angles.
2. Small surface or table with paper and pencils for visitor responses.

Lighting: Specifically focused fixtures will allow the labradorescence to be visible when the face of the rock is positioned correctly. Visitors will be able to experiment with this by manipulating the mount.

The size of the case is to allow visitors to see the labradorite from all four sides, and to get as close as possible to it. By enclosing it in a case, the heavy object can be safely secured and manipulated by the rotating mechanism.

Each side of the case is devoted to a different interpretation of labradorite, introducing an aspect of the objectworld. The labels pose questions intended to provoke the visitor to consider what is more than meets the eye about the object before them, similar stories or experiences of their own.



Side #1

Text:

Labradorite has a hidden talent.

When light shines at just the right angle, brilliant colors reflect from the crystals *under* the polished surface of this igneous rock. Unique to this mineral, this flash is called **labradorescence**.

Turn the wheel to move the labradorite. How does its appearance change?

Image:



Text: Labradorite is found all over the world!

Side #2

Label text:

What if you saw the sky in the ground?

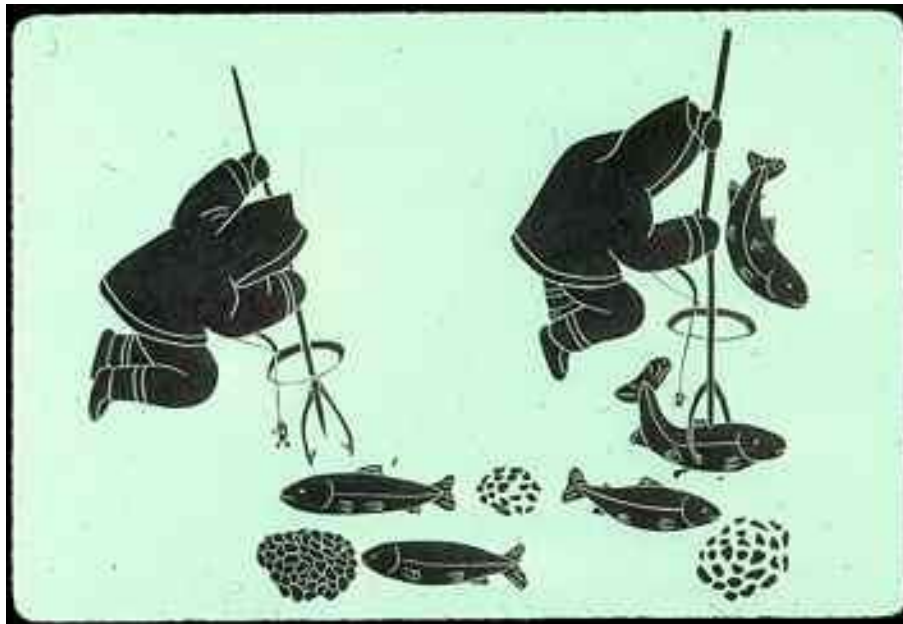
The Inuit People of the Labrador, Canada (the mineral's namesake), believed the Northern Lights were trapped in the rocks. A warrior used his spear to free them; some escaped, but others still remained trapped as the shimmering labradorescence.

What other legends try to explain natural wonders?

Image:

Commission an Inuit illustrator to create a line art image of the warrior throwing a spear. This would be applied to the case bonnet and create a look that the warrior's spear is reaching up and toward the labradorite.

For style reference:



Harry Egutak and Mona Ohoveluk, *Fishing with Spear and Lure*, 1978, stonecut

Side #2 continued

Image:



Text: The Northern Lights over Canada

Photo credit: Pete Lytwynik

Side #3

Label text:

Over 70 million years ago forces of red hot magma formed this labradorite in Madagascar. Now, labradorite is mined from quarries to create sculptures and jewelry like this clock for Napoleon Bonaparte, or this gold and labradorite ring.

What are you inspired to create with this natural piece of art?

Image:



Text: Labradorite quarry

Maniry, Madagascar

Photo credits: Labradorite Blocks

Side #3 continued

Image:



Text:

Clock

1804

Giacomo Raffaelli

The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum

Image:



Text:

Ring

1800-1869

Feldspar (Labradorite) set in gold

Victoria and Albert Museum, bequeathed by the Rev. Chauncy Hare Townshend

Side #4

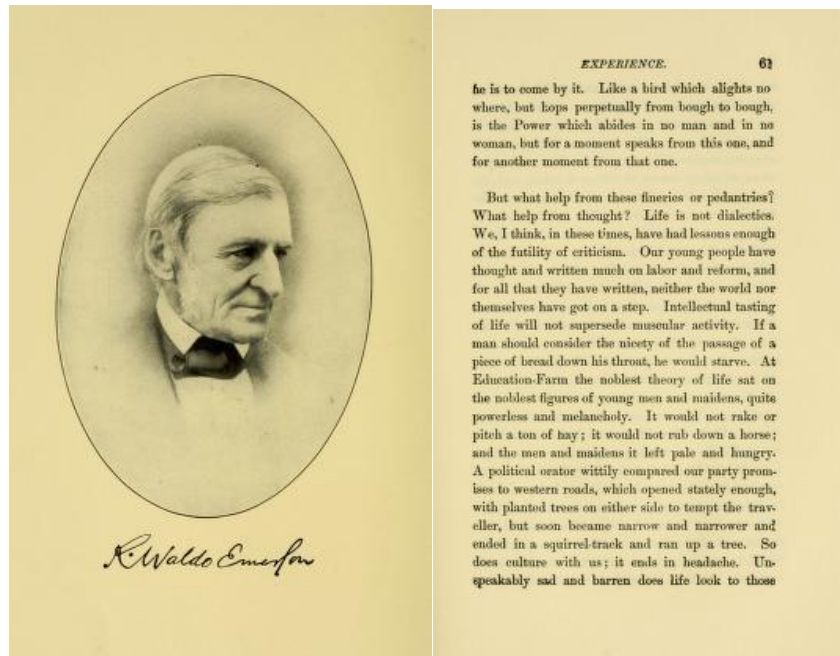
Label text:

“A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no lustre as you turn it in your hand until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors.”

Labradorite inspired poet Ralph Waldo Emerson to think about hidden beauty. Where does your imagination wander when you look at the brilliant colors?

Use the post it notes to write, draw, or sketch what comes to mind.

Images:



Text:

Reproductions of the 12th printing of *Essays: First and Second Series*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

1883

Boston Public Library Internet Archive

References

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Resources

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