



## SWISS MUSEUMS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Museum visits offer endless experiences for individuals and school classes in the local languages but also for foreign language learning and teaching. The ideas below and the additional materials found in this Babylonia project offer ideas for using Swiss museum experiences for foreign language learning.

Many coursebooks include work on art and artists, and these units lend themselves to visits and activities before and after the visit. Yet museums are not limited to art and can be used for many more foreign language lessons. Historical periods, events or characters, science and technology, literature - there are so many exciting topics and objects on display for learners to discover and explore and discuss.

Swiss children can easily get to another linguistic area of the country for a museum visit and be totally immersed in the local language if the translated materials are not provided. If translated materials are provided, the translation of information panels, for example, valorizes Swiss multilingualism and provides the learners and teachers with mediation

activities and a whole range of exercises in multilingual comparative linguistics. The following ideas are geared towards an explicit use of the museum trip planning and visit itself in the foreign language classroom before, during, and after the visit. The ideas here are general ideas aimed at using the museum visit for foreign language instruction (English, French, German, Romansh and Italian, henceforth “the target language”) in primary and secondary schools. On the [Babylonia website](#), specific ideas for particular museums and educational levels are presented. Both parts encourage a focus on discovering museum collections for meaningful foreign language learning in art, history, literature, biology and many other worlds.

## Planning the journey

Depending on the age or language level of the learners, it would be good to let them plan the trip. They can decide which museum to visit by listing all the museums in the region they will be visiting, ranking their preferences, providing rationale for visiting a certain museum, organizing a debate to choose, and finally making a class decision. This would be considered a task and teaches functional language such as “I’d like to go to the Art Museum because they have Picasso” or “The Technorama is better because you can touch things”.

Once a museum has been decided upon, there are numerous ideas for small role plays about the specific planning. For instance, learners can be taught set the SBB settings to the target language and use Google Maps to create a little role play where one child asks the questions (e.g. “What time should we leave to arrive at 9am?”) and the other learners look it up and answer. This can also be done as a task whereby different learners or groups are responsible for different points: one group can look up the schedule, another can plan snacks, another can plan a game for the train, and so on.

### Planning the trip with beginners

1. List all the museums in region you are visiting and write the names down in the target language. Learners can be asked to do this step.
2. Rank the museums in order of individual preference.
3. Choose your top museums and prepare to state why you want to go there “I want to visit ... because...”
4. In groups of four or five learners, each member presents the selection and reasons for the selection. Each group should now choose one museum.
5. Each group should present their selection to the entire class with an argument or two for why the class should visit that museum.
6. The class now votes on the museum they would like to visit. Remind learners that they do not have to vote for their original choice!

### Planning the trip with more advanced learners

1. List all the museums in region you are visiting and write the names down in the target language. Learners can be asked to do this step.
2. Find information on each on the museum website (exhibits, collections, etc..) and take notes in a “Museum Fact File” (if every group/learner does the same, it will be easier to compare afterwards).
3. Learners should now individually rank the museums in order of preference. For the top three museums, they should note some reasons why they like the museum and do the same for their least favorite three with reasons why they do not want to go there. Learners should be prepared to share this.
4. Form groups of 4 or 5 learners. Each individual should present their favorites and least favorites. As a group, choose three museums that can be agreed upon to visit.
5. Search for information on each of these three museums (exhibits, artists, interaction, etc..) and note down practical information (entrance fee, length of the visit, guided tours, etc..) and prepare to present this to the class.
6. In class, each group presents one museum at a time, taking turns so each group can at least present one museum that the other groups do not present first. If one group has selected a museum, the other groups who may have also selected the museum can say what they had noted differently. As a class, come to a decision as to which museum to visit.
7. The final decision could be the basis for a debate or a text on the « strong points » of each museum from the perspective of the learners.

## Using Reviews

On googlemaps, users leave reviews in myriad languages and about various aspects of the museum. Whilst this idea might be better after the visit as you may not want learners to be influenced by what others have written, there is value in looking at these beforehand to help make informed decisions, and to decide what section to go to or not, and so on as well as to provide a controlled environment for improving digital literacy skills. The following questions can be adapted:

- Find one review in each of the following languages: Italian, English, French, German, an unknown language. Read it out loud to a partner. Are they positive or negative?

Look up any words you don't know and add them to your notebooks with a definition or a picture!

- Find a critical review: do you think it was justified or was the person having a bad day? What did the author criticize? What language makes you know the review is negative?
- Find a superb review: What are all the positive words you find? Note down the language that will help you write a positive review in the future.
- Create a grid with the following headings: The exhibits, the café, the shop, the guides (tour), etc.... Go through the reviews and take notes – what do people say about each of these categories?

After the visit, the learners can write up their own reviews about the museum that you can post as a class. For this collaborative work, learners will have to agree on the elements that are worth reviewing and divide up this work. They can provide each other with peer feedback, and share their notes they had noted down useful language for a review before the visit.

Many museums also provide visitors with a guestbook – you can ask the museum if you are allowed to take a picture, or have the learners copy down some of these reviews before they leave. A comparison of the comments in the guestbook and on the maps can lead students to question the differences between the two media, the expectations of the audience and the intentions of the authors. At the secondary level, analysis of the messages and style used, using the above activities for example, can lead students to reflect on the (implicit) rules of communication that should be respected depending on the medium.

## The museum website

Most Swiss websites have translations of their pages in the target language. On the sites, you find basic information about the exhibits, services, tours, travel, and sometimes more in-depth information. The learners can, as they might do with the reviews, be given a challenge of searching for information and words that they note down into different categories. They can also, if available, go into more depth on a topic – on an artist or exhibit or style. If each learner takes a different topic (or selects a different artist or aspect of the museum to look at), they can present this information to one another as preparation or during the visit itself, they can act as an “expert” on the specific subject and present, as a tour guide, to one another.

## Museums with connections to literature

Maybe you are reading Sherlock Holmes in English lessons or Heidi in German – why not organize a trip to one of these museums?

- Sherlock Holmes Museum in Meiringen / Lucens
- The Nietzsche House in Sils Maria
- The Johanna Spyri Museum in Hirzel
- Institut et Musée Voltaire in Geneva
- Centre Dürrenmatt in Neuchâtel
- Fondation Rilke in Sierre
- Strauhof in Zurich
- Hermann Hesse Museum in Motagnola
- Gottfried-Keller-Zentrum in Glattfelden
- Dichter- und Stadtmuseum in Liestal
- Fondation Martin Bodmer in Coligny
- Robert Walser Centre in Bern

This list is not exclusive because many museums include literature as part of their exhibits; for instance the Musée d'Ailleurs Museum in Yverdon-les-bains displays many “Choose your own adventure” books.

## Observing people and museum interactions

During a museum visit learners will see other classes and individuals from all over the world. Instead of observing a painting, they can stay in one spot and observe people! Learners could be asked to observe the following:

- Who is speaking which language? Would I have guessed that based on what they are wearing or their voice? What might have fooled me? If someone were to observe you, what language would they say you speak? Why?
- Who asks a question of a museum guide or security staff? What language was the question asked in? Why? Do the museum employees speak different languages?

## Tours

All museums in Switzerland offer tours in different languages and some museums, such as the NONAM in Zurich will offer tours in the local language with small elements, such as authentic stories, in English (or other languages).

## Following up

*Diary Entries:* Learners, after having visited the museum, can write a diary entry with or without a model depending on their level.

*Writing thank yous:* After a visit, it's always nice for museum curators or those having provided the tours to receive a thank-you note.

*Presentations:* During the visit, you can ask learners to find one thing that really inspired them that they can follow up on afterwards and make a commercial for, a poster about, or simply write up a text on. If they took pictures or video clips, they can also create a short presentation to share with other classes.

*Leaving a review:* learners can do this individually or in groups, and can really leave the review or you can hang them up in the classroom.

The ideas provided here are general considerations when developing lessons around a museum visit in your foreign language lessons. Many museums have materials for teachers that can be used before, during, or after the visit that are found on their specific website. The specific museums have a lot more to offer with displays or interactive tools and scavenger hunts in the target language and these ideas are located on the Babylonia website. Have fun!

Dear diary,

Yesterday we went to Fribourg and visited the Tinguely Museum. It was awesome! We saw lots of machines that moved – really cool. Tingley was from Fribourg and Basel and he ...

I really liked...

I didn't like ....

I noticed that...

I didn't know that....