

## 6B: SMART MUSEUM SCAVENGER HUNT

Media Aesthetics: Text | Morgan

**Note:** You have no assignment due on Thursday. However, you do need to do two things:

- 1) review “key questions thus far” (below) and make sure that you understand each of them—go back to the texts in question if you’re hazy on any of these questions.
- 2) briefly scan the three PDFs of what is currently on display at the museum and make note of anything you want to seek out. You don’t need to bring or print these PDFs.

**Your task is to find a space within the museum where text, speech, or writing is interesting.**

Most likely, you’ll find an artwork incorporating text, but you might also focus on the interaction between the title of a work and a work itself, or between the description of a work and the work itself.

Required: Bring a PENCIL and a NOTEBOOK

### 1) **EXPLORE** – 10 minutes

Move through the galleries with a notebook, making quick notes to yourself about objects and spaces that draw your interest. Your group can stay together or disperse for this part of the hunt.

### 2) **SELECT** – 5 minutes

With your group talk about what you’ve found, and which works seem most promising for a discussion and why.

### 3) **DESIGN** a discussion – 10 minutes

Discuss your object with the group *in relation to key concepts we have encountered thus far*. Your group will be responsible for 1) saying why this work drew your interest and 2) creating two discussion questions for the class as a whole. In drafting these questions I would like you to use the ideas and questions we have been pondering.

You are welcome to use your phones to look up any information about the artist or work that may provide useful context, but in most cases you should be able to pose some questions with minimal context.

Key questions thus far:

- How do text and image relate differently to their referents (arbitrary vs resemblance)? (Kosuth)
- The signification of words and phrases are *arbitrary* and exist only because a society has agreed to use them in a certain way—but even though the sign is arbitrary, individual speakers cannot control what signifiers signify. Are there any exceptions? Does poetry, for example, break the usual, agreed upon bonds? (Saussure)

- What effects can language/text/speech have on/in the real world? (Austin, Hurston)
- Who controls what text means? How do changing contexts (historical, cultural) change the meaning of the “same” piece of text? (Brooks, Keats, Barthes)
- How is it that language still conveys meaning once broken into fragments, rearranged, or divorced from an author? (“defacing” Keats exercise, Barthes)
- Is rhetoric dangerous because it can persuade audiences even when speakers have no access to truth? (Plato)
- Writing is a medium that allows language to exist apart from its originator. What are the ethical problems with this new medium—and, conversely, what are its promises and possibilities? (Plato)
- How can language be used to create community? How can it be used to perpetuate cultural stereotypes? (Hurston)
- Who owns a community’s oral traditions, and how can one’s relation to these traditions change if one is both inside and outside a community at the same time? (Hurston)
- And one new question: How does the *physical medium* and *physical shape* of writing shape its meaning? What difference does it make for a word to be chiseled in stone, written with a pencil, painted on a canvas, printed in thousands of books? What can specific physical media allow writing to do that it might otherwise not be able to do?

4) **SPONSOR** the object for discussion – 5 minutes for each group

Bring the class to your object, and lead us in a brief discussion of it.