

Big Idea

Professional museums often begin their exhibit development process by writing a “big idea.” This can be a single sentence—with a subject, an action, and a consequence—that tells what the exhibition is about. It clarifies the content for the visitor—of all that *could* be explored, this is what *will* be explored in this exhibition.

(See *Learning on Display*, chapter 3.)

According to exhibit and evaluation consultant and author, Beverly Serrell (*Exhibit Labels*, Altamira Press, 1996), a big idea “should not be vague or compound; it is one big idea, not four. It also implies what the exhibit is not about” (p. 1).

Can you identify the “subject”, “action”, and “consequence” in the following school museum big idea statements?

- *School Museum about Immigration*: Immigrants built a new life in an unfamiliar land, enriching the local culture.
- *School Museum about Famous Scientists, Inventors, Artists, and Leaders (Extraordinary Minds Museum)*: Many imaginative people have pursued and realized their dreams, making the world a better place.
- *School Museum about the Civil Rights Movement*: Activists take a stand for social justice and make a difference.
- *School Museum about Caring for the Environment*: Humans can help or hurt the environment.