Big Idea / main point/ thesis /…discussion

Why bother with crafting a Big Idea?
- Makes the exhibition development process much easier
- Results with an exhibition that is easier for the visitor to comprehend

Defining a big idea* (written as a big idea) – “The big idea provides an unambiguous focus for the exhibit team throughout the exhibit development process by clearly stating in one noncompound sentence the scope and purpose of an exhibition.”

characteristics of “Big Ideas”**
- One sentence – with subject, an action and a consequence
- Should not be vague or compound
- One idea – not more
- It implies what the exhibition is not about
- Its meaning transcends content – relates to human nature
- Conveys scope and purpose of exhibition
- A tool for the exhibition team, not an actual label for visitors
- Must be clear, but is not necessarily simple
- Each element of the exhibition must have a clearly defined objective that supports the big idea

Examples

**Lewis & Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition – Missouri Historical Society**
When they encountered each other, Lewis and Clark and the Indians made discoveries about their respective worlds.

**Freer Gallery – Chinese jade gallery installation – in the works**
The natural qualities of jade attracted the ancient Chinese people leading them to create unique objects and to impose those objects with social value.

**NMAH – On Time exhibition – a big question**
Why is the clock so important?
Staff said this about the question:“We posed that question to visitors at the beginning, and then everything in the exhibit helped answer that question.”

**NMAH – Price of Freedom**
This exhibition examines how wars have shaped the nation’s history and transformed American society.

Other examples

**A Planetarium***
Most of what we know about the Universe comes from messages we read in light.
A zoo exhibition about a swamp*

A healthy swamp—an example of a threatened ecosystem—provides many surprising benefits to humans.

An art museum*

What the artists portrayed about the West in these paintings is largely fiction, which had an impact on perpetuating myths about the West in other media.

* from Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach by Beverly Serrell, pp.1-5