

***The Museum Guard* by Howard A. Norman. New York : Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998. 1st ed. Robarts Library: [PS8577 .O472 M88 1998](#)**

The year is 1938. Leaving behind his lonely, orphaned childhood, DeFoe Russet is working as a museum guard in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with his uncle. He is involved with a mysterious woman named Imogen, who is convinced that she is the character in the painting called "Jewess on a Street" housed in the museum. As terrible news from Europe reach Canadian shores, art becomes life. Norman explores the difference between the reality of an object and the experience of an object, blending the two concepts through the character of Imogen. Even in the sheltered and peaceful setting of a museum, the objects are never divorced from real life.

***The Rules of Perspective* by Adam Thorpe. London: Jonathon Cape, 2005. Robarts Library: [PR6070 .H73 R84 2005](#)**

This novel, set in April 1945, follows Heinrich Hoffer, director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, as he and three of his colleagues take shelter from the advancing American Army in the museum's cellar. When the building suffers a direct hit, the four watch the history crumble in front of their eyes. But the discovery of a miraculously undamaged masterpiece among the ruins sparks personal conflict, as the protagonists not only decide what to do with the artwork, but also re-examine commitment to their country and contemplate the philosophical ideals of art. For students interested in the theme "The Memorial Turn: Museums, Heritage, Human Rights, and War," this novel provides an in-depth look at the ways in which cultural artefacts can instil consciousness in people who interact with them, and at the effect of exploring "heritage that hurts."



Stories of Museums & Cultural Heritage

A Reading Guide for

Students of MSL 2370H



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***The Bone Vault* by Linda Fairstein. New York: Pocket Star Books, 2003. Baycrest Hospital Library: [FIC.FAI](#)**

The Bone Vault takes place in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. When the body of a young female researcher is found in an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus—months after she was allegedly murdered—readers are taken behind the scenes of the famous museum to investigate. While readers absorb much factual information—about art, law, history, and cultural rituals—they also become privy to the dark secrets of the New York cultural elite and art world, as well as the tensions among different museums. Travel through the twists and turns of the story with assistant DA Alexandra Cooper and her NYPD sidekicks.



***Bringing Up Baby* (1938 Film). Burbank, CA: Turner Home Entertainment, 2005. Media Commons: [VideoDVD 753768](#)**

This romantic comedy follows palaeontologist David Huxley who, for the past four years, has been preoccupied with finding the last bone of the skeleton of a Brontosaurus. But when David meets Susan Vance and visits her country home with the bone in hand, he has his work cut out for him. This film explores the ways in which a small artefact, unnoticed and unimportant to anyone else, can be crucial to a museum professional, and explores the relationship between a patron and a curator. Students who enjoyed Hilde Hein's discussion "On What is Real in the Museum" will find that this film resonates with the idea that museums are not only about storing objects but, first and foremost, about creating experience in order for the public to understand the value of cultural heritage.



***The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. New York: Doubleday, 2004. Robarts Library: PS3552 .R685434 D3 2004**

This thriller-paced art mystery starts with symbologist Robert Langdon and cryptologist Sophie Neveu investigating the murder of the curator in the Louvre. Brown uses the backdrop of the famous art museum to create a world wherein what is presented to the public is not the whole truth. The detectives unravel ancient secrets, starting with the Louvre treasures, to unmask a different history of Christianity than that which has been officially introduced to the world for two millennia. Through its alternative exploration of museum as place, students interested in the theme of "Architectures of Representation" will find this story an interesting example of how the design of museums can contribute to its symbolic intentionality... even if that intention is to conceal the truth.

***The Glace Bay Miners' Museum* by Sheldon Currie. Ste. Anne de Bellevue, QC: Deluge Press, 1979. Robarts Library: [PS8555 .U872 G47](#)**

Set in the 1940s in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, this novel follows Margaret MacNeil who suffers a nervous breakdown after losing her father, older brother, and finally her husband to coal mining accidents. As a result of her surreal mental state, Margaret decides to create a museum to preserve the memories of all those who have died in the mines of Glace Bay. Students interested in exploring the effects of preserving "heritage that hurts" and the ethics of remembering will find this book an eye-opener. A cinematic incarnation of this novel is a 1995 film *Margaret's Museum*.

***Haunting Museums* by John Schuster. New York: Forge, 2009. Faculty of Information: [069.5 S395H](#)**

This book provides another behind-the-scenes look at museum exhibits, exploring some of the strangest and most mysterious historical artefacts currently preserved in various places. These artefacts include the Carnegie Sauropods' unfitting head, the quizzical mark on the Star-Spangled Banner, and the Amelia Earhart display.

This book will allow students to explore the concepts of representation and intentionality in museological practice as it demonstrates how the presentation of artefacts can invoke meaning and manipulate perception.

***The Murder Room* by P.D. James. London: Faber and Faber, 2003. Robarts Library: [PR6060 .A56 M87 2003](#)**

This murder mystery is set in the Dupayne Museum, a small, quirky museum in England. The highlight of the museum is "The Murder Room"—a collection of artefacts from famous homicides that took place between the World Wars. Ostensibly quiet and frozen in time, the museum is set in motion when another murder takes place within its walls. This story would appeal to anyone interested in the issues of representing the past and the architecture of representation. James not only explores the ways in which an exhibit design contributes to the museum experience; he also traces how the changing notion of truth affects the history of museums, the mentality of their staff, and the entire social environment.

