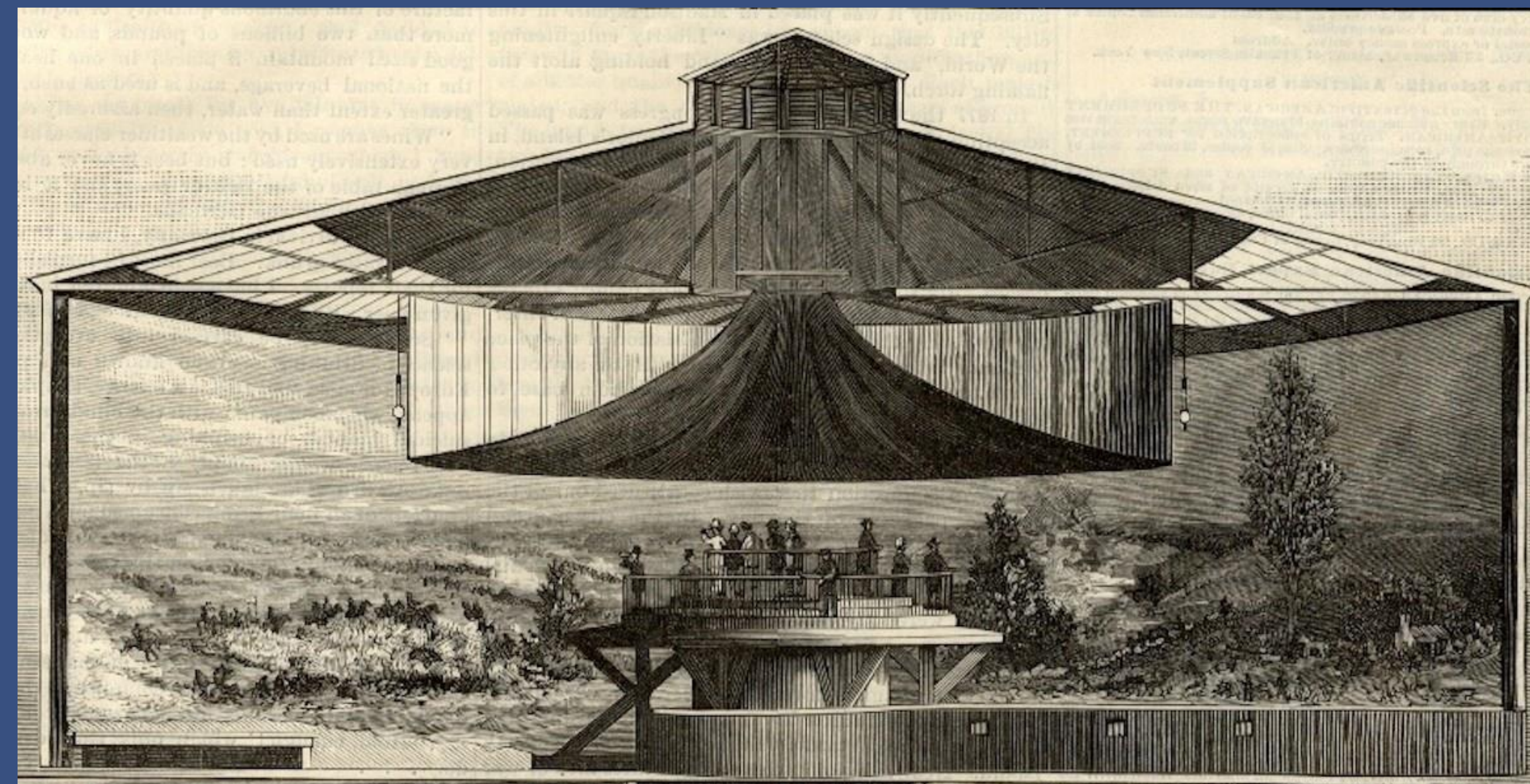


Old Technologies Made New: How Cycloramas Can Be Used in the Classroom

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Introduction

This poster hopes to present suggestions for library instruction based on the cyclorama. While the elements themselves are not novel, the link to an old technology can help us understand the long-term success of certain ways of understanding. I define what a cyclorama is, break it down into some methods the cyclorama uses to engage the viewers, and offer thoughts and examples on connecting it to one-shot library instruction sessions.



The Construction of a Cyclorama, November 6, 1886. From "Front Matter," *Scientific American* 55, no. 19 (1886).

Definition

Created in 1787, 360 degree paintings known as cycloramas advertised and supplied a life-like experience of historical events and natural landmarks. They appealed to the masses in both Europe and the United States. To see them, viewers ascended onto viewing platforms and were immersed in the paintings with heights of 40 to 50 feet and circumferences of 370 feet. Cut off from all light and external stimulation, the sheer size of the cyclorama left little room for other concentration. The viewer had to take in what was on either side of them from a geographic perspective as opposed to chronological, which would be understood by reading left to right. They were intended to be entertaining as well as educational, a combination that, when applied to the classroom, would allow instructors to retain students' attention and engagement in a constructive way.

Methods of Engagement

Below are some elements of the viewing experience of a cyclorama and examples of their implementation in library instruction

Visual Literacy

Viewers of cycloramas naturally engaged in visual literacy as they observed the three-dimensional scene and tried to make sense of the story being told. Visual literacy, or the capacity to look at and analyze images, among other visual skills, should be interdisciplinary. Being curious about what you are looking at helps with critical thinking skills generally, but also when confronted with political images, social media, and understanding global current events. This is particularly useful with primarily visually based skills that we teach at the library, like during our Introduction to Infographics workshop. We take time to ask participants what they see about various infographics and why they might prefer one visual arrangement over the other. This gives them confidence that they already have the tools, their eyes and brain, to put forth a quality infographic, and it also provides them with the critical thinking skills to approach it.

Physical Movement

To see and understand the full cyclorama, viewers moved around the space which creates an embodied learning. Susan Hrach, in her book *Minding Bodies, How Physical Space, Sensation, and Movement Affect Learning*, encourages an approach to teaching, particularly in higher education, that combines the brain and the body which can increase critical thinking and even build more efficient thinking processes. In a session at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at UIUC, I had the opportunity of walking around to the books laid out along a table. My brain has now visualized the locations of these books which helped me map other useful information onto it. In the same way, I can visualize where I was in relation to the cyclorama which helps me remember the narrative.

Multisensory Engagement

In addition to moving around and looking at the painting, cycloramas provided physical information pamphlets and maps to engage the viewer. Audio elements were also injected into the experience. I included a book from Susan Ambrose below, where she talks about the many ways to engage students with different learning styles. In our one-shot library instruction sessions, we include a one-minute introductory video about the library, which provides a different format than the instructors' voices. We also provide physical hand-outs or electronic for students' to work on their research, and a library guide, so the information is presented in a variety of forms. The goal is that one method of learning will stick with the student and they will be able to retain more.

Further Thoughts

Below are some bullet points of activities inspired by the methods of engagement from a cyclorama that might be implemented in one-shot library day sessions

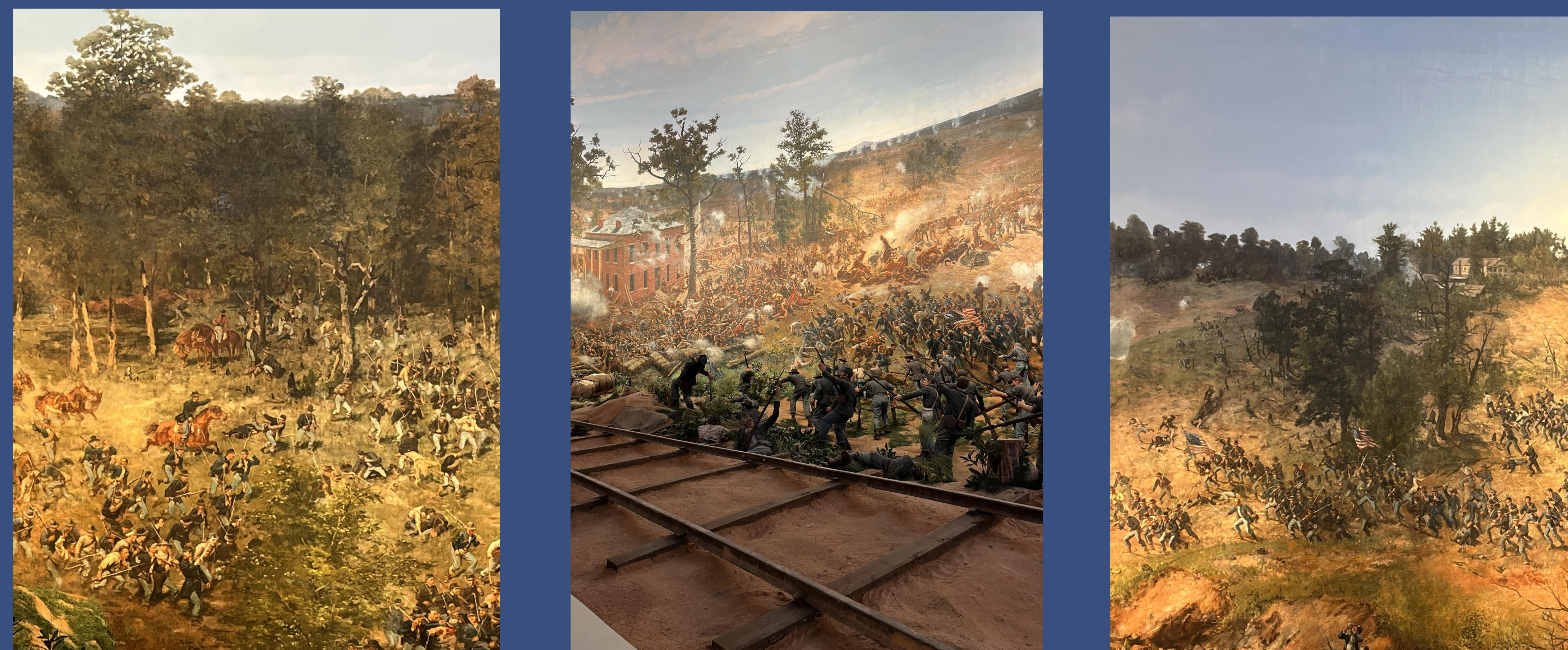
- Have students in an introductory writing class go on a scavenger hunt of the library with a map and instructions in hand
- Use visual thinking strategies (what do you see, what do you see that makes you say that, and what makes you curious), to navigate various points on the library homepage
- For a music class, play the music in the background from the score that the students are looking for in the catalog
- Include brain breaks in instruction that involve stretching or doing a lap around the classroom.

These ideas are simple, but at their core, they center visual literacy, physical movement, multisensory engagement, and different modes of learning.

This is by no means a comprehensive look at the features of a cyclorama that can be employed in a classroom. This poster only suggests that older technologies can be reframed and reconsidered. Further research on putting this into practice might be helpful in strengthening these claims.

Below is a QR code with my works cited

<https://go.illinois.edu/MonahanRylynWorksCited>



Images I took from the *Battle of Atlanta* cyclorama. December 20, 2022.