

# Think Like a Curator

**Grade(s):** Upper Elementary (3-5), Middle School (6-8)

**Subject(s):** Visual Arts

**Topic/Theme:** Museums

**Suggested Time:** Average Activity (45-60 minutes)

**Lesson Overview:** In this activity, students will step into the unique role of a museum curator and design a layout of how they think The Neon Museum's collection is organized. This activity will introduce the concept of a "boneyard" and will allow students to conceptualize how The Neon Museum differs from a traditional museum.

- Materials:**
- Museum Curator handout
  - Boneyard vs. Traditional Art Exhibitions Venn Diagram
    - Teachers can use the attached pdf or can make their own. It's best to have this chart somewhere it can be constantly referenced.
  - Pictures of boneyards and traditional art exhibitions
    - Teachers can use the pictures provided in this lesson or can research their own for class use.
  - Museum Curation grid sheet
  - The Neon Museum Collection cut-outs
  - Scissors
  - Glue
  - Optional: Coloring materials (i.e., crayons, markers, colored pencils, etc.)

- Objectives:**
- Students will be able to identify differences between a boneyard and a traditional museum curation, as evidenced by participation in classroom discussion.
  - Students will be able to curate their own prediction of The Neon Museum's layout, as evidenced by completion of a museum design activity.

- NVACS:**
- Visual Arts Anchor 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
  - Visual Arts Anchor 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
  - Visual Arts Anchor 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.



# Think Like a Curator

## Activity Steps:

**1** Ask students if they have ever heard of the word “curate” or “curation”. Using students’ prior knowledge, guide the discussion towards forming the definition that “to curate something” means to organize, select, and present something. Then have students use this definition to infer what the job of a museum curator is. Present the ‘Museum Curator handout’ to the class and go over the role of a museum curator.

**2** Explain to students that one of the challenges museum curators face is that they have to work within the space of their museum when it comes to organizing a collection. Overcoming this challenge means that not all museums will look the same. At this point, show students ‘Gallery Picture 1’ and ‘Gallery Picture 2’. Ask students to note some similarities and differences they see between each collection and museum space.

**3** Now explain to students that The Neon Museum is a very unique museum. At The Neon Museum, our collection is displayed in our ‘boneyard’ which results in a non-traditional display layout. Your students will learn more about what a ‘boneyard’ is during the field trip. For now, present students with the ‘Boneyard vs. Traditional Art Exhibit’ Venn diagram.

**4** Using Gallery Pictures 1-4 and Boneyard Pictures 1-4, discuss with students the similarities and differences they notice between a boneyard and a traditional art exhibit. Record student responses on the Venn diagram. You might ask the following questions to help students generate ideas:

- What do you notice about the type of items in each space?
- What do you notice about how the items are arranged in each space?
- How would people move around in each space?
- What could be some strengths and weaknesses of each space?

\*If needed, refer to the Venn diagram ‘Teacher’s Guide’.

**5** Once the Venn diagram is complete, make sure it is displayed so students can use it as a reference before and after the field trip. You may want to revisit this Venn diagram after the field trip and ask students if there is more they would like to add.



# Think Like a Curator

## Activity Steps:

**6**

Now that students have developed a sense of what a boneyard is and how it differs from a traditional way to exhibit art, students will have the opportunity to think like a curator and design a layout of how they think The Neon Museum's collection is organized. Provide each student with a copy of the 'Museum Curation' grid sheet and 'The Neon Museum Collection' cut-outs.

**7**

Explain to students that the cutouts are examples of some of the signs displayed in the Neon Boneyard. Each cut-out on their worksheet has specific dimensions. These dimensions are purposeful because a curator must consider how big each item is when deciding where each item should go. Have students use scissors to cut out each sign.

**8**

Then, have students design the layout of their boneyard by purposefully and strategically gluing their cut-outs onto the 'Museum Curation' grid sheet. Encourage students to let their creativity flow! But also encourage them to keep in mind some important logistics that a curator must consider:

- How will people move around this exhibit?
- Does each item have enough space to be appreciated?
- Which items might be most popular? Do these items need more space?
- Which items might be less popular? Do these items need less space?

Students can also color the cut-outs if time permits.

**9**

Once completed, students can do a gallery walk of each other's boneyards. It may be beneficial to revisit these layouts after the field trip to assess how their predictions matched reality.

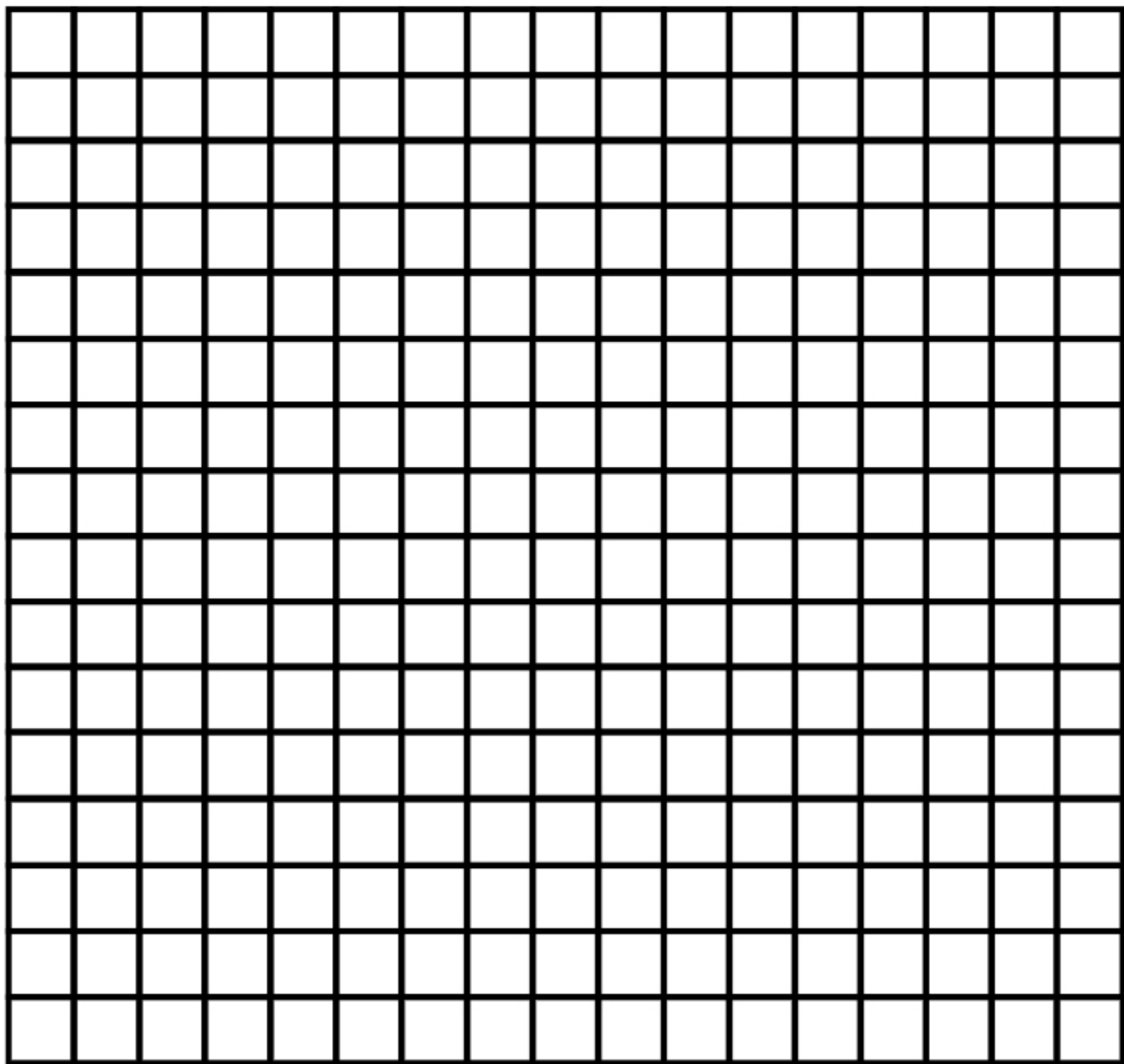


# Museum Curation



Use this grid sheet to design a layout of how you think The Neon Museum's collection is organized. Consider these questions when designing your layout:

- How will people move around this exhibit?
- Does each item have enough space to be appreciated?
- Which items might be more popular? Do these items need more space?
- Which items might be less popular? Do these items need less space?



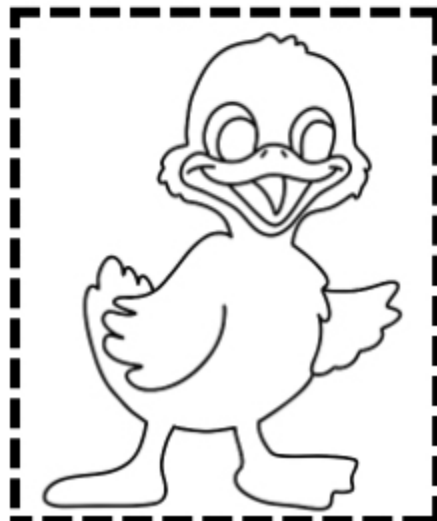
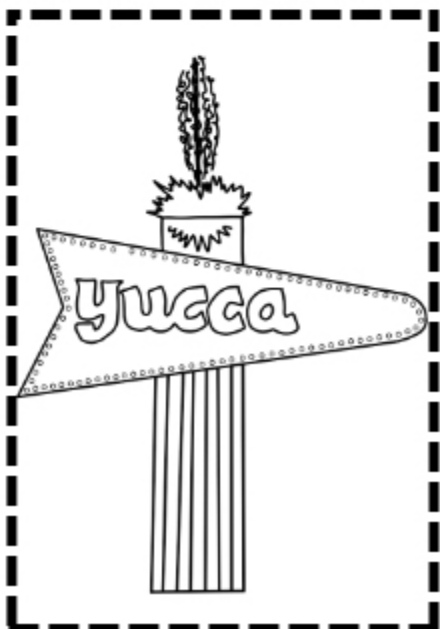
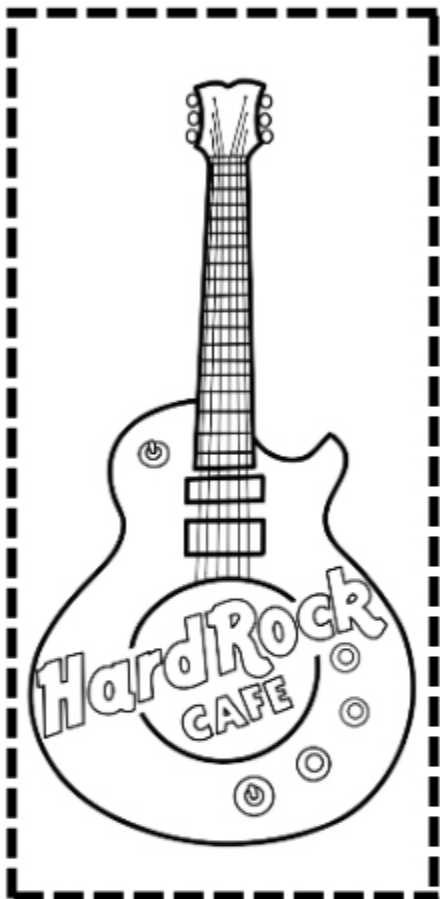
# Collection Cut-Outs



Cut out each sign using the dotted lines.

It's okay if you cut out the dimension labels - they are there to use as a guide. Then, design a layout by gluing the signs purposefully and strategically on the 'Museum Curation' grid sheet.

The signs can be vertical or horizontal. You do not have to use every sign.





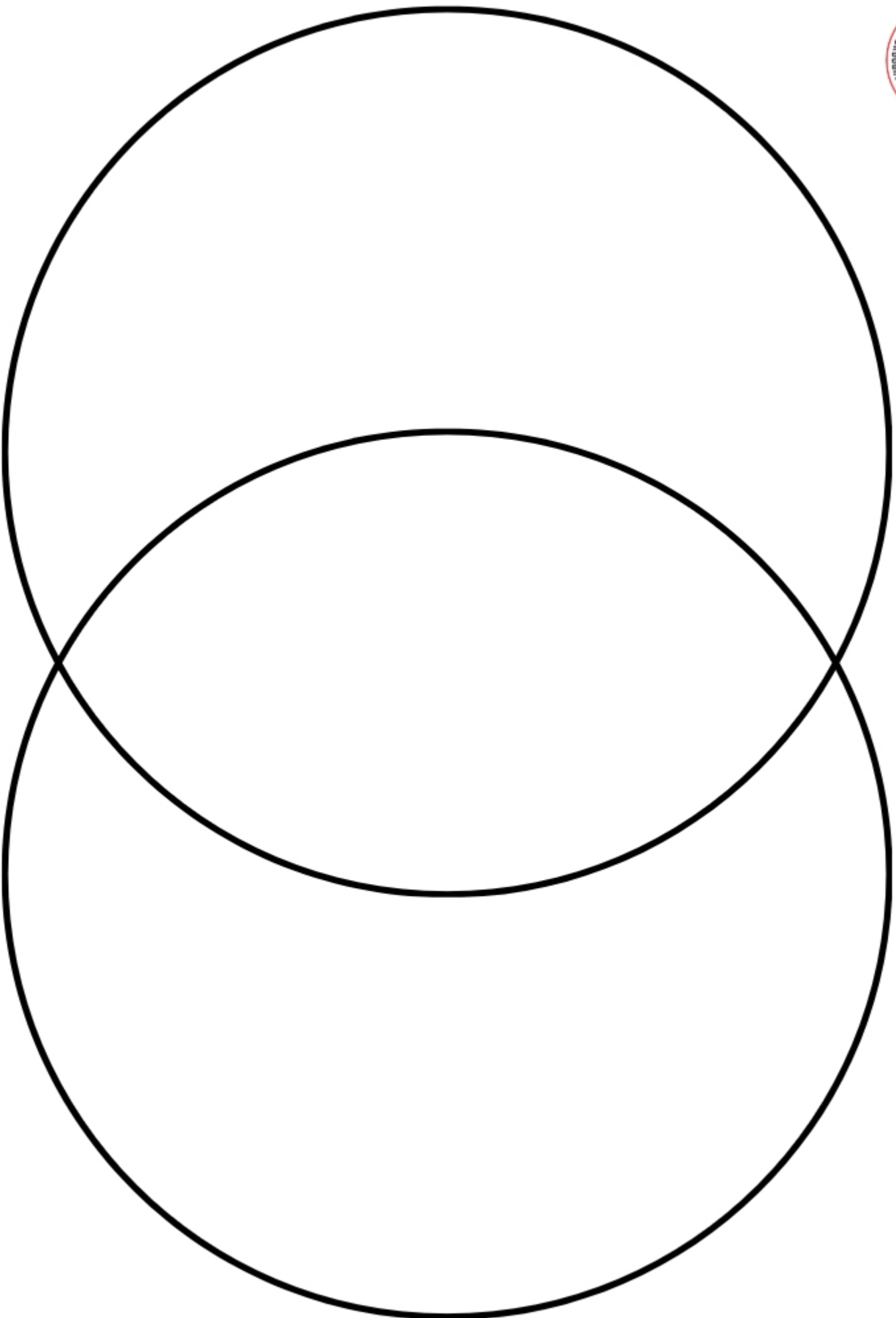


A **museum curator** selects, organizes, and presents objects for display. They make sure that items in a collection are thoughtfully\_chosen and collected. They also make sure the collection is displayed in a way that is engaging\_for the audience while still protecting\_the items.



**Boneyard**

**Traditional**



# Boneyard

# Traditional

- 
- Messy, disorganized
  - Looks like a junkyard
  - Most of the items are not in good condition
  - Collection is mainly signs and things used as advertisement
  - Collection is outside
    - People might not have to compete for space because items are large and are outside
- More organized
  - Artwork is hung up on walls
  - Most of the items are in good condition
  - Collection includes paintings, sculptures, artifacts
  - Collection is inside
    - People might have to compete for space because items are smaller and are in a confined space
- Contain old things
  - Both exhibit some type of art
  - Allow people to walk around/through different parts of the museum
  - Contain history





Medieval and renaissance rooms, V&A Museum, London  
Photo Courtesy: Library of Congress



National Gallery of Art  
Photo Courtesy: Library of Congress





Visitors viewing paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Photo Courtesy: Library of Congress



American Sign Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio  
Photo Courtesy: Library of Congress





YESCO Sign Boneyard, Reno, Nevada  
Photo Courtesy: UNLV

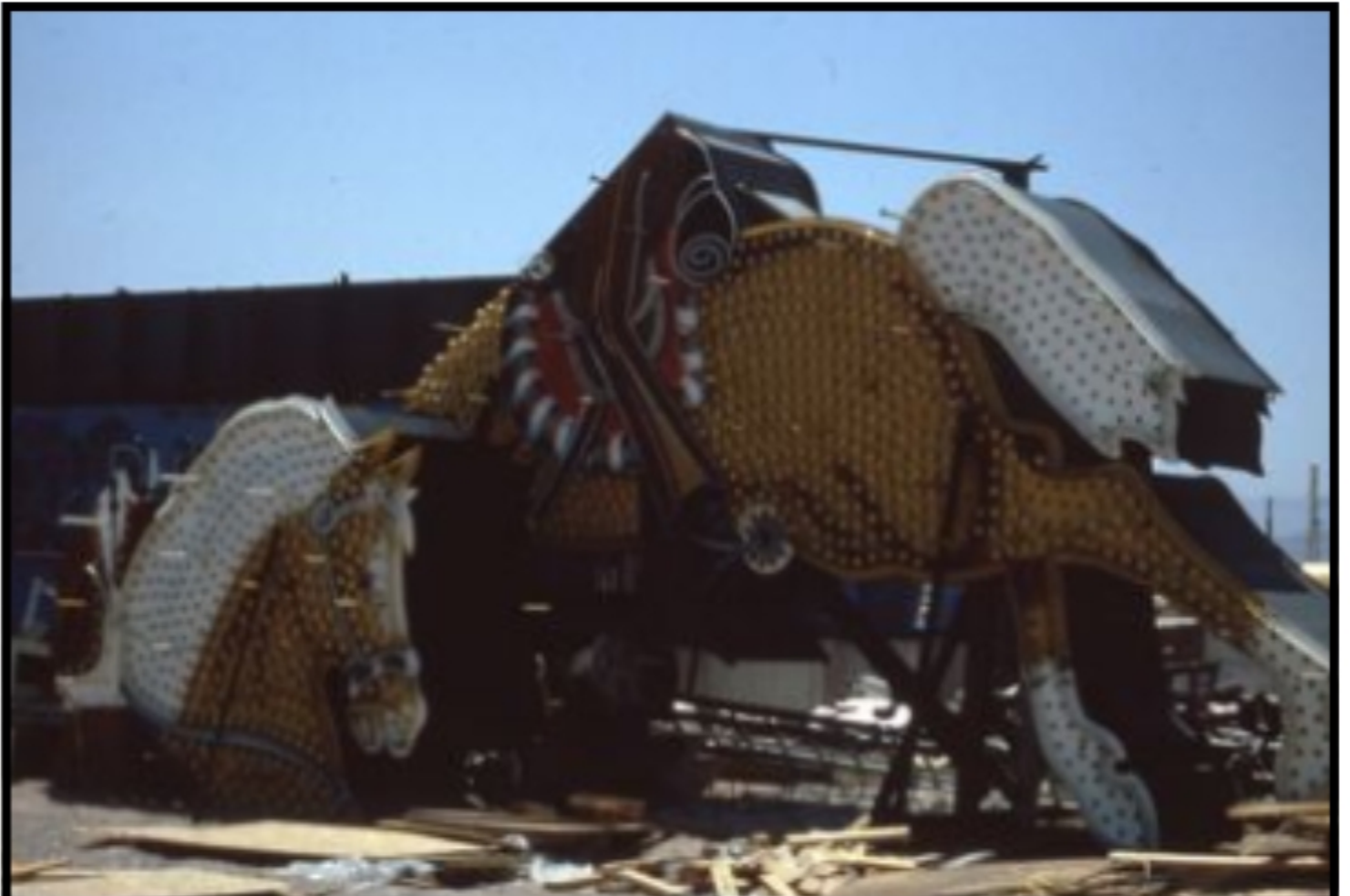


Neon signs in the YESCO Boneyard, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Photo Courtesy: UNLV



Neon signs in the YESCO Boneyard, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Photo Courtesy: UNLV





Neon signs in the YESCO Boneyard, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Photo Courtesy: UNLV