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minds in motion
The Docent Educator

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Notwithstanding the axiom that all audiences are special, and the truism that every individual deserves your best teaching efforts, there are segments of your community that require special attention. The reasons for this may be related to the purpose of their visit, their level of awareness or understanding, the preparation they received before arriving, the language they speak, or their physical or mental abilities.

In this issue of The Docent Educator, we present information about a wide range of “special audiences.” Regardless of the reason that this rather ambiguous label is prescribed to a particular group, the need to employ good teaching practices is paramount. As Jan Majewski, author of Part of Your General Public is Disabled, often reminded me when we worked together at the Smithsonian, many of the so-called “accommodations” made for disabled visitors are just good teaching practices, and would enhance tours for all visitors.

The extra thought or planning given to “special audiences” may, indeed, be the best way to teach and tour all audiences visiting such auxiliary educational institutions as museums, historic homes, zoos, parks, and botanical gardens. For purposes of illustration, consider how primary educational institutions — such as public schools — teach a special population of students identified as “gifted and/or talented.”

Most schools having special programs for gifted and talented students use an instructional model developed by educator Joseph Renzulli. Dr. Renzulli called his method of teaching The Enrichment Triad. As its name implies, The Enrichment Triad has three levels. The first level consists of general exploratory experiences designed to expose students to new and exciting topics, ideas, and fields of knowledge not ordinarily covered in the regular curriculum. The second level consists of exposure to methods, materials, and instructional techniques specifically designed to encourage higher level thinking processes, such as creativity (the ability to generate ideas, insights, alternatives, and consequences). The third level consists of active involvement, or the expression of students’ interests and creative abilities resulting in a project, report, or something else tangible.

 Doesn’t the richness of experiences inherent in this model sound like a better, more exciting, and more effective way to learn? Shouldn’t this form of instruction be available to all students, rather than only to those who are already motivated and interested?

Many educators think so! Among them is Dr. Renzulli, himself, who writes in his text The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Creative Learning Press, Mansfield Center, CT, 1985), “development of gifted behaviors should be viewed as the goal of a schoolwide enrichment program rather than a pre-existing condition.”

This model has had an impact upon museum education, whether museum educators are conscious of employing it or not. Most museum educators hope that classroom teachers will conduct pre-visit activities designed to expose students to the ideas and concepts they will encounter on their visit to the museum (level one); and they also urge classroom teachers to follow-up their visits by conducting post-visit activities that make use of what was learned while on site (level three).

An increasing number of us who teach with collections believe that the audiences visiting our institution should be exposed to methods, materials, and
Special Audiences

instructional techniques that encourage active learning and that engage higher-order thinking skills (a level two experience using Renzulli’s model), as opposed to simply listening and remembering. In other words, many museum instructors recognize that they should encourage visitors to think creatively and participate when viewing institutional collections.

Just as I truly believe all children have gifts and talents, I recognize that all visitors have special needs. And, just as I believe that all students would benefit from the richness of experiences provided to those considered to be gifted or talented, I recognize that all visitors, regardless of needs, deserve accommodation and consideration.

Attending to our visitors’ special needs, regardless of type, does not, and should not, mean altering or lowering our educational sights for any particular group. Rather, it requires that we refine and attune our methods of teaching and communicating. Our instructional goal, that of challenging visitors to strive, think, respond, learn, and gain appreciation for our collections, should remain the same for all.

For this reason, I strongly recommend that docents receive training in teaching methodology, questioning strategies, and learning styles, in addition to academic content. As Joseph Renzulli states, again in his text The Schoolwide Enrichment Model, “Although a comprehensive knowledge about the content of any field is considered to be a major part of the overall training of professionals, the ability to apply one’s knowledge in practical [teaching] situations represents the real payoff so far as effective training is concerned.”

As you read this issue and contemplate appropriate strategies for teaching special audiences of every or any variety, it is useful to remember that we must not program ourselves to respond in mechanical ways to the variety of people, learning styles, and needs we confront. Nor should we stereotype those people whose needs are more apparent than others. As educators, we must be knowledgeable and flexible enough to find and adapt to that which works best for each visitor we meet, ensuring that all our “special” audiences have experiences that appropriately challenge them to think, learn, and grow.

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor

For docents hoping to better serve visitors who have disabilities or specific physical needs, I know of no better resource to recommend than Part of Your General Public is Disabled, by Janice Majewski. Ms. Majewski, who is responsible for ensuring that every facility under the Smithsonian “umbrella” is accessible to all visitors, has developed a text and accompanying video that ought to be seen by every docent and be among the reference materials in all institutional libraries.

Part of Your General Public is Disabled consists of a 93-page manual and 23-minute videotape. Both offer practical suggestions on how to effectively assist disabled visitors in museums, zoos, and historic homes. The package provides step-by-step procedures for working with people who have: mental retardation, learning disabilities, hearing impairments, visual handicaps, mobility impairments, cerebral palsy, mental illness, severe communication disabilities, and sensory and motor changes that nearly all older adults experience.

In a clear, easy-to-follow format, the manual presents suggestions for: planning museum tours that are accessible to wider audiences; using museum materials and audio-visual equipment to disabled visitors’ best advantage; handling emergency situations involving disabled people; and recognizing and working with the various aids disabled people use.

The videotape introduces you to five disabilities that are not readily identifiable, either because of their nature or the degree of impairment. You will view tours involving a hard of hearing man in a history museum; a visually impaired man in an art gallery; a woman with cerebral palsy in an historic house; a man and a woman with mental retardation in a modern art museum; and learning disabled students at a zoo. You learn of ways to detect problems, to ask questions of the disabled visitors, and to accommodate your entire tour group easily and effectively.

This training package is available for sale through the Smithsonian Institution only. The entire package may be purchased for $80. Individually, the manual (available in print, audio cassette, and Braille formats) sells for $8 and the open-captioned videotape (in VHS and 3/4” formats) for $75. To purchase part or all of the package contact:

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for the Arts and Humanities
Arts and Industries Building, Room 1410
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
(202) 786-2492 (voice)
(202) 786-2414 (TDD)
(202) 786-2210 (fax)
Reaching All of Your Audiences

At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, thousands of adults with special needs participate in educational programs through tours and full-day, hands-on workshops. These visitors come from rehabilitation hospitals and mental health settings, group homes, halfway houses, drug recovery centers, and more recently, community service centers for those who have AIDS. They have found their trips to the museum to be not only a social outing but a place where personal discovery, healing, spiritual renewal, and learning can happen.

All docents at the Philadelphia Museum receive training that prepares them to assist the individual disabled child or adult who arrives unannounced on a tour, or the group that participates in specialized programming. Over time, a group of docents who focus their energies on working with the Office of Special Audiences has evolved. The twenty-five energetic and dedicated men and women, about 15% of the total docent program, enjoy the challenge of working with the disabled communities. They say these special tours challenge their perceptions and offer opportunities to sharpen their abilities to create new approaches to standard tour material.

The following suggestions are gleaned from their experiences and from my own years as a social worker and museum educator. Though this article focuses on adult visitors, most of the suggestions are also applicable to children.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Because language tends to reflect our perceptions of other people it is helpful to become familiar with the acceptable terminology for people with disabilities. No matter what the current preferred definition is, it is important not to lump people into categories such as “the disabled,” “the blind,” or “the deaf,” which confuses individual people with their disability. “People with disabilities,” “blind people,” or “people who are deaf” are reminders that you are dealing with the people, not with the disabilities.

Being only human, we sometimes make unconscious assumptions about people with disabilities. The most common assumption is thinking that if one thing is wrong with an individual then other things must be wrong as well. Remember that if a person is in a wheelchair this does not mean he can’t communicate. The person who is visually impaired will often notice that people are speaking loudly to them, although they are not deaf! This tendency to assume is called the theory of negative spread. Being sensitive to it will help you avoid it. Offer assistance to push a wheelchair or assist a blind person as you would to anyone else, and respect the person’s decision should he choose to decline your help. It is considerate, however, to warn someone of a danger such as a steep ramp, a protruding object, or an approaching vehicle or push cart.

TOUR GUIDELINES

Groups of visitors with special needs, no matter what their disability, are not always able to arrive or leave exactly at the appointed time, for a variety of reasons such as transportation, illness, or mobility problems. Allow extra time in your tour schedule. Plan time to greet your visitors in a relaxed manner, and, if possible, have everyone wear a name tag (we all enjoy being addressed by name). Shaking hands and having lots of eye contact is always a plus. If possible, groups should be arranged into small, manageable numbers with a docent assigned to each group in order to further facilitate personal interaction.

At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, our seasoned docents plan the first stop in the museum to ask questions that help them “size-up” their group. By asking...
questions that require more than a yes or no answer, and that solicit personal views or general information, the docent is able to make some quick decisions about the audience’s level of art exposure and understanding, as well as the extent and manifestations of their disabilities. This “warm-up” phase also allows docents to dispel any fears they may have about dealing with the unknown. Addressing first the person who presents the most discomfort to you is one way to abate this fear! Most people find this technique melts all apprehensions.

Many docents note that body language plays an important part in communicating with people who have special needs. Pantomime and gesturing help to keep the attention of those who have difficulty concentrating or have short attention spins, such as people with certain mental illnesses or developmental disabilities. Those with hearing impairments or deafness also benefit from emphatic gestures as well as by watching the lips of the speaker.

**Sign-Language Interpreted Tours**

Tours interpreted in American Sign Language for deaf visitors should not run longer than an hour. Because it is not possible for the hearing impaired person to watch an interpreter and look at the object at the same time, you must build extra time into your tour for the visitor to look after you are finished speaking. It is important, therefore, to shorten the tour by covering less material. The interpreter should stand so that the painting, animal, or object you are looking at is between you and the interpreter. While most professional interpreters are able to interpret at a fairly quick pace, it is helpful to them if you speak in a regular cadence. It is most important to never address the interpreter — always speak directly with the hearing impaired person!

**Mobility Impaired Visitors**

When a person in a wheelchair is part of a group of able bodied people it is important to allow this individual to stay in front of the group. Often it will be difficult for them to keep up with the tour so be sure to remember to invite them to the front of the group at each stop. If you are touring a group of people in wheelchairs, it is helpful to bring a portable stool for you to sit on so that you will be on eye level with your audience. It is really tiring for a person to look up for a long period of time.

Always plan a barrier-free route in advance of touring, using elevators and avoiding rough floor terrain or thick carpeting whenever possible. Also, remember that the wheelchair is part of a person’s bodyspace. Do not hold onto a person’s wheelchair or move it without warning. It is also an invasion to move or take away a walker or crutches without asking.

**Visually Impaired Visitors**

Due to a commitment on the part of the Philadelphia Museum of Art to serve all members of its community, there are extensive programs for visually limited and blind people that include “touch tours,” studio workshops, and internships. Touch tours of objects in our permanent collection happen on a regular basis. Guides have expressed enthusiasm for offering tours that focus heavily on the materials and methods of the artist, offering lots of comparisons about surfaces of objects and getting into discussions about form, texture, and temperature that normally do not arise with the sighted public.

As people may have varying degrees of visual impairment it can be useful to provide assistive devices such...
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as flashlights, magnifying glasses, or
large black and white photographs of
objects to assist those visitors who are
partially sighted. And, by the way, it is
okay to mention colors or use the words
“see” and “look” when speaking with
blind or visually impaired people.

TOUCHABLES
Using touchable objects is also
helpful for teaching children and adults
who have learning or developmental
disabilities. If circumstances do not
permit touching, a less precious, but
related, object can be introduced, such as
samples of structural materials like stone,
wood, or other samples, painting
materials, canvas, and so forth. During a
recent special exhibition of the anatomy
drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, for
example, a local chiropractor lent the
museum a life-sized model of the spine
to pass around for visitors to touch so
they could better understand the forms in
the drawings.

COMMUNICATION
Repetition of questions, key ideas,
or phrases is important reinforcement for
people with learning and developmental
disabilities. This technique is also
helpful sometimes for those who have
communication disorders.

People with aphasia due to strokes
have difficulty responding to questions
not because they do not understand the
information but because they have a
speech disorder that interferes with
relaying their thoughts. Tours offer
opportunities for eliciting simple answers
but require a great deal of time and
patience. People who come from
rehabilitation hospitals generally come
with an escort or therapist who is skilled
in assisting with communication. One
therapist explained that “they don’t need
language skills to appreciate a painting –
because of their diminished verbal
skills, stroke patients respond with deep
pleasure to nonverbal expression.”

VISITORS FROM MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS
Clients of mental health centers who
may be depressed, schizophrenic, or have
other psychiatric problems present
unique challenges for docents. These
clients are sometimes harder to reach
than most other special audiences
because they may be withdrawn,
cautious, or distracted as a symptom of
their illness or as a result of medication.
Docents who tour these groups regularly
strive to establish rapport, use a lot of
reinforcement and encouragement, and
find it worth the extra effort.

PEOPLE WITH AIDS
Groups of people with AIDS who
come to our museum usually contain
extremes in abilities. Physically, some
require wheelchairs in order to conserve
their energy, or need to leave the group
early because of fatigue. It is important
to plan several rest stops in your tour or
use portable stools. Mentally, some are
understandably depressed, but most have
been in a supportive system and respond
quickly to encouragement from their
peers. Docents have notice that, in
general, they are quite in touch with their
emotions, respond to art with intensity,
and are eager to express how they feel.
One person with AIDS who had never
been to the museum before has now
returned on several occasions because,
she says, the art is giving her answers.

It is my hope that all docents will be
able to give tours that accommodate
people with special needs, and that these
audiences will enjoy increased access to
museums and other community
resources. Kudos to all docents who
provide tours for people with special
needs!

Carol Wisker, M.A., has been the
Coordinator of Audiences with Special Needs
at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since
1987. Prior to joining the museum world she
was an administrative social worker and
therapist in a variety of medical and mental
health settings. In addition, she is also a
professional artist. Ms. Wisker has
presented numerous lectures on accessibility
and educational programming for special
audiences at museums and Americans with
Disabilities Act (ADA) conferences.

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Tough Topics - Vol. 2, No. 3
Speaking with an E.S.L. Class

When working with English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) students, there are different techniques that research shows will help these students understand the English language. Of these techniques, three that docents might find useful when touring ESL students are: Total Physical Response (TPR), Roles and Drama, and Fun and Games.

In TPR, the instructor asks students to be silent and listen carefully to a command or modeled behavior, such as “smiling.” Then, the students are to carry out or repeat the command/behavior. Flash cards are sometimes used as a visual stimulus reinforcing the spoken word.

Extrapolating from this technique, docents might employ pictures on flash cards and model behaviors to aid the ESL students in expressing themselves. Prior to touring the cards and behaviors could be presented to the class. Then, while on tour, students could view pictures and identify the smiling, sad, or tired people using the expressions on their faces or with cards. Or, the students could be asked to use the cards or behaviors to describe how the pictures make them feel. To aid in the acquisition of English, docents could repeat the word out loud each time students use a card or behavior for descriptive purposes.

Roles and Drama is a group activity where a few students act out a scene in a picture, or take the stance of a sculpture while the others observe. The docent may need to guide students or help model the poses. Props or costumes could be used should you want to get more elaborate or descriptive. This activity can be lots of fun and the students’ actual participation brings images to life for them. The scene could be repeated quickly with new students from the class. Repetition is good for ESL students, and this total body and emotional involvement helps make meaning and intention clear.

Fun and Games can also be effective and enjoyable. Seek and search could be played using different textures, such as sandpaper, silk, fur, and cotton-balls. Different textures would be passed around the group, then students would be asked to look for things in the picture that might have similar textures. In a similar manner, a variety of sounds could be made and then students could look for items that might make those sounds. Treasure hunts can be played by holding up a detail from a picture, artifact, or natural history object and asking the class to find that work, artifact, or object. Such games add to the enjoyment of a museum visit and teach students at the same time.

Another technique employed in Fun and Games uses the five senses to communicate. What might they see, or imagine they could hear, taste, smell, or touch in a work of art.

The techniques used in TPR, Roles and Drama, and Fun and Games are just three of several ways to help ESL students gain understanding in the museum. Learning a second language can be exhausting mental work. These activities can help a docent adjust the pace of learning and lighten up the atmosphere.

Increasing numbers of students for whom English is a second language are visiting museums like the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences.

Louanna Emery is a second grade ESL teacher at Herbert Marcus School in the Dallas (TX) Independent School District. She earned her B.A. at William Jewell College and her M.Ed. from Texas Woman’s University.
Imagine that you are leading a group of fourth grade students to the gallery where you will begin your tour. Listen to their comments:

"Oh, look! It's much bigger than I thought it would be! And the blue-green is brighter than the print we saw."

"There's the picture with 'peace' as its main idea!"

"This museum has decorative arts in it. Remember when we talked about whether they belong in an art museum?"

"Look how many cowrie shells are on that African figure — it must have been valuable to the people who made it."

The children are making connections. The comments you hear reveal their familiarity with formal qualities of works of art as well as their meanings. Beyond that, there are references to language arts, aesthetics, and social sciences. There is a good chance that these children are students of discipline-based art education (DBAE), and that the teachers in their school use works of art to communicate key issues in many other disciplines as well. What must art museum docents know about DBAE, its teaching methods, and their own collections in order to make the right connections?

**Disciplined-Based Art Education**

DBAE is an approach to teaching art as a subject with lesson content drawn from the four basic art disciplines: art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. Because it is a theoretical method and not a curriculum, DBAE can be adapted to the specific needs and structures of individual schools and districts.

In their art classes, DBAE students not only find creative self-expression in art production, but explore works of art from the points of view of the three other disciplines. In art history, students discover stylistic qualities characteristic of individual artists and schools of art, as well as meanings and values communicated by works of art across space, time, and cultural boundaries. Art criticism enables students to talk and write about works of art, using critical inquiry to describe, analyze, interpret, and make informed value judgments. Aesthetic issues are discussed in questions about the nature, definition, and significance of art.

Ideally, children in DBAE programs learn about applied, craft, and folk art as well as drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and architecture. The art that is studied should be representative of many cultures, styles, and periods.

**DBAE and Interdisciplinary Studies**

DBAE's broad-based definition of art and its inquiry-based approach suggest applications in interdisciplinary units of study. These are developed in collaborations between art specialists and classroom teachers. Such is the case in Stark County, Ohio, where teachers plan units based on the theme of "Discovery-Recovery." Fourth grade teacher Janice Hamilton's unit on cultural exchanges between the Spanish and Native Americans in 1492 is an example.

At the Florida State University School, science, social studies, math, and English teachers collaborated with artist specialist Deb Barrett-Hayes to teach a middle school unit on "Energy." A final project produced a mural, 8'4 x 40', on the history of human use of energy.

Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools are placing a city-wide emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching strategies, drawing on the DBAE process as an exemplar. Interdisciplinary models for art, language arts, social studies, science, and health were being piloted during the 1992-93 school year.

Plano, Texas, art specialist Ruth Tice worked with classroom teacher Kim Gill to design a course of study for Gill's second grade class based on two works of art from the Dallas Museum of Art. Using a poster reproduction of Edward Hick's *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Ms. Gill involved the children in language arts (identifying words for parts of speech, looking for synonyms and antonyms); literary devices (main idea, personification, narration); science (animals, natural habitats, sounds); and history (William Pitt's treaty with the Indians). In music class, the children learned the song "Simple Gifts." Art specialist Tice appeared in their classroom dressed as the artist Edward Hicks and led the children in taking poses to become a "living painting." After a similarly interdisciplinary study of Frederic Church's *The Icebergs*, and comparing and contrasting the two American paintings, the class visited the DMA to see the works in person.

**Visual Arts and Whole Language**

Courses of study frequently are based on the relationship between
the visual arts and whole language as it relates to art criticism. Beginning with a visual examination of works of art, elementary children next progress to verbalization about them, and work up to written criticism.

At Burton Hills Elementary in Fort Worth, art specialist Carolyn Sherburn involved every child, special education through fifth grade, in producing art work and accompanying written work based on the theme of "Dreams." She taught her art students to look at a picture in the same way they would look at a book. To implement Fort Worth Independent School District curriculum goals, the children learned to use reproductions and original works of art to develop a point of view, to sequence, to generalize, and to summarize. At their winter 1992 PTA meeting, Burton Hills children produced and presented four different "living paintings," first studying about the artists, then writing scripts, painting backdrops, designing and making costumes, and acting out their roles.

Carole Arnold, art teacher at Riverside Elementary School in Dublin, Ohio, stresses the importance of reading about art and artists in developing writing skills in visual arts. She cites the example of two fourth-grade students who read the book Van Gogh by Mike Venezia and The World of Art reading comprehension card on Van Gogh in art class. A few days later, they appeared in Mrs. Arnold's room with the Time/Life Library of Art book, The World of Van Gogh. They had read more about Van Gogh and his art, and wanted to discuss the artist in depth.

**DBAE and Multicultural Education**

To an increasing degree, multicultural studies are infused into DBAE programs to ensure that art is studied contextually as well as historically. The shift in curriculum is from "What is Art?" to the equally big aesthetic question "What is Art For?" The result is that art is seen as fundamental to societies worldwide and throughout time. Students study how art functions as an agent of transmission of culture and discover that there are many art worlds, none more important than another. For DBAE students, the concept of art changes and widens.

Grade-level themes and subjects such as animals, environments, families, seasonal changes, and patterns can be studied in artistic expressions by people, both ancient and modern, from parts of the world like Africa, Latin America, Indonesia, China, and Alaska. The result is deeper insight into students' own cultural backgrounds and those of others.

To paraphrase multicultural educator Carl Grant, instead of viewing our country as a "melting pot" where all cultures blend together, individual cultural differences are celebrated as essential ingredients in its "tossed salad" citizenry.

**DBAE's Impact on Museum Education**

What does this approach to the art education of our young people mean to art museum education programs and their docents? Art museums have long been recognized as flexible learning environments where thematic and interdisciplinary approaches like those mentioned above can flourish. But to serve DBAE-educated audiences successfully, docent training must address DBAE approaches and content. The ideal solution is for docents to attend one of the DBAE institutes held at several U.S. sites during the summers. With or without the training, certain components for touring DBAE-trained audiences can be addressed.

**Inquiry-based Touring**

Because art criticism is a basic component of their art education, DBAE students are accustomed to discussing art, rather than listening to talks about it. Asking the right questions is essential to the interactive atmosphere in which DBAE students learn best. In school, they learn about artistic choices and contexts for works of art. Only hearing about art's formal qualities will not satisfy their curiosity about why a piece looks the way it does, or how it functioned in the culture that produced it. Docents' questions should be formulated to guide critical analysis and interpretation.

More questions should link works on tours, creating threads of comparison to enliven discussions. Why is a certain material used in sculpture from one country and not in another? Why is intense color more evident in one place or time and not in another? Why does an artist paint a portrait of a certain subject, and why is the subject presented in a particular way?

**Contextual Training**

Successful inquiry-based touring results in a lively give-and-take of questions from both the docent and the

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**The Getty-promoted DBAE is one of several methods schools are now using to teach young people about the visual arts.**

Photo: NancyWalkup Reynolds

**by Nancy Berry**

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Nancy W. Berry is Assistant Professor of Art at the University of North Texas, where she also serves as a faculty member of the North Texas Institute for Educators in the Visual Arts. Her career includes teaching art in grades K-12, and art and museum education at the university level. She has served as head of education at the Meadows Museum of Southern Methodist University and the Dallas Museum of Art. She was national director of the Museum Education Division of the National Art Education Association and named national Museum Educator of the Year by that organization in 1990.

**Regional Institutes –**

**Getty Centers for Education in the Arts**

Want to learn more about DBAE and whether it has a presence in your area’s schools? Try contacting the Getty regional institute nearest you.

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**PUBLICATIONS ABOUT DBAE**

The Getty Center has produced many publications about DBAE, which are available at nominal cost and several are complimentary.

For more information, contact Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 401 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 950, 9th Floor, Santa Monica, CA 90401; and/or Getty Center Publications Distribution Center, P.O. Box 2112, Santa Monica, CA 90407.
A Resource to Help Enfranchise People with Disabilities


Science Museums and School Change

A report resulting from a conference sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Eisenhower Program for Mathematics and Science, the Association of Science-Technology Centers, and the Franklin Institute Science Museum, entitled “Science Museums and School Change: Making the Connection,” has been published.

The conference brought educators together to explore the role of museums and science-technology centers in achieving meaningful reform of science, mathematics, and technology education. To receive the report, contact Publications Department, ASTC, 1025 Vermont Avenue, NW #500, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Art Museums Win Grants to Diversify their Audiences

The Indianapolis Museum of Art, University Art Museum at U.C. Berkeley, Newark Museum, Museum of Fine Arts - Houston, Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University, Heard Museum, and Hood Museum at Dartmouth College have received grants totalling $50 million over the next five years to “shed their elitist image and attract previously underserved and diverse audiences.” The grant was awarded by the Lila Wallace - Reader’s Digest Fund.

F.Y.C.

For Your Consideration

Multiculturalism and Children’s Literature

To heighten interest and enthusiasm for viewing cultural artifacts or art from other nations, or to enfranchise visitors of various cultural backgrounds, try incorporating stories into your teaching. Folktales and children’s stories illustrate both the differences and similarities among peoples throughout the world. In addition, they are entertaining. Here are several suggested titles:

ASIA
• The Spring of Butterflies and Other Chinese Folk Tales. Trans. He Liyi. Illus. by Pan Aiqing and Li Zhao. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1985. (all ages)

THE MIDDLE EAST

AFRICA

HISPANIC CULTURES

NATIVE AMERICAN
• And It Is Still That Way: Legends told by Arizona Indian Children. Byrd Baylor. Scribner’s, 1976. (all ages)
• Many Smokes, Many Moons. Jamake Highwater Lippincott, 1978 (all ages).
Spricht Hier Jemand English?*

Providing for Foreign Visitors

Travel can be entertaining, educational, and ... when you don't speak the language ... frustrating. During a recent vacation in Germany and Austria, I encountered a variety of ways museums communicate information about their collections to non-German speaking visitors. I became curious. Do European museums do a better job serving their foreign visitors than museums in the United States?

At the simplest level, many collections are accessible to the visitor without explanation. The scientific and technological displays and models of the Deutsches Museum in Munich, for example, are delightfully self-explanatory. Full-size machines and systems are reproduced in miniature inside dioramas that put them in context. There was little textual material in any language in this museum where the most complex of scientific marvels are presented as overgrown toys for the visitor to play with. It is possible to enjoy a zoo or art museum, too, on a purely visual basis without a guide. Most museum-goers, however, are eager to know more than they can perceive without language.

The most common way of communicating with foreign visitors is via print. Some small museums such as the Heimatmuseum (Folklore Museum) in Berchtesgarden offered a room-by-room general description of the artifacts with some contextual background. Other museums provided floorplans in several languages, but little additional information. Each room in the museum of the Benedictine Abbey in Melk, Austria, contained written information about the exhibition's theme in both German and English. Here, as in all the museums visited, label copy was written only in German. Most small museums and museums outside the tourist centers offered no non-German information about their collections.

Large museums and those in the more heavily visited cities spoke to their foreign visitors in a variety of ways. A rather innovative communication method was installed in the Hohensalzburg Fortress in Salzburg, Austria. At key locations throughout the castle buildings and grounds, "Phonomat" offered a brief description of the immediate surroundings in exchange for a few schillings. The aesthetic shock of what appeared to be a bright yellow pay phone in a medieval castle was somewhat offset by the pleasant voice and instructive message. Recorded tours were available in Spanish, French, and English in a few of the larger museums and were very satisfying.

Still, the most satisfactory viewing of a museum's collection should be accompanied by a real, live person with whom the viewer can interact. English-speaking guides were available at prearranged times. In most cases, however, the guides were not native English speakers, and their tours varied in quality. They were frequently merely memorized recitations of the histories of various Hapsburg or Bavarian monarchies, including endless repetitions of the number of candles in successive chandeliers. Rarely did any interaction take place between guide and tour group; often, the guide was unable or unwilling to answer questions.

Therefore, it was with enormous delight that I encountered Christopher Clouter in the Kunsthistorisches Museum
*Does Anyone Here Speak English?*

in Vienna. He and three others volunteered to conduct English tours for the Kunst; he claims to teach English at the American Institute to "support my vocation — art history."

He began our tour in the magnificent main hall of the ground floor of the 100-year-old art museum. After pointing out the tools of the architect painted over the museum's entrance and Michaelangelo's name and the tools of the sculptor over the entrance to the sculpture wing, he let us discover the intent of the other two wings. When he asked, "What do you see in this section over Raphael's name that tells us he was a painter?" I began to suspect I had found a real docent — a teacher — not just another tour guide.

We moved to the "Krumau Madonna" and all marched around the statue while he asked us, "Sculpture is made to be seen on all sides, so why did they make pieces like this to go on the altar where no one would ever see the back?" When we moved to a small ivory carving of "St. Gregory with the Scribes," he led us into a discussion of why books were so valuable during the Middle Ages and reminded us that we still remember the "magic" of the written language when we "spell" a word.

"When you look at any painting, think how you would have painted the subject," he urged and then helped us see how Titian leads the viewer into a thematic center of "Ecce Homo," the figure of Christ at the outermost edge of the huge canvas.

Our tour continued in this vein for more than an hour. The group was very large — more than 30 adults. We saw only a fraction of the vast Kunst collection, but we were treated to an entertaining, enlightening, and enabling introduction. The Kunst became accessible, and we spent 5 more of our precious tourist hours exploring on our own the paths that had been opened for us.

Do European museums do a better job for their foreign visitors than museums in the United States? The question is moot. Far better questions, however, concern your own museum. Do non-English speaking visitors have access to your collection? Has your museum gone beyond print, tape, or guides to provide docent tours for foreign visitors? As a docent, have you

made it known to your education director that you are available to give tours in languages other than English? Have you helped recruit into your museum’s docent program volunteers who speak languages other than English? These are the more important questions to consider when providing for these special audiences.

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Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

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**Use local demographic information**

(available from Regional Planning Commissions or Census depositories in most communities) and your museum’s guest register to assess the need for non-English information. Certainly, if your museum is located in a key tourist area, or if there are significant ethnic populations in your community, non-English tours should be available.

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**Submit an Article!**

**Publish Your Teaching Ideas and Techniques**

*The Docent Educator* invites you to submit articles, questions, techniques, comments, and announcements for possible publication. Interested? Please consider addressing the themes of our upcoming issues.

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**Little Ones:** Teaching our Youngest Visitors
Winter 1993
submission deadline: Sept. 1, 1993

**Program Mechanics:** Recruitment, Training, Orientation, and Evaluation
Spring 1994
submission deadline - Dec. 1, 1993

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**Blockbusters:** Teaching with Temporary Exhibitions
Summer 1994
Submission deadline - March 1, 1994

**Back-to-School:** Programming for School-Aged Audiences and their Teachers
Autumn 1994
Submission deadline - June 1, 1994

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Have an article, technique, or activity in mind that does not conform to the themes above? You are still invited to submit it for consideration. Send your ideas and manuscripts to *The Docent Educator* 2011 Eleventh Avenue East, Seattle, WA 98102.
Interpreting with Deaf Audiences

by Amanda Park

I could feel the air charged with their excitement and anticipation as the small group of thirty children and their teachers approached the museum center. I stood waiting to greet them. Young eyes looked up at me filled with curiosity. The children’s eagerness and enthusiasm engulfed me. I felt myself seeing things the way they do, not only as a child would, but as a child who hears no sounds.

I am an historical interpreter and an interpreter for the deaf at Conner Prairie, a living history museum north of Indianapolis, Indiana. Conner Prairie focuses on life in the early 1800’s. The museum consists of three areas: Prairietown, a re-created 1836 village where costumed staff role play residents living in a small town; the Pioneer Adventure Area, where visitors can do hands-on activities related to 19th century life; and an historic house built by early settler William Conner in 1823.

The staff who work these areas is used to meeting the needs of visitors and finding the best way to reach each individual in order to impart pieces of history to all.

On this day, I was meeting children and teachers from the Indiana School for the Deaf. I would be translating the spoken word into sign as we toured the historic areas. Here is what I saw my fellow interpreters of history do to totally involve the children to the point where many times my presence as an interpreter for the deaf was not needed.

1. **Maintained Constant Eye Contact**
   Eye contact with the children made them feel a part of what was taking place. In general eye contact establishes a link to the audience. In an interpretive situation it is important to remember to establish eye contact with the audience and speak to them (rather than the interpreter). To maintain this communication link, remember not to turn away from your audience when doing an activity or referring to an object. This is especially important because some of the audience may be reading your lips and so need to see your face at all times. Also, facing the audience provides the greatest volume of your voice for those with some hearing.

2. **Convey Feelings and Meaning Through Body Language and Facial Expressions**
   People with hearing impairments focus on visual images. When speaking to persons with hearing impairments, body language and facial expressions can communicate meanings without the voice being heard.

3. **Use Writing or Drawing To Communicate**
   With older students and adults, this is a personal way to communicate on a one-to-one basis.

4. **Add Visual Activities to Their Presentations**
   When possible, demonstrating how objects are used can replace the need for verbal explanation.

5. **Use Basic Sign Language**
   Some interpreters used basic sign language. This ranged from as simple as signing a greeting to signing the whole presentation. Staff at Conner Prairie learn basic sign language from a variety of sources. Some have taken classes previously. Some have attended classes offered at the museum and taught by my husband and me. Some have studied books or videos.

In addition to the above considerations, here are some other thoughts to keep in mind when addressing an audience that includes persons with hearing impairments.

- Enunciate, but do not over-exaggerate, your words. Do not yell.
- Speak clearly. Slow down slightly. Remember your visitor is most likely an intelligent person.
Be patient. Let the visitor help you. Use the visitor’s lead when determining the way he or she feels most comfortable communicating. Not all persons with hearing impairments read lips or use sign language.

Make sure your words say the message you really mean. Idioms such as, “What’s wrong, has the cat got your tongue?,” are difficult to understand.

Pointing is not considered rude in deaf culture. Pointing to objects, pointing directions or pointing to a person are effective ways to communicate and direct attention.

On the day I toured with the students from the Indiana School for the Deaf, my fellow interpreters demonstrated their communication skills, especially their ability to treat each visitor in a way that made their experience a positive one. I knew a positive, uplifting experience had taken place. How did I know this? The looks on the children’s faces showed that spark to know more about history had been created.

After spending the day with these children, I knew why I love my work as an interpreter of history. The rewards of my job are to see smiles that reach from ear-to-ear, to see the eyes wide with wonder and amazement, and to hear the never-ending questions that the children ask.

Sometimes we don’t see what kind of experience our visitors have had. With good communication and understanding, hopefully we can transcend all cultures, ages, and groups. It takes far more effort, patience, and hard work, but it is all worth it when you can see the faces of smiling children even if when they “hear” with their eyes.

In a previous issue of The Docent Educator, you discussed some tough topics. I would like to share with you what works for us when we deal with our own “tough topic,” partial nudity in an exhibition on the Mississippian Indians.

Our exhibition consists of several objects, including bowls, scrapers, and projectile points, as well as a mural of what Mississippian Indian life might have been like in our area. In the mural, the women and men wear only a “loin cloth.” Children ALWAYS notice that the “women have no tops on” and there are usually quiet giggles and lots of finger pointing.

Our docents do not ignore this or try to stop it … at least they have noticed something! We address the issue by talking about the weather. Our questions begin with a description of the mural. What are the people doing? What are their houses like? What season do you think it is? How are the people dressed?

When we talk about the season, we ask what clues they’ve seen that tell them it’s summer time. They will invariably mention the trees in full flower, the people working on crops, and eventually will mention that “the women have no tops on.”

Finally, the magic sentence! Now we can get to the reasons they have no tops on. We ask the children to consider what summertime is like here in Clarksville, Tennessee. Is it hot? How do you keep cool? Their answers range from swimming pools and air conditioning, to going to malls and movies. Then, we have them look again at the mural and identify ways the Mississippian Indians might have kept cool in the summer, without air conditioning, movies, swimming pools, and so on. The children mention the creek in the painting, shade, and finally the magic words … their clothes.

We have had only one problem with a school group at this particular exhibition, and that was before I arrived at the Museum. When we have had religious schools call for tours we mention the mural and let them know that it is part of the tour, but that if they felt it would be inappropriate we could skip it. We have never had a school decide to skip it, but they have said that they were pleased that we brought it to their attention beforehand, so that they were not surprised upon arrival.

If you can use this, please do. I enjoy reading The Docent Educator; as do our docents. Keep up the good work!

Anne Berry
Curator of Education
Clarksville-Montgomery County Museum
Clarksville, TN

Your participation is requested!

The Docent Educator is looking for activities, ideas, techniques, and comments to share in its “It Works for Me” column. Help others be more effective. Jot your thoughts or ideas down and send them in!
Touring Nursing Home Residents

In the Autumn 1992 issue of The Docent Educator, we discussed touring with older adults. This article departs from that one by focusing on a specific segment of older adults — residents of long-term care, nursing facilities.

In the previous article, one of our main points was that, even though there are differences between younger and older adults that should be taken into consideration, the attitudinal starting point for touring older adults was to treat them as adults first. Is it necessary for us to alter this dictum when discussing nursing home residents? Absolutely not. Even though the differences between most adults and those in nursing homes can be substantial, we argue that the starting point is to recognize these people as adults. The all too often heard, “I just love working with old people. I treat them like my children.” has no place in senior citizen centers, in hospitals, or in museums.

While residents of long-term nursing homes tend to be, on average, older and to have lower levels of physical and cognitive ability than other adults does not suggest that you should significantly alter the approach you take. Treating these visitors as adults who happen to be older respects their dignity and should help to reduce any anxiety present in the docent who provides the tour.

Docents should understand that nursing facility residents with greater functional and mental difficulties are not going to be members of a touring group. It is highly unlikely that nursing homes would include anyone at risk of developing problems in a tour group. If nothing else, their potential liability would discourage it. In addition, the planning and implementation of an activity such as a tour is far more time consuming for the facility than just keeping the residents in-house. Simply put, nursing homes do not organize tours to get their problem residents out of the facility.

Advanced Planning

Conscientious docents gather information about their tour groups prior to providing tours. In most institutions, reservations are not accepted from schools without knowing something about the group of youngsters and their chaperones. Likewise, it is paramount that you learn about the nursing home group and about the staff who will accompany them.

You have every right to ask about the general physical and mental condition of those to be toured. For example, you will want to know how many of the tour members will be in wheelchairs. Some docents may have experienced a reticence or refusal on the part of a nursing home to discuss these issues on the grounds of confidentiality. If you experience such hesitance when working with the home’s activities personnel, ask to speak to the director of nursing, or, as a last resort, the administrator. Make it clear that you are not asking for confidential information but that you simply want to be prepared so that everyone will have a successful tour. Knowing what medications someone is taking or their medical diagnosis, which are confidential, will probably not mean much to you anyway. But, you certainly should know about general physical and mental capacities.

We suggest that if you cannot secure the information needed to help you properly plan for the event, consider not giving the tour. It is inconceivable that a reputable nursing home would refuse to share the necessary information.

You should also be very specific about transportation arrangements and necessary escorts. Will the nursing facility supply enough individuals to assist in transferring participants from the vehicle to your facility and back, or are they expecting you to arrange for this? How many nursing facility staff will accompany the group on tour; what are their qualifications; and what are their responsibilities in case of some emergency? Will the group be
accompanied by a registered nurse, a licensed practical nurse, and/or a certified nursing assistant? Will there be nursing home volunteers accompanying the group? Will you need to recruit volunteers to assist with the group?

CIRCUMSTANCES OF RESIDENTS

It is instructive to remember the general environment of such facilities. With few exceptions, the lives of residents in long-term care nursing facilities are controlled by the rules of the institution, not by the personal wishes of the residents. Nursing home residents may find such decisions as when to go to bed, when to arise from bed, when to bathe, when to dress, when to eat, when to receive visitors, with whom to share a room are all governed by institutional regulations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DOCENTS

The circumstances described above suggest that you keep in mind that nursing residents have suffered not only the loss of functional and/or mental capacity (prompting nursing home placement), but also loss of the freedom to make many of life’s decisions. An approach that comes across as paternalistic and emphasizes what the residents cannot do will simply reinforce the negatives many of them feel very acutely already. Most nursing home residents do not need reminders that they are different, but instead could benefit greatly from an approach that recognizes their humanness and worth, not their disabilities.

For example, plan the tour so as to de-emphasize the need for mobility. If possible bring items to a central location, obviating the need to move from room to room. This will be especially useful for a group that has a large number of individuals who are in wheelchairs, because it takes time just to move from one room to another. This also reinforces their lack of mobility.

Do not presume the presence of disabilities. Even if the nursing home staff indicates that the cognitive abilities or attentiveness of a group will be low, remember that they see the residents in an entirely different environment than you. Do not rule out the possibility that the stimulation of your interest in them and of the new environment will spark a response that the staff is not likely to see in the nursing facility.

We know of a situation where a docent was touring a group from a nursing facility. One resident, let’s call her Mary, indicated on a couple of occasions that she was bored and wanted to go home. During the movement from one room to another, an attendant from the nursing home leaned over and whispered to the docent that Mary had Alzheimer’s, in an apparent attempt to explain Mary’s behavior. Later, as the group stopped to observe a particular piece of sculpture, the docent singled out Mary asking her how she would want to look at this piece. Mary went over to the sculpture, circled it and declared, “In order to get the full effect you have to feel it from all sides.” She had succeeded in providing an extremely appropriate response, much to everyone’s surprise. By assuming an ability to participate, rather than writing off Mary as a victim of Alzheimer’s disease, the docent was able to evoke a response no one would have predicted.

Another technique that is sometimes successful with nursing home residents is to relate items to their childhood or early adulthood. This is particularly effective if you can focus on items that suggest an earlier time period, such as photographs or objects that might have been more common earlier in the century than now. Or, even if the theme is contemporary, you can relate it to an earlier time period. For example, images of modern architecture could prompt questions about the first time residents saw a skyscraper or what people might have thought of such a building if it had been erected in 1920. Evidence of a genuine interest in what things were like “back then” can sometimes evoke meaningful responses. And, being in a situation where the more knowledgeable person – the docent – is asking them to be the educator can feel empowering.

REHABILITATION PATIENTS, ASSISTED LIVING RESIDENTS, AND RETIREMENT HOME RESIDENTS

With the enactment of cost containment legislation for Medicare forcing older patients to leave the hospital earlier than in the past, a sizeable minority of new nursing home admissions are temporary ones, while the individual is continuing a rehabilitation program begun in an acute care hospital. If your touring group consists of these individuals you are likely to find most of them to be cognitively normal and more like your typical older adult clientele than the typical nursing home resident.

Likewise, residents of assisted living facilities should not be confused with the nursing home resident. Assisted living facilities (which are known by different names in different locations) are for individuals who need some assistance with activities of daily living, but do not need skilled nursing care. Usually they will be more mobile and more alert. Do not confuse these individuals with nursing home residents.

Residents of retirement homes or retirement communities should not be confused with nursing home residents. These individuals will be totally independent and even more alert and mobile than assisted living residents.

SUMMARY

Docents with considerable experience with nursing home residents can attest to the tremendous satisfaction they gain from working with these people. In all likelihood, these successful tours were characterized by careful planning, knowledge of the group’s needs, a recognition of the dignity and worth of the group members, and by aggressive attempts to engage the participants during the tour.
Skeptical Visitors in the Art Museum

Chances are good that every docent will eventually encounter reluctant or skeptical visitors. Docents serving in art museums and galleries have special problems with such viewers since much of the art world seems subjective and mysterious to novice gallery-goers. Because art museums do not have the same straightforward, factual aura found in many science and history museums, viewers feel particularly at liberty to rely upon their own opinions and to confuse these opinions with informed, critical evaluations. The opinions and biases of these visitors are easily activated by abstract and non-representational works, contemporary art, naïve and folk art, as well as by nudity and certain themes that may conflict with religious or political beliefs.

Skeptical viewers come in all ages. It is not unusual for young children when looking at naïve art to say, scornfully, “It looks like a kid did that!” And, every docent eventually meets visitors who say some version of “Do people get money for that?” “If this is art, I’m going home!”. “My kid could do that!” “I could do that!”

Remarks such as these often reveal biases about art that are typical of many viewers. You, yourself, may even share some of these thoughts. How can you become more comfortable with your own questions and handle the skeptical visitor, too?

It may be helpful to remember that almost everyone is uncomfortable when first facing the unfamiliar. Therefore, it is best not to rush the process of understanding. Recall that most art styles and movements were not greeted with joyful acceptance when they first emerged. The Impressionists, whose works are among the most widely enjoyed today, were rejected from the French academic salons and were referred to as “lunatics” in the press when their works first appeared. Even the term impressionism, derived from the title of a Monet painting, was not considered a flattering one at that time.

Many visitors arrive with the belief that art should be “beautiful.” This is an idea that dates back to ancient times. However, definitions of what constitutes beauty have changed during the intervening years, as has what the term “beauty” refers to. Over the centuries “beauty” has been defined as physical appearance, goodness, morality, as certain sublime emotions, or as a psychological response to certain predictable visual stimuli. The problem with using beauty as the criterion for art is that it is not specific, and that it is culturally, temporally, and personally subjective. It also discounts the idea that artists are people who challenge our assumptions, rather than simply pandering to them.

Art is not simply decoration. It is a language or visual code for important ideas in culture. Art functions as far more than the personal expression of the artist. Art discusses what we think, how we behave, and what we feel. Just as contemporary life is not always beautiful, contemporary art can reflect the strife inherent in our times — violence, disease, political oppression, racism, and sexism.

At some point in your tour, it is incumbent upon you to demonstrate how an art work can be analyzed. Through the process of questioning, help visitors see a work’s formal design elements. Develop discussions about any narrative subject matter you, or they, perceive in the work. If some deeper symbolic or hidden meaning seems evident, talk about that. Skeptical viewers often do not know that understanding art is more than just reacting to it.

Let your visitors know that understanding art is not like watching television. You cannot be passive and
simply respond. You must participate and use your ability to see. Quick
looks at 30 seconds or less, which are
the kind that many visitors give to any
particular work, will not inform. Model
more productive behaviors by spending
as much time as possible with a single
object to demonstrate the process of in-
depth looking and consideration.

Ask questions of your reluctant
visitors, such as:
- What choices did the artist have to
  make about materials? About color?
- What risks did this artist take?
- If you could remake this work, how
  would you make it better, or different?
- What might the artist be trying to tell
  us in this work?
- What might a child (or with children,
  an adult) say about this work?
- What do you think this artist’s life is
  like? How do you find that in his/her
  work?

Another challenge skeptical viewers
 may pose is their belief that an artist may
de be deliberately fooling us, and that the
work is a scam or a slap in the face.

They may even believe that curators and
critics have “had the wool pulled over
their eyes.”

Given the fact that less than 1% of
serious artists actually make a reasonable
living from their art alone, it seems
unlikely that many artists would use the
hard-won opportunity to exhibit their
work just to mock institutions and the
people visiting them. While some artists
do use their work to question art trends,
the sanctity of the museum world, or the
preciousness of art objects, these efforts
are done in earnest and have validity.

One of the most important things a
docent can teach is to feel open and
relaxed with works of art, rather than
tense and fearful. A docent’s attitude
about viewing art, even when unspoken,
will be sensed and noted. It is essential
that docents be open-minded and
accepting of art. No, he or she need not
love everything on display; however, the
docent should remember and understand
that personal feelings about art do not
constitute informed viewing or a full,
solid critical evaluation.

Should you experience personal
difficulties accepting a work or an

exhibition, take this as challenge. Do
some research. Discuss the work(s) with
staff members until you are more
comfortable, or at least until you
understand why the museum has chosen
to display it/them.

Art has the power to stir emotions and
challenge the intellect. If you call
upon your own interest, excitement,
honest concerns, and analytical skills,
you can enhance your awareness and
understanding while challenging
skeptical visitors to shift from wariness
into a willingness to look deeper into art
and themselves.

Ellen J. Henry is the education
director of the Peninsula Fine Arts Center
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Virginia Art Education Association.

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