Multiculturalism
Diversity in our Audiences and Collections

Helping Children See Through Bias
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“Truths” that are Self-Evident

Regardless of whether you read The Docent Educator in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Panama, or the United States, you reside in a multicultural environment. All modern nations are composed of a variety of cultures — indigenous, dominant, and minority; and all societies are characterized by diversity — including differences in race, ethnicity, religion, language, and so forth.

North America has always been multicultural. The first people here spoke different languages, maintained separate tribal identities, and observed different customs from one another. And every group arriving thereafter has contributed to the mix. While the character of these contributions was often overtly discouraged, their substance was routinely integrated and used to strengthen the whole.

Whether by neglect or design, we who live in the United States have done little to chronicle the contributions made by the different cultures that compose our society. Thus, we know less than we should about ourselves and tend to have a skewed view of our own history and national character.

Lately, however, a new awareness is beginning to emerge, and with it some of the “truths” people hold sacred are being challenged or replaced. Many have already unraveled. Hollywood westerns, which once had portrayed Indians as senseless and brutal savages, now challenge that view in such films as “Dances with Wolves.” The reviling and internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II has been replaced by a sense of collective shame, and legislation to make reparations to these victims of unfounded prejudice.

Instability often follows in the wake of change, and the shift toward understanding, valuing, and respecting diversity has been accompanied by feelings of turmoil, defensiveness, and fear. We should not be altogether surprised to learn that the school board of Lake County Florida recently passed a law that “required teaching [students] that American culture is inherently superior to others” (New York Times, Sunday, May 15, 1994, p. #12Y). Fortunately, however, such acts seem desperate, silly, and make most people wonder how do they define ‘American culture’?

While such fear-generated myopia is not characteristic of staff educators and docents serving in museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens, it must still be guarded against. It is not uncommon within the U.S. to have an “us” and “them” mentality about the composite cultures existing within our nation, or to have varying degrees of xenophobia about the cultures of other nations.

It’s been said that the key to flourishing in a multicultural environment (locally or globally) is possessing an ability to recognize yourself in someone who is least like you. At the very least, all people:

→ share a desire not to be abbreviated into a stereotype;
→ find depersonalization degrading;
→ seek a personal connection when learning; and
→ have similar needs and desires.

Let’s examine just a few of the implications of these common traits.

No one appreciates historical stereotypes or falsehoods. It is abhorrent to have one’s history or people trivialized. For example, hearing that slaves were “happy” or “well cared for” before emancipation is insulting, simplistic, and just plain incorrect. While some slaves may have been content with their fate, such statements do not acknowledge the wholesale degradation, lack of control over one’s destiny, and destruction of families that is far more characteristic of such a brutal system.

Depersonalization is degrading. No one wants to be thought of as a commodity. For instance, referring to Chinese or Irish people only as “an inexpensive labor force” used to build railroads or canals is callous. It does not acknowledge the hardships and costs of such servitude, nor does it reflect their aspirations and many other contributions. Similarly, depersonalizing the victims of genocides, holocausts, or famines into such objective terms as numbers or percentages can be obdurate and frightful if not balanced by references to their humanity.

All people seek themselves, or a personal connection, when learning. When learning about the past, people will find most relevant what they connect with most directly. If you are an African-American student visiting a plantation home in the South, for example, it is only natural that you would want to know about the lives and contributions of the slaves on the plantation. This does not mean that you would be uninterested in the lives and personal affects of the plantation owners, but the owners may not be your connection to the past.

This same desire to identify personally invites many white visitors to misconceive of their own connection to the past. Most will place themselves into the role of the wealthy homeowner when
"It's been said that the key to flourishing in a multicultural environment (locally or globally) is possessing an ability to recognize yourself in someone who is least like you."

visiting historic houses. They dreamily consider how grand and gracious life would have been for them back then. Rarely are they told of how few people actually had access to such luxury, and how restrictive the social and economic barriers to such lifestyles were during earlier times.

All people have similar needs and desires. People everywhere require shelter and food; want good lives for their children; observe celebrations and rights of passage; adorn themselves and their objects; construct rules; and so forth. Should your museum examine different people and their customs, try discovering some of the similarities, rather than just the differences, among them.

If your institution examines the interaction of early European settlers with Indians, have visitors find similarities between the two groups. Consider, for instance, the ways in which 17th century Native Americans and Scottish Clansmen adorned themselves. How are their traditional modes of dress and decoration similar? How did these traditional embellishments serve similar purposes?

Should an African mask of a human face marked by scarification (the cutting and scarring of flesh in order to impose a design upon the skin) be thought of as "barbaric" or "primitive," establish parallels to such culturally familiar practices as tattooing, plastic surgery, hair removal, and ear piercing. That should make the unfamiliar seem less strange. Similarly, a reliquary figure containing the bones of an ancestor may seem less odd when compared to an urn containing the ashes of a loved one.

If you introduce visitors to endangered species from other parts of the world, how do you present the issue? Do you inadvertently give the impression that the animal or plant’s endangered status is the result of uncaring or uneducated people in a third world country? Or, do you compare such problems as the need for jobs, demands of growth, use of pesticides, desire for economic trade, pressures of competing interests, and so forth to those that we, in our country, are also struggling with?

There is little doubt that living in a multicultural world makes teaching more complex. But it also makes it richer and more interesting. Variety and spice do enliven our diet! And, learning to adjust the ways we view other people and interpret objects is well worth the added effort.

So remember, when the variables related to teaching seem overwhelming, good teachers are never complacent. They understand that teaching is a skill never fully acquired, and that it will always require diligence, deliberation, and further refinement.
Building Bridges

Multiculturalism is a term that perplexes me. I have attended conference sessions and museum-sponsored seminars, read articles, and participated in many informal discussions on the term. It seems the term 'multiculturalism' is one of those enormous concepts that holds a variety of meanings. I'm a little uncomfortable with this because the term is so often used as if we all understood and accepted a shared meaning. And, from my own experiences, that is rarely the case.

This past summer, while rereading Harper Lee’s novel, To Kill A Mockingbird, I came across the passage where Atticus Finch is comforting his daughter, Scout, after a particularly trying day at school.

"Atticus stood up and walked to the end of the porch. When he completed his examination of the wisteria vine he strolled back to me.

"First of all," he said, "if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view —"

"Sir?"

"— until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

That’s it. In Miss Lee’s 1960 novel about childhood in a Southern town, I’d finally found an elegant way to sum up how I personally define the term multiculturalism. To get inside someone else’s skin and walk around in it for a while. This may not be the way the museum community chooses to define the term, but this definition helps me remember that when I’m developing or participating in programs, I must actively seek out many points of view, that my truth is not the only truth, and that I must help all people feel considered and welcome if I truly want to connect with my audience.

Creating the Welcome Mat

Your primary responsibility as a docent is to make each person you encounter at your museum feel welcome. One way to do this is to shift how you think about the people who visit your institution. What if everyone who walks through your doors was considered a guest, rather than a visitor? Would that shift in perception influence how you respond in your role as docent? How differently do you treat a guest in your home from a visitor at your door? I have heard museum staff — both paid and volunteer — mutter the term 'visitor' as if a visitor were someone to be avoided. Museum, zoo, park, or garden guests are our reason for being. And, if our guests feel welcome and wanted, they will return.

Facing Stereotypes

Institutions across the United States are heeding the call to diversify their boards, staff, and volunteer corps. And despite efforts to develop staffs that reflect an institution’s entire community, I still look like the average docent in most museums: middle-to-upper-middle class, married, over - 30 female of European descent. These facts about me can influence how I treat others and how other people treat me. So, when I conduct programs, I need to consider the stereotypes I hold for other cultural groups. What things get in the way of my attempts to connect with others? I must acknowledge my biases about age, abilities, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, education, and economics. Those are the "biggies," but there are much more subtle stereotypes that can interfere with my connecting with guests. For example, prejudging students’
abilities, performance, and behaviors based on the address of the school, or because the children are visiting from a particular day camp, or making assumptions about the attitudes and behavior of chaperones, kids who wear starter jackets, people in fur coats, or people who only visit on 'free day.'

Group labels can also get in the way of connecting with people. Often, tour reservation forms contain cryptic notes such as "learning disabilities," "seniors," and "gifted." Like 'multicultural' the meanings of these terms can vary wildly depending on who's using them. You owe it to yourself and your guests to fully understand what that label means for the group in order to do your best work. How can you do that? I urge docents to telephone the leader of the group to discuss the types and extent of "learning disabilities," or "giftedness," or whatever.

After calling, I knew a docent who rerouted his tour to be certain it would be fully accessible for the seniors who used wheelchairs. Another docent included many more touchable objects than usual after learning that some of the students in her group are blind. A third docent made a point of learning how to say, "Good morning, children. Welcome to the zoo!" in Spanish even though she knew the group would have a translator along. Being able to discuss and clarify a label with the group's leader helps docents tailor basic programs to the needs of the group.

I must also understand that museum guests will prejudge me based on the stereotypes they hold for people who look and act like me. It is my responsibility to think about ways to put others at ease so I can help museum guests make the most of their visit.

Building Bridges

Regardless of the cultural differences that separate people there are many commonalities that we all share and which can help us bridge the gaps between us. Try to focus on the shared commonalities to help put museum guests at ease.

First, everyone wants to know what's going to happen next. Knowing what to expect helps people relax enough to appreciate whatever comes next. How do you do that?

Before beginning anything, set expectations. At the start of a tour, introduce yourself and let guests, especially children, know how to address you — "I like to be called Jean." Positively state any rules or preferences up front. For example, "We need to be especially quiet after entering this enclosure because our female fruit bat gave birth last week," or "Let's hold all questions until we get onto the trail." Let guests know where bathrooms are located and when there will be time to take a break. Be clear about smoking policies and where refreshments can be enjoyed.

When teaching a class, let teachers and parents know what's expected of them. For instance, "When we get to the craft project, I'd like all the adults to help the children cut the fabric." Let children know if you have rules that might be different from their classroom rules.

Another thing people share in common is curiosity. People love to be in the know — so, tell 'em! Work to satisfy their curiosity about your entire institution. Talk about upcoming events or classes, share information about becoming a member of your institution, let them know how to take advantage of family programs, special tours, volunteering, or anything else that may pique a guest's interest in further participation. The more information you can share with guests the more at home they will feel. Just be sure that any information you share is intended to be shared publicly.

... when I'm developing or participating in programs, I must actively seek out many points of view ... I must help all people feel considered and welcome if I truly want to connect with my audience.

photo: Mike Greer, Chicago Zoological Society

by Jean Linsner
Everyone wants to feel like they matter. Here are some ways to show your guests they truly matter to you and your institution. Start on time and end on time. Everyone’s time is valuable and punctuality is a sign of respect. When a group arrives late for a program, the best course of action is to deliver the entire program as planned. However, when tight scheduling makes that impossible, be prepared to edit the late-arriving group’s program down to the most important elements without taking time from the next group. All this needs to be done without blaming the group for being late. Usually their late arrival was out of their control.

Guests want to feel like you were expecting them. Know the name of the group or the school, including the correct pronunciation. Learn the name of the teacher or group leader, have all props ready and enough handouts. Greet guests with a genuine smile. Sometimes groups show up for tours, but no one at the museum was expecting them. Someone made a mistake. Figure that out after the guests have received the most informative and gracious tour possible.

Take into account your guests’ experience with your institution. Ask them questions — Have you visited here before? What have you been studying in school? Is anyone a member? Was there something you specifically hoped to see? Be flexible. Change what you can to meet their needs and let them know if there is anything you won’t be able to cover.

Rethink the vocabulary, examples, and anecdotes. During a tour, a docent use the term “flesh-colored.” What he meant was a very pale tan color. His audience, however, was a class of African-American children. The adjective he selected caused confusion at best.

Some Final Thoughts

“Joanne!!!”
The stillness of the exhibit is broken. “Joanne, look!!! It’s here — the baby giraffe you told us about — it’s here — I saw it!”

Unbridled, raw enthusiasm. The cry of a seven-year-old connecting with something her teacher helped her discover at the afterschool program she attends.

Imagine you’re the docent in this exhibit. The quiet of your observation ends as several young children from an inner-city afterschool program enter. What are you feeling? How will you react? Because museum guests see docents as the embodiment of the museum, how you respond to these children and their teacher will largely determine the quality of their visit and their feelings towards the institution. What choices will you make?

Jean Linsner directs Operation SMART, a science, math, and technology program for children in Chicago YWCA afterschool centers. She is Program Co-Chair for the Association of Volunteer Administrators of Metropolitan Chicago. Ms. Linsner earned her M.S. in Education at Indiana University. Prior to joining the YWCA staff, she managed the docent and Guest Guide volunteer programs at the Brookfield Zoo. Ms. Linsner wrote of her experiences managing the Zoo’s 270 volunteers in her article “Volunteer Program Mechanics,” which appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of The Docent Educator.

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Survival in the Chalbi Desert
Multicultural Perspectives at the Zoo
by Marta Gore

Incorporating multicultural perspectives into exhibit interpretation encourages visitors to gain an appreciation for the longevity and diversity of native cultures. At the Brookfield Zoo, a team of docents has developed a “touch cart” demonstration that introduces visitors to the lifestyles of the Gabbra people, who live in the Chalbi Desert area of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia.

The touch cart is situated in The Fragile Desert section of the Zoo’s three part exhibition, The Fragile Kingdom. The theme of The Fragile Kingdom is the ecology of survival, and in The Fragile Desert visitors are shown how desert plants and animals, including humans, cope with extreme heat and shortages of food and water.

The touch cart demonstration serves as an interactive, interpretive component within the exhibit. Docents present visitors with an opportunity to carefully touch and handle authentic Gabbra artifacts. By combining object-based learning with questioning strategies, docents help visitors gain appreciation for those who cope with the problems of desert survival, and invite visitors to compare and contrast their lifestyle with that of the Gabbra people.

Learning how the Gabbra’s lifestyle enables them to use scarce food and water resources in a sustainable and renewable manner prompts an examination of our own lifestyles. It also encourages us to consider how we, too, might use our natural resources in a more sustainable way.

Though Brookfield Zoo visitors learn an approach to survival and conservation in the desert, the touch cart concept may have just as easily been used to enhance the study of art, history, or technology. Multicultural perspectives have much to offer us and questioning strategies help us relate them to any discipline area.

Questions Help Deliver Messages
Questioning strategies enable docents to lead visitors in any number of directions. At the Brookfield Zoo, docent training includes several sessions on informal learning and communication skills. Docents learn a questioning strategy that focuses on four levels — recall, process, application, and affective.

Each level builds upon the other. To be most effective, questions are asked in sequence, beginning with recall questions that allow visitors to recall what they’ve learned, make observations, and collect information.

After sufficient data has been gathered, docents raise the level of thinking by progressing to process level questions. This encourages visitors to compare, infer, and analyze. Finally, the thinking level can be raised further with application and affective questions.

When additional information or new concepts are introduced, docents return to the next lower level, allowing visitors an opportunity to gather missing data or to re-examine ideas.

The Gabbra touch cart demonstration utilizes all four levels of questioning. Docents begin the demonstration with a “recall” question. (Do you think it is easy or hard to live in a desert?) Answers to recall questions are based on prior knowledge. This level of questioning asks visitors to list, name, describe, define, observe, identify, recall, count, or select.

The next level of questioning gets visitors to “process” information. (Why would it be hard to live in a desert?) Answers are based on organizing information and on finding cause and effect relationships. Process questions ask visitors to classify, compare, contrast,

(Continued on page 20.)
The Community as Teacher

**A View from Within**

The paintings are in muted browns, greens, and beige. Asian eyes — eyes like mine — stare back at me from behind barbed wire and in barracks. They were my parents and my relatives and all their friends.

In this case, art imitated life — the life of over 110,000 Japanese-Americans who were evacuated from their West Coast homes, farms, and businesses and forced to spend World War II within the confines of hastily-assembled "relocation centers" in the wastelands within Wyoming, Arkansas, Colorado and other interior states. The event went down in history as one of America’s biggest civil liberty errors — the evacuation and internment of an entire civilian population from the Western states, based on race. These centers became known as "America’s concentration camps."

Interned with the evacuees were a number of reputable painters and illustrators. Some had worked on W.P.A. murals in the San Francisco Bay Area in the Thirties. Others had exhibited their works at prestigious museums and galleries throughout the United States and in Europe and Japan. For many, art was not their occupation but their calling; they survived by working menial day jobs as gardeners, cooks, and laborers.

These artists formed art schools in the camps as one of a number of activities to battle the boredom and maintain some form of normalcy for the residents. They, along with farmers, physicians, housewives, and gardeners who became amateur artists in the camps, created works in captivity that later became the core of the Japanese-American National Museum (JANM) exhibition, *The View from Within."

First displayed at UCLA in 1992, *The View from Within* had a successful four-month run at the San Jose Museum of Art. The venue was appropriate, as San Jose was home to many Japanese-Americans who farmed and worked in the area and who were forced to relocate in World War II.

**Looking for a Few Good Docents**

As a way of supplementing the San Jose Museum of Art’s regular crew of volunteer docents, and to provide a unique perspective of the internment experience for visitors, the JANM recruited "community docents" from its San Jose-area members. Twenty Japanese-Americans, a mixture of camp survivors and younger JANM members, signed up for training sessions.

Although I wasn’t even a gleam in my father’s eye when the relocation occurred (and I had no formal art training), volunteering my time was a way for me to better understand my parents’ camp experiences. And the works in the exhibit really put the hook in me, projecting powerful images of camp: the barbed wire, the guard towers, the overcrowding, and the dust — always the dust — that filtered through the walls and floors of the cheap tar-paper barracks my parents and thousands of others lived in.

**The Heart of the Matter**

We trained alongside the museum’s regular docents. Exhibit curator Karin Higa, a third-generation Japanese-American whose parents were interred during World War II, flew up daily from her JANM office in Los Angeles to direct the sessions.

Important to the success of the exhibit was a session on race and discrimination, held by the JANM directors Nancy Araki and Mary Worthington. They stood side-by-side in front of the class and asked us to detect any differences between them. No one would mention the main difference until Ms. Araki broached it herself. She was of Japanese ancestry. After that, there were discussions between Japanese-American trainees and the mostly-white docents about our experiences with race and discrimination. By evening’s end, I think each group had a better understanding of the other — and deeper feelings for the art we were about to explain.

**My Rough Debut**

Some of the community docents chose to stay away the first week the exhibit opened, worried that they weren’t yet ready to face the crowds. I wasn’t fully prepared to discuss the 130 works in the exhibit, but signed up for the opening night gala anyway. It turned out that I was the first docent to show up and that I would lead the first group to go in — a group that seemed to grow in volume as the tour went on. I learned the hard way that you can’t "wing it" as a docent. My copious notes helped, but my presentation was rough and my voice didn’t survive the tour. I felt awful.

While my art presentation remained somewhat weak, my historical presentations became stronger as I began working more shifts. I used graphics in my tours — photocopies of camp diagrams and evacuation posters. I could feel the emotion welling up in me as I described scenes such as: Japanese-American soldiers leaving their families behind in camp to serve in a segregated U.S. Army unit and fight and die on a hundred battlefields (and liberate another
“Although I wasn’t even a gleam in my father’s eye when the relocation occurred (and I had no formal art training), volunteering my time was a way for me to better understand my parents’ camp experiences.”

camp they had not known of … Dachau, and to become one of the most-decorated units in Army history; the furor between young and old internees over government-demanded loyalty oaths; and the frustration at not being recognized as “good” Americans.

One thing that surprised me was the interest taken in the exhibit by student groups. Tours were given for elementary and high school students, and quite a few students and instructors came on their own.

An entire art history class at the University of California at Santa Cruz chose to make The View from Within its term project. Some of those students drove 40 miles over a winding mountain highway to San Jose. They were touched by the exhibit and told me so. When I asked why, they said the internment had not received a lot of ink in school history texts and that the pictures presented by the exhibit, coupled with docent presentations, gave new meaning to the issues involved.

Classroom teachers apparently felt the same way. They questioned me about names, dates, events that had occurred in the camps, materials, and where I had obtained my graphics — information they could use in future lectures. It was a good thing that I had done some research on the internment. The many books I had previously collected on this subject provided me with useful facts and recollections. I knew the internment was important for Japanese-Americans to remember, but knowing that it would be given so much attention in our schools made me proud that my docent contribution might make a difference some day in explaining how freedom will always be taken for granted until it is lost.

The older Community Docents in our group were content to discuss their camp experiences. Their vivid recollections provided much insight for exhibit visitors. Regarding a painting of coyotes roaming a camp in the Utah desert, a survivor recalled that, as a child, her mother not-so-jokingly told her she would be fed to the coyotes if she didn’t behave. Overall, the response from visitors to The View from Within and to our docent group was overwhelmingly positive.

Near the end of the exhibit’s time at the museum, I escorted my mother on a special tour of The View from Within. She marveled at the works on display, particularly those of her camp in Wyoming, and was happy that I had become involved in my own heritage. For me, this was a beautiful reward.

Bruce Iwamoto is a paralegal with the United States Department of Justice in San Jose, California. He was a Community Docent at the San Jose Museum of Art during the Spring 1994 presentation of The View from Within.

by Bruce Iwamoto

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For Your Consideration

References about the Full Spectrum of American History

While the English immigrants and their descendants require and deserve attention, for they possessed inordinate power to define American culture and make public policy, learning about a range of other cultures can fill out understandings and help to explain general patterns and characteristics in our society. Try reading such texts as:

- Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*
- Albert Camarillo’s *Chicanos in a Changing Society*
- Irving Howe’s *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America*
- Yuji Ichioka’s *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants*
- Lawrence Levine’s *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*
- Kerby Miller’s *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*.
- Ronald Takaki’s *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*

Time to Change

Are we getting too sensitive about what we say and how we say it? No! Do words really make a difference? Yes, they do! Language reflects and shapes attitudes. Consider what these two items, from the 1930 edition of *Compton’s Pictured Encyclopedia*, communicated to children of that time.

- Eskimo tribes are referred to as “the inferior people living in Alaska.”
- On a map of the African continent, those geographic areas where whites settled are captioned, “where the light shines in darkest Africa.”

Museums Showcase Multicultural Resources

An increasing number of museums and historic organizations are creating and sharing educational materials that highlight minority and multicultural societies. Among the resources available are:

- **African Diversity**: The Art Institute of Chicago [(312) 443-3575] offers *The Arts of Africa*, a teaching unit that uses art as “a vehicle for showing students the intricate tapestry of diverse peoples, languages, and cultures that is Africa.”
- **Chicano Culture**: The Wight Art Gallery in Los Angeles, CA, [(310) 825-1461] developed educational materials examining civil rights and the Chicano culture from an interdisciplinary perspective.
- **Holocaust Lessons**: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [(202) 653-9220] in Washington, DC, offers curricula, lesson plans, and videotapes that introduce young people to the Holocaust and to its remembrance.

The Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, VA, [(804) 649-1861] has developed an exemplary teaching unit entitled *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*. The unit uses primary documents, narratives, songs, and folktales to discuss slavery, traditions, celebrations, everyday life, resistance, and the Civil War.

- **Native American Topics**: The Heard Museum in Phoenix, AZ, [(602) 252-8840] specializes in Native American art and artifacts. They offer five multimedia instructional packets that use specific Native American tribes to convey a social studies topic.
- **Asian Cultures**: The Asia Resource Center in Washington, DC, [(202) 547-1114] rents exhibits and materials that feature Asian cultures, including *Vietnamese Folk Art: The Block Prints of Dong Ho and Hang Trong*, which present various aspects of Vietnamese life including family and educational issues.

These resources might be as valuable a complement to docent training, and as useful a method for engendering cross cultural awareness and sensitivity among volunteer and staff educators, as they are vehicles for institutional outreach and school programming.
Did You Know…?

- The first Africans arrived in Jamestown a full year before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock.
- An African-American surgeon performed the first successful heart operation on a human being.
- Asian-Americans began arriving in the U.S. over one hundred and fifty years ago, before many European immigrant groups. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the first law prohibiting entry of immigrants on the basis of nationality.
- Many Chicanos are not illegal aliens, but were already living in lands that the United States incorporated during wars with Mexico.
- Even before American Indians, the Irish were the first ethnic group the English termed “savage.” The Irish were also the first people to “pioneer” the American urban ghetto.

Children’s Stories

Unlike the debate over school curricula, the revolution in children’s books reflecting multicultural diversity has been a peaceful one. Long gone are the books that introduced children to the quaint customs of our little friends from foreign lands. Instead, there is *The Last Princess* (Four Winds Press), by Fay Stanley and Diane Stanley, a biography of Princess Ka‘īulani, who tried in vain to prevent American businessmen from taking over Hawai‘i in the late 19th century. Or the books of Harriet Rohmer, founder of Children’s Book Press in San Francisco. Ms. Rohmer publishes books that are told by an author who shares the story’s culture. Blia Xiong is from Laos, and her story *Nine-in-One Girl! Gr!* is about the Hmong tribe. Carmen Lomas Garza’s *Family Pictures* depicts the author’s own Mexican-American childhood in south Texas. And, *Tar Beach*, by artist Faith Ringgold, tells the story of an African-American childhood in the inner city.

It Works for Me ...
Sharing successful techniques and ideas.

Receivng *The Docent Educator* has encouraged me to write about a special project of mine. I call it “building memories.”

It began one day while touring a third grade group. Three of the children recognized me from the previous year and asked if we could go to see the same pictures where we had had so much fun before. It took me a while to realize that I had given them a tour on landscapes. Here is what we talked about together.

Have you ever been out in the country? Have you ever been on a farm or read a story about a farm? Well, we’re going to pretend we all live on a farm over here (outside the painting). It is Saturday and we have chores to do — what kind of chores do kids have on a farm? (feed chickens, slop hogs, bring in wood, make beds – endless)

Well, I’m all finished my chores and Mother says we can go play in the meadow. Let’s run over there (pointing to the meadow in the painting). What kind of day is it? How did the artist tell us that? How could we make it look like fall / winter?

I don’t see any toys. What are we going to play with? Oh, we could climb the trees! Let’s do it; I’m going up real high. Are you coming? Look down, how does the meadow look from up here?

Who lives in this tree? (birds, insects, squirrels, even snakes) It’s nice and cool up here. Do you see the leaves moving? Why are they moving? This is nice, but now I want to climb down and explore the meadow. Who is coming with me?

What do you see in the tall grass? (flowers, insects — you can prompt them by pretending to find an insect and asking them what kind it is) Oh, Jason has found a frog by the pond over here, and he is going to chase us with it. Where should we run?

Now I’m all hot and sweaty. What can we do to cool off? Jump in the pond! Great! I’m going to jump right in, are you? Will it be cold? Will it be deep? How can you tell?

Wait, I hear Mother calling us. It’s lunch. Let’s dry off and hurry back. What is the fastest way back to the farm?

I have never had a group since who has failed to participate with enthusiasm. If you become one of them, while leading with enthusiasm, they will follow!

Mary Doiron, docent
New Orleans Museum of Art
New Orleans, LA

What Works for You?!?

Are there questions, activities, games, or teaching techniques that have been particularly successful for you? Let us know which ones they are so that we might share them with others. *The Docent Educator* requests that docents everywhere, serving in all types of institutional settings, send in their ideas and methods for inclusion in our “It Works for Me” column.

Please remember that this publication is your vehicle for professional growth. It requires your participation and willingness to share in order to foster professional development among your fellow volunteer and staff educators serving in museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens.
Oyate Tawicoh'an
(The Ways of the People)

Curators are educators, too. Every decision we make during the exhibit planning process is made with educational goals in mind. Like each word in a Poe short story, each object and illustration is selected for its contribution to the whole and for its ability to tell a story larger than itself. We try not to select obscure objects that are difficult to relate to, and we strive not to write dense labels that put off the average visitor. You see, curators, too, want the general public to understand what they see in a museum and to learn from it.

At the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, South Dakota, we have taken a fairly simple approach to presenting and interpreting another culture — we ask members of that culture to join with us in order to produce and explain an exhibit essentially from their point of view. South Dakota is home to nine Sioux Indian reservations and is surrounded by more in neighboring states.

Consistent with our mission to interpret the cultures of all South Dakotans, we are presenting the Sioux people in one part of a three-part, $3 million permanent exhibition installation.

The traditional approach to presenting Indian culture in museum exhibits has been an anthropological one — nice niches (home, family, roles of men and women, occupations, religion). It appeals to Euro-American sensibilities and mirrors the way we think of ourselves. Early in our planning, however, we discovered that this approach might not be the best way to explain Sioux culture. For example, white society tends to compartmentalize religion. Except among the most devout, the sacred and the secular usually occupy separate spheres of our lives. This is not true in Sioux society. The sacred and the secular are inextricably combined and cannot logically be separated into two areas of discussion in a museum exhibit.

To respond to problems such as this, and to meet our educational goals, we needed to try an approach other than the traditional one. In 1990, we officially established an Indian advisory committee (although an ad hoc committee had existed since 1976) to help us sensitively interpret Sioux culture and to represent the Indian point of view in exhibits on post-contact South Dakota.

Together, staff and committee members devised a different strategy. The Sioux would be presented in their own terms, through their four cardinal virtues: courage, fortitude, wisdom, and generosity. The committee remained with us every step of the way, offering their advice, objecting to some of our characterizations of beliefs or objects, and helping us locate craftspeople and other consultants that enabled us to carry out this project.

In the exhibition, Oyate Tawicoh'an (The Ways of the People), we wanted our visitors to learn the following:

To shift the point of view away from that of Euro-Americans, only the work of Indian artists was used to illustrate points throughout this exhibition.

Detail from a muslin painting by an unknown artist, ca. 1880, shows a courting couple.

photo: Robert Travis, South Dakota State Historical Society
This horse tooth necklace could be explained as adornment or, when placed in context, could represent a young man's acts of wo’ochitika (courage).
issue continues to this day, and illustrates the cultural divide existing between whites and Indians.

The Sioux virtue of wacantognaka (generosity) dictates that a person is known for what he or she gives, not keeps. The cultural imperative to generosity gave rise to the extraordinary productivity of Sioux women, who lavishly beaded gifts, and the extreme bravery of men, who captured horses to give away. Indeed, people in mourning gave away literally all of their belongings (including their clothes, horses, and tipis) at the conclusion of their year of mourning. Seeing this concept explained may help white visitors gain a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, their neighbors — the Sioux.

One way to shift the point of view away from who Euro-Americans believe the Sioux are to the view the Sioux have of themselves was to avoid using the work of white artists as illustrations for the exhibit. We decided to use illustrations created by Sioux people — a way of presenting them as they saw themselves. As it happened, our collection offered a wealth of imagery that illustrated points the exhibit tried to make.

We avoided the use of loaded English words with negative connotations. For instance, raiding for horses was one way that a young man gained prestige, wealth, and demonstrated his courage. Traditionally, white anthropologists have called this activity “horse stealing.” Instead we use the term “horse taking” or “horse capture,” both of which we believe are correct and far less negative.

**Objects and their Meanings**

Visitors will learn that simple objects have larger meaning, and they may learn to look for those meanings. For instance, we show a necklace made of horse teeth, which a young man named Hump made himself from the teeth of horses he had captured. Of course it is adornment, but in this context it represents more — a young man’s acts of wo’ochitika (courage).

We learned to look for the larger meanings in objects ourselves, as we spent weeks looking at our Indian collection with fresh eyes. With the aid of our advisors, we grouped the objects in a new sequence under each of the virtues and stopped thinking of anthropological niches. Although the fit was not always perfect, we believe we are using most of our great objects in fresh new ways.

**Visitors**

Of paramount importance was to produce an exhibit in which our Indian visitors would feel comfortable. We want them to feel a shock of recognition that they may never have felt before in a non-tribal museum. And, we want them to feel a sense of ownership in our museum that we may have failed to instill in the past. All of the Indian people associated with the project thus far have felt very positive, but only time and visitors will tell us if we succeeded. [Stay tuned to The Docent Educator for a follow-up report.]

We believe Oyate Tawicoh’an will work well for the self-guided visitors, but we know that it will work even better for the tour-guided visitor. Our tour guides can make explicit the subtle connections between object and beliefs. They can help visitors come out of themselves and go into the mind set of the other culture. They can lead the visitor to accept the other culture on its own terms, rather than their own, at which point they may begin to understand the “other” in a way they could not before.

It is impossible to develop a museum exhibit in the United States without acknowledging the presence and influence of whites. While we will not explain trade networks that brought European beads and other manufactured objects into Indian communities, white anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians are given an opportunity to explain where they think the Sioux came from. The difference, however, is that side by side with this explanation will be the Sioux creation story, given equal
Moving camp was often an event akin to a forced march, and demonstrates the Sioux virtue of wowacintanka (fortitude).

weight, to explain their origins as they see themselves. Instead of valuing one explanation over another, we offer the visitors two possible explanations, and allow them to pick one, or blend the two. It is the ultimate open-ended question!

Curators do believe in the educational possibilities of museums. As guides through museum collections, they can aid you in designing tours and programs with deeper educational meaning — the object is more than a relic. And you, in turn, can aid them in making more explicit the deeper meanings and values object hold, in a way that speaks to all visitors.

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HOW TO ESTABLISH YOUR OWN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Assuming your museum does not already have an Indian advisory committee, the education department should seriously consider establishing one. Designing tours and education programs present equal opportunities for presenting the "other" to students and visitors. [Our advisory committee is exclusively Sioux. If you have a pan-Indian committee, you may need to increase your numbers.]

Seek broad representation among indigenous people. Try to get people who are articulate and knowledgeable about their culture. It is advisable to have a religious representative to help you navigate those tricky waters; seek representation from a range of ages and both sexes. It also does not hurt to have at least one person who is politically connected. You should also look for someone who knows the language well, although under the happiest of situations, all of your committee members would be native speakers.

WORKING WITH AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Here are a few key things to keep in mind when working with an advisory committee:

X make certain that committee members are, or become, acquainted with your institution; help them understand you specific needs and how they differ from other educational media (an exhibit is not a book, for instance); make sure they can support your institutional goals;

X listen to what they say, and how they say it; try not to let your preconceived notions of what their real concerns might be prevent you from understanding what their concerns actually are;

X pick up on their terminology, use their phrases, ask for explanations of what you don’t understand, but make sure you make an effort to find out about their culture on your own. (You should read the works of white anthropologists carefully — descriptions of objects and ceremonies are probably more reliable than speculations on motives or other cultural explanations);

X make an effort to properly pronounce their words. Nothing is more annoying to someone’s ears than their beautiful language being massacred;

X remember that in many cultures, deference to elders is the norm. This may mean that younger members of your committee will be reluctant to express a dissenting opinion in a group. Save time for the occasional private conversation.
The Birth of American English

"American-English," as it would come to be known, was a rich mixture of ethnic terms and simple descriptive idioms that found their way into the English language. 

While in flight became, of course, a "hummingbird." The same descriptive method applies to the origin of "redbird," "catbird," "mudhen," "groundhog," "flying squirrel," and "bedbug." When a farmer or hunter came upon an evil-smelling growth, he simply called it "stinkweed." Watercourse descriptions such as "fork," "branch," and "run" had to be created since England lacked such waterways. Our present day sugar maple owes its name to colonial ingenuity; colonists called it a "sugar tree" because of the sap which, when boiled down, was transformed into a sweet-tasting liquid. 

Colonists also incorporated words from other languages into their vocabulary. This should come as no surprise when viewing the extraordinary number of nations and languages represented in the colonies. There were more languages spoken on the North American continent in 1776 than at any other time since then. 

The Dutch in New Amsterdam (later to become New York) gave the English language such words as "brief" (letter), "yacht" (riverboat), and "spook" (ghost). Although the French presence along the Ohio River Valley ended with their defeat in the French and Indian War (1756-1763), their influence can be seen in such words as "cafe" (barroom), "chowder" which was a modification of "chaudiere" (cauldron), and "gopher," which comes from the French word used to describe the gopher's living quarters — "groupe" (honeycomb). The Spanish along the Florida frontier gave the colonists "el lagarto" (the lizard) which was later modified to "alligator." They were also the first to use the term "negro" (black), an unusual word since it began as an adjective but was later adopted for use as a noun. 

Contact with Native Americans through trade along the frontier provided another valuable source for new words. Colonists found it difficult to pronounce many native words so they simply modified them. "Arathkone" became "raccoon," "isquetsusauh" was somewhat combined and shortened to "squash," and "oachex" evolved into "woodchuck." Thin griddle cakes of corn meal were called "jonakin" by natives, but settlers preferred "johnny cakes."

Unlike other ethnic groups that came to America en masse, Africans were unable to choose where they settled. This made it difficult, if not impossible, for those speaking a similar tribal language to stay together. Nonetheless, Africans added another unique dimension to American-English. Words such as "banjo," "jazz," and "okay" all originated in the languages of West Africa. And, the commonly used word "tote," which means "to carry" in the Gullah language, first arrived in America in the early seventeenth century. 

Regional dialects within American-English that developed during the colonial period can be identified in the
different names colonists assigned to the same object. For example, the Spanish in the Florida territory used “puma” to describe any large cat-like creature, while Virginians preferred “mountain lion,” South Carolinians used “tiger,” and Pennsylvanians used “bobcat.” When considering a staple crop like corn, colonists agreed the edible “kernels” were a part of the “corn cob,” but disagreed as to what to call the exterior part. Virginians called the exterior “shuck” whereas those in New England preferred “husk.” Other colonists simply referred to them as “trash.”

A free man who was hired and paid for his labor wanted to be called a “hired hand” to distinguish himself from an indentured servant — one who was “indentured” to work a number of years in exchange for passage to America. “Hired hand” was soon modified to “hand,” and these “hands” came to expect “room and board.” Indentured servants, usually white men and women, brought their regional dialects with them from Great Britain. In 1735, Noah Webster observed that “Every State in America and almost every town in each State, has some peculiarities in pronunciation which are equally erroneous and disagreeable to its neighbors…”

Since the first accounts of life in America began to arrive in London, English literary authorities were concerned about the influence of American dialect on the language. They viewed it as a ludicrous corruption of the King’s English. As early as 1712, Jonathan Swift, author of Gulliver’s Travels, lamented about works that “…in an age or two shall hardly be understood without an interpreter.”

During a trip to the colony of Georgia in 1735, Englishman Thomas Moore commented that the two-year old village of Savannah “…stands upon the flat of a Hill; the Bank of the River (which they in barbarous English called a ‘bluff’) is steep…” In England, “bluff” was originally an adjective describing the bows of a ship when showing almost a vertical front. In America, “bluff” described a cliff or bank that resembled the bluff bow of a ship. Like the Spanish word “negro,” “bluff” originated as an adjective but was adapted for use as a noun. British writers went so far as to exclude American idioms from their works, considering them crude and unworthy. Colonial records contain rich colloquialisms not found in English literature of the period. Moore’s reference to “barbarous English” reflected British animosity toward the American dialect.

In the years immediately following the American Revolution, there was a widespread tendency to reject British influence in government as well as culture. A growing national pride fueled anti-British sentiment. Many national leaders realized America’s population and wealth would one day surpass England’s. Others believed America needed cultural independence to retain national solidarity. John Adams recommended an academy be establish by Congress for “correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English language.” He later wrote that “the population and commerce of America will force their language into general use.” In 1788, Dr. Benjamin Rush published “A Plan for a Federal University” to show his support for the American dialect, suggesting that “even modern English books should cease to be models of style in the United States.” That same year, the American Philological Society elected a young linguist named Noah Webster as their prime member. Although the Society lasted less than a year, Webster’s idealism provided the catalyst needed to preserve the ever-evolving American dialect.

Webster sought to standardize America’s language in order to preserve it for future generations. He also knew such work would establish recognition for “American” culture among the world’s cultures. In 1783, he published A Grammatical Institute of the English Language … Part I: Containing a New and Accurate Standard of Pronunciation. This work became The American Spelling Book, the best-selling book in America next to the Bible. It taught children the proper use of “American-English” for generations and defined American language for the rest of the English-speaking world.

As America grew from infant settlements to a sovereign nation, colonists sought to express their discoveries in a strange new land. The American wilderness forced them to develop new ways to communicate their experiences. By combining Old World expressions, ethnic terms, and simple descriptive idioms, colonists developed a language unique to the world. Through the work of Noah Webster, we are able to share this distinctive language and contribute to its ever-evolving nature. These contributions enable us, as Americans, to understand our cultural heritage.

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Helping Children See Through Bias

You, Me ... and THEM!

At first glance, these three article titles — Making the Multicultural Connection; Multicultural Education: Development, Dimensions, and Challenges; American Pie, A Multicultural Snapshot — all taken from recent educational journals, might indicate that multicultural education is simply the latest buzzword in a field well-known for leaping from trend to trend with little regard for classroom reality. However, in the case of multiculturalism, classroom reality may have already outdistanced the educational theorists.

Although classrooms increasingly reflect cultural and ethnic diversity and approach the “browning of America” predicted by Workforce 2000, critics of multicultural education continue to debate the issue. As teachers attempt to acknowledge the differences within their classrooms, and, consequently better meet the learning needs of all their students, some scholars argue that multiculturalism will polarize America. And, while teachers and administrators struggle through unending committee meetings to rewrite curriculum, adopt new textbooks, and train and retrain their peers, docents in museums, historic sites, galleries, and zoos can already offer students existing programs and exhibits that help young people see themselves as part of a world of diversity.

Although many of today’s classrooms offer a cultural diversity of their own, museums are in a unique position to help school children value such diversity. In those situations where the visiting class is predominately of one ethnic or culture group, of course, the museum can offer what that classroom cannot — glimpses of the art, artifacts, and environments of other groups. And, when the class on tour contains cultural or ethnic diversity of its own, the museum can help individual class members by validating the contributions of their group.

Multiculturalism doesn’t separate; it provides a framework for finding commonalities. Docents can help school children “see through” the racism and other biases that, consciously or unconsciously, separate groups. The following six areas of bias were identified in Implementing Title IX and Attaining Sex Equity: A Workshop Package for Elementary-Secondary Educators by Shirley McCune and Martha Matthews. While schools are still working out the hierarchies, museums can go ahead and start helping children recognize and eliminate these biases.

Exclusion/Invisibility
One of the most fundamental forms of bias is the exclusion of a particular group from an exhibit or discussion. Fortunately, in recent years many museums have recognized such omissions in their exhibits and have taken steps to include groups that were previously excluded. However, when such corrective steps have not been taken, the docent has an even more important job of including such groups in their discussions. When bias is obvious, though perhaps unintentional, simply asking children “Who’s missing?” can provoke thoughtful analysis of an exhibit. Guide children to think about what is excluded as well as what is included in an exhibit, and you help them see a culture or era from a new point of view.

Stereotyping
The selection of photographs and artifacts in a museum exhibit may portray different cultures, and males and females within those cultures, according to one particular characteristic or role. Although adults can usually identify the stereotypes this kind of selection creates, children frequently need a docent’s help in understanding that a museum exhibit may picture only part of the truth of a given situation.

It can be particularly important in art museums, for instance, that children discuss how and why an artist might choose to depict only part of a culture. Tell the children that “not everyone looked like this,” or “not everyone lived like this.” Then, follow-up by asking, “Why might the artist have only shown us these people, and not those who looked (or lived) differently?”

In a history setting, you might tell youngsters that “not everyone owned one of these.” Then you could ask them, “How would life have been different for the people who couldn’t afford to own one of these?” If questions such as these aren’t asked, children may leave your museum with a very skewed view of a culture or era.

Imbalance/Selectivity
Historical truth is often distorted when only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people is presented. Letting children role play different participants in a museum exhibit situation allows them to see different viewpoints. “Did everyone agree with this?” is a helpful question that promotes seeing different sides of an issue.

To address the notion of selectivity within an exhibit or site, try creating a parallel situation. Ask children what they would include in an exhibit about themselves. Would the exhibit be the same if their brother or sister made the selections?

Unreality
The historic home that ignores the servant or slave that maintained the way of life of the owners, the zoo that glosses over captive breeding controversies, or the art museum that fails to mention the conflict surrounding its burial artifacts denies children the information they need to understand the complexities of societal issues and problems. Ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and intergroup conflict may be more pleasant, but it fails
to prepare children to, hopefully, avoid the mistakes of their predecessors. Children often come to the museum with questions concerning such controversies, which they may have heard about on television or discussed in the classroom. The wise docent is prepared to answer their questions honestly.

Isolation

With all good intentions, special "days," "weeks," or "months" have been set aside to recognize the achievements of people from specific cultural groups. Black History Month in February and American Indian Day in September are just two examples. The danger in this type of bias is the implication that the experiences and accomplishments of these cultures are somehow separate and unrelated to those of the dominant culture. Museums often strengthen this form of bias by offering special programs about these cultures only during the special week or month. Education departments and docents should resist the impulse to fragment cultures by discussing them in isolation.

Linguistic Bias

Language is the tool of the docent, and it is a powerful purveyor of bias. When Native Americans are said to have "wandered" or "roamed" across the land, the implication is that they had a purely physical relationship to their environment, much as would an animal. Conversely, if white Americans "travelled" across the same land and "settled" it, their taking of that land seems more justified.

Words that dehumanize a group of people ("hordes" of immigrants, for example) erase the diversity within a group and make it more difficult to see the group as individuals. Just as children in your tour group will respond more positively when you call them by name, they will respond more positively to cultures different than their own when the words used to describe those cultures create individual lives.

Cultural Immersion

Docents, those people who (unlike classroom teachers) work with the real art, artifacts, animals, or plant life of the multitudes of world cultures, have an extraordinary opportunity to help children see the truth of those cultures. Their impact is even greater when they themselves understand the culture from the inside — when it is their culture. To that end, docent training that includes content instruction from members of the culture group represented, and a docent corps that includes multicultural diversity, offer more to visiting school children than is possible otherwise.

For some, the question may still remain — why should museums be leaders in multicultural education? The answer emerges when you consider that the fit is a natural one. The immediacy of objects from a culture, the diversity among visitors, and the "right now" opportunities to help children "see through" cultural bias put museum educators in a position that classroom teachers are still seeking.

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

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Survival in the Chalbi Desert

(Continued from page 7.)

distinguish, experiment, explain, group, infer, analyze, or sequence.

Then, visitors are asked to “apply” a principle to a new situation. (Can you imagine living in a desert all year round? Can you think of some ways people get enough food to eat in the desert?) When applying, visitors will predict, hypothesize, generalize, guess, imagine, or evaluate.

Finally, “affective” questions encourage visitors to explore their feelings and/or clarify values. (While we may not wish the Gabbra’s lifestyle to be our own, theirs enables scarce food and water resources to be used in a sustainable and renewable manner. How can each of us make changes that will allow us to use our fragile kingdom’s resources in a more sustainable way?)

Can you think of ways you might use questioning strategies to incorporate multicultural perspectives in your exhibit interpretation? Be inspired — pursue research into how and what other cultures may teach us — and then, share it!

Marta Gore is an Education Aide at Chicago Botanic Garden and a candidate for an M.A. in Curriculum and Instructional Design. Her studies were devoted to informal museum learning and to environmental values education. She has developed and presented a number of programs concerning multicultural and environmental related topics. In addition, she is Education Chair for Prairie Woods Audubon Society, a chapter of National Audubon, and since 1992, a docent serving at Brookfield Zoo.

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Next issue: Visual Literacy – Reading, Interpreting, Constructing Meaning

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