Tour Components
Introductions, Transitions, and Conclusions

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Crafting a Tour

This issue of The Docent Educator examines introductions, transitions, and conclusions — three of the most important structural elements of any lesson. Along with content, these structural elements determine and direct every guided learning experience.

When poorly conceived or implemented, introductions, transitions, and conclusions can defeat the most well intentioned and deliberate tour. But, when fashioned in a manner that facilitates learning and achieves cohesiveness, they become the distinguishing hallmarks of a well-crafted lesson.

The Well-Crafted Tour

The structural elements of a lesson or tour consist of its introduction, content, transitions, and conclusion. Since content differs for every institution, we will focus on the functions and characteristics of the remaining three.

• The introduction. A tour’s introduction serves as its starting point. The introduction should orient learners by providing them with a sense of purpose, a tone for interaction, and an awareness of the institution. It is also an opportunity to handle logistical considerations.

When constructed properly, introductions give tours “definition.” Definition refers to the tour’s focus and form. Do all participants have a clear understanding of the tour’s subject, purpose, or theme? Do learners understand what is expected of them? Is the format to be active or passive, responsive or fixed?

• Transitions. A tour’s transitions are its moments of change. Transitions should help learners shift from one thing to the next by forging relationships between experiences or among ideas, ensuring that there is a continuity and focus throughout. Transitions can also provide an opportunity to embellish, emphasize, or clarify.

When successful at establishing linkage between two objects or ideas, transitions give tours a sense of “unity.” Unity refers to the tour’s cohesiveness. Do all facets of the tour relate to one another? Does the central theme, message, or idea tie all parts of the experience together? Does learning carry over from one thing to the next?

• The conclusion. A tour’s conclusion is its ending point. The conclusion should review with learners the lesson’s purpose and content, integrating both into a larger scheme or body of thought. It is also an opportunity to evaluate the learning that has taken place and to invite visitors to return.

When constructed properly, conclusions place what is learned into “context.” Context refers to the circumstances surrounding or relating to information. How does this information fit into a greater field of study? What implications or applications does it have? In what other circumstances might this information be useful?

The Introduction: A Time to Define

Perhaps no single feature of a lesson is more crucial to its ultimate success than is its introduction. This is when visitors make inferences about the nature of the institution and the tour’s intent, and appraise the character of the person leading the experience.

First impressions do count! Defining the appropriate tone is the immediate order of business. Are you friendly and accessible, or are you formal and removed? One or the other is quickly communicated — through your body language, intonation, facial expression, and greeting.
Be welcoming. Convey enthusiasm for the subject matter. Remember that every learner deserves your best effort. Being tired or nonplused is contagious. Moods and interest are communicable. Often, it is your style of delivery that is the key to unlocking your audience's attention, interest, and enthusiasm.

Introduce yourself and your institution. "My name is Alan. I will be guiding you through the Metropolis Wildlife Conservancy, which most of you know as the Metro Zoo." If you volunteer your time to conduct tours, let your audience know. You need not say much, simply that you are a volunteer who tours the institution with visitors. This lets your audience know that your commitment is personal and that your interest is genuine.

If your tour will be interactive — in other words if you will be asking questions of your visitors rather than reciting a scripted presentation to them — ask them a question early on to get them talking and to let them know that you will want them to engage with you. Some typical questions are "Have any of you been here before?" or "Is there something in particular you were hoping to see on your tour today?"

Try using an ice-breaker to get things going. Ask questions that relate to the tour. "As you walked into this house, what was the first thing you noticed?" Or, "What things do you associate with a rainforest environment?" I do not recommend beginning an introduction with institutional rules filled with "please do not ..." This starts things on a negative tone. Instead, present the rules in a positive fashion during your first transition.

Tell visitors the purpose of your tour. State the central theme or idea that will occur throughout the tour so that they can link the new information on to a concept that they understand. One should not assume that the reasons for learning are obvious or that they will be "discovered" by the lesson's end. (School textbooks can provide good examples of how to introduce a topic by presenting the overall concept before delving into the details.)

For instance, you might begin the tour of a botanical garden by saying, "On this tour, we will learn how plants have adapted to specific climatic conditions by carefully observing their form and characteristics." Or, when touring an historic house museum, you might tell visitors, "On this tour, you will see how this wealthy 18th century family lived by considering their home and by examining the objects they purchased and surrounded themselves with."

If you are able to divide the group into smaller touring parties, now is the time. Have young visitors count off, and have all the "one's" go with docent A, all the "two's" go with docent B, and so forth. Teens and adults should be corralled and then asked, "Would the six of you please go with docent A," and then ask about the same number go to with docent B.

TRANSITIONS:
WAYS TO UNIFY

The first transition, which occurs as the group moves from its gathering place to the first stop, is an appropriate time to review institutional etiquette. Remember that it is nice to know the reasons for following a rule, rather than just to be told the rule. "Let's keep our voices low so that we don't startle the animals. People frighten them and they will hide from us if we are too noisy."

Every transition thereafter should serve to unify the lesson by making experiences interconnect. Transitions are intentional ways to move productively from one thing or idea to another. Whether in the form of a question, statement, or activity, transitions should keep people on task while propelling them toward something else.
“Whether purposefully developed or haphazardly occurring, all tours have a beginning, middle, and end. At their worst, they can actually obscure lessons...but, at their best, these features support learning by reinforcing lessons and giving them symmetry.”

For instance, stating that “like these frogs, the birds we will see next also live in the rainforest, but they live at the top of the tree canopy” provides visitors with the connection between two different life forms, while supplying them with useful information about habitat. Asking visitors, “How do these hunting tools differ from those we looked at previously?” can heighten their awareness, while reviewing and reinforcing what they previously learned.

Activities are useful transitions when teaching youngsters. While investigating lines as an element of design in an art museum, have the children walk to the next art work in a single-file line, in parallel lines, in wiggly lines, and in broken lines. In similar fashion, you might have children count the number of birds they see while walking between stops during an ecology lesson in a park.

Use transitions to reinforce the overall theme or message of a lesson, while giving visitors something productive to contemplate. “Remember, our tour topic is adaptation. So, as you look at the plants in this next area of the garden, consider how they have adapted to climate and soil conditions.”

CONCLUSIONS: CULMINATION AND CONTEXT

The conclusion of a lesson is the time for summarizing. It is an opportunity to glance both backward and forward — backward to make certain that new information was understood and forward to ensure that new information will be placed into its proper context.

When concluding, ask visitors what they learned or remember best about the tour. This is a quick method to review and reinforce what was learned and to evaluate what you taught. (If everyone seems to remember something fairly peripheral, perhaps it was given too much emphasis.)

After visitors tell you what they have gleaned from the tour, remind them of how to use any newly acquired skills. “Remember, by comparing works of art to one another, you can gain greater awareness and understanding of artistic styles and subject matter.” Or, “As you encounter new cultures, try asking yourself the same question we asked ourselves today — in what ways are these people similar to us?”

Finally, place the information and your institution into context. Context tells visitors that the educational experience they had at your institution is anchored in something larger than itself. It is learning that has usefulness, purpose, and applicability.

Without context, the meaning and significance of content are obscured. Consider the plight of the poor patient who overhears two medical professionals talking outside of the examining room where he has just received a check-up.

“You know,” one physician says to the other, “he really looks terrible.”

“It’s true,” the other responds somberly. “In fact, I don’t see how he can hold out for long like that.”

The patient, in near panic, scrambles out of the examining room only to see that the two doctors are watching a televised tennis match where the favored player is losing badly. Unless context is known and understood, things can be misconstrued and misinterpreted.

Give learners a context within which to place their new discoveries. For instance, tell them that “Your tour through this historic home has not been descriptive of most people’s lives during the time period. This house is a special place that shows us some of the most precious and exceptional things about life during the 18th century.” Or, that “Many of the same pressures threatening the rainforest ecosystem in Brazil threaten areas of our own country, too.”

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Whether purposefully developed or haphazardly occurring, all tours have a beginning, middle, and end. At their worst, these elements can actually obscure lessons, making new information seem less accessible and increasing the level of confusion; but, at their best, these structural features work to support learning by reinforcing lessons and giving them symmetry.

It need not take lots of time to make introductions, transitions, and conclusions work on behalf of your teaching. A three-minute introduction, a sentence or two each time you move to a new location, and a brief conclusion can be sufficient. Almost immediately, these structural elements will become part of the flow of your tour, which is only fitting, as they are a part of your tour, whether deliberate or not!
**Off to a Great Start**

by Susan Miner

A well constructed introduction does several important things for a museum tour. It establishes the tone, clarifies expectations, and affirms the docent’s role while orienting visitors to a new experience. Just as the seasoned docent can size up a group as they enter the museum, visitors form powerful first impressions based upon how the docent introduces the tour.

The actual text of the introduction will vary depending from institution to institution and audience to audience, but certain aspects need to be included:

- **Welcome.**
  Just as you would acknowledge a guest in your home, visitors to the museum deserve a cordial greeting that conveys your pleasure that they have come.

- **Name exchange.**
  In addition to introducing yourself by name, mention (or ask) the name of the group leader, organization, school, or hometown of your guests and thank them for coming. Ask if any in the group have been to the museum before. Their answers can help you adjust your tour and will tell you who you might first engage in conversation.

- **Logistics.**
  To relieve adult newcomers’ uncertainty, explain where and how long you will be touring, the location of rest rooms and water fountains, and any other directions they may find helpful and that will make them feel more at ease in new surroundings. When touring school groups, this information should be mailed ahead of time if possible and could be printed on a note of welcome and handed to the chaperone when the group enters.

- **Theme.**
  Before launching into the tour itself, remind your group of the theme or focus of the tour. This is especially important with school groups who have, hopefully, prepared by using your pre-visit materials. It not only reminds students of the topic to be covered but also cues the docent as to their familiarity with it.

  One day, as a docent routinely asked during her introduction, “Have you been studying the Wichita Indians in class?” she got not only blank stares but shaking heads followed by the response, “We’ve been studying Victorian etiquette.” There had evidently been a mix-up in the teacher packets and, fortunately, the docents were able to shift gears and begin an entirely different tour!

- **Museum Manners.**
  Both first-time and returning visitors appreciate knowing what is expected of them and why. A simple request not to touch the objects, to maintain a single file line, to stay to the right on the stairs, or to keep voices quiet in the exhibit area can eliminate confusion and save someone from encountering an embarrassing situation. Remember, before-the-fact explanations are more persuasive than are censoring looks during the tour.

  Everyone, especially youngsters, like to understand that rules have reason and are not punitive. When touring young children, pass around a small mirror or piece of Plexiglas. Then, point out the fingerprints it collects and explain that these would spoil the special things in the museum. Asking their help in protecting the artifacts makes even these youngest visitors our allies.

  While all this may sound like a lot to accomplish before the tour even begins, consider how important the first few minutes of any new experience can be. Imagine yourself entering the museum for the first time. What could your host do to make you feel welcome and to encourage your interests? Build these elements into your introduction so that it works as well for your guests as it does for you, and you will have established a rapport that can have lasting effects long after the tour has ended.

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by Alan Gartenhaus

Struggling to prepare the appropriate introduction for your tour — one that establishes both the topic and purpose of the lesson? Where do you begin? How do you begin?

To be effective, an introduction should tell visitors what they are about to learn in a manner that prepares them to receive the information and that helps them integrate the experience. This implies that the docent knows precisely what learners are expected to learn, and how they will be learning it.

A common error when developing a tour or lesson is for docents to prepare it chronologically — in the same sequence as it is presented to an audience. An introduction should only be developed after the full lesson plan is conceived and constructed.

Another common miscalculation is trying to construct a lesson plan based upon what the teacher or docent intends to do. Some statements do little to help plan an introduction, or the rest of the tour for that matter.

- I plan to teach the group how to better appreciate works of art.
- I will acquaint visitors with the customs and traditions of the indigenous island people.
- I'll introduce students to various kinds mammals and their common characteristics.

Statements such as these offer no guidance as to what a lesson should include, nor do they reveal any information about how learning will actually take place.

It is best to begin with what is expected of visitors and work from there. What should visitors have learned by the end of your encounter together? What should they be able to do?

- By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to articulate several responses to works of art beyond personal preference.
- By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to identify and discuss at least three attributes of the people who first inhabited these islands.
- By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to distinguish between mammals and non-mammals.

Statements like these are known as instructional objectives. Instructional objectives state unambiguously, and in an active voice (using action verbs), exactly what the learner should be able to do by the conclusion of the lesson. Notice that the instructional objectives are phrased in a very specific manner, beginning with “By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to ...”

To be useful, instructional objectives must be clear and defined. To simply state that “learners will appreciate works of art,” or that “learners will know about an indigenous people,” or that “learners will understand what makes an animal a mammal” does not ensure that learning will actually occur. You can’t see appreciation, knowledge, or understanding. They must be demonstrated. Instructional objectives should describe what observable behaviors will take place that will indicate that learning has happened.

Learners must be given opportunities to practice what they are supposed to learn and to demonstrate that they have learned it. Working from your instructional objective, decide what activities will prompt visitors to practice, learn, and demonstrate mastery of your instructional objective.

- In a gallery of many works, visitors will select a work of art that they feel has powerful emotional content, and will analyze how the artist conveys these emotions. Then, visitors will ...
- Visitors will examine tools used for fishing and for agriculture, and will make hypotheses as to what these implements
reveal about the people who used them. Next, visitors will ...

- Visitors will decide if humans are mammals after considering their physical characteristics. Following this, visitors will ...

The various activities that you use to promote learning constitute your instructional plan. Your instructional plan answers the question, “How?” How will learners practice, learn, and demonstrate mastery of the instructional objective?

Once you have developed an instructional objective, and you have mapped out the instructional plan that leads to achieving that objective, you are ready to create the tour’s structure. Each aspect of the tour’s structure — its introduction, content, transitions, and conclusion — should advance visitors toward the instructional objective.

The primary function of an introduction, for example, is to provide visitors with a sense of purpose and to set the tone of instruction. What is the central theme or idea of the lesson? How will it be taught? Answers to such questions are the ingredients — the content and character — of your introduction. They answer the question, “What’s the big idea?” before it is ever asked.

- Have you ever seen a movie that you didn’t like, but that had a powerful effect on you, nonetheless? Which movie? What was your response?

Well, today we will look at a variety of art works; some you will like and others you may not. We won’t be focusing on likes and dislikes, however. We will be thinking about other attributes and reactions we might have to them.

- The everyday things people use tell stories about them. For instance, what might one of our coins tell other people about our society? How many things could other people learn or decide about us just by inspecting one?

We will be going through the gallery examining the tools, artifacts, and art work of the native island people. As we do, I will be asking you to consider what these objects might tell us about their lives and society:

- Every living creature has some kind of covering on its body. Fish have scales; people have skin and hair. What other kinds of body coverings have you seen?

You will be looking at lots of living things, here. Most of them will be mammals. Many different types of animals are mammal, but all of them share some important things in common. One is having hair or fur on their skin. Soon, you will be able to tell if an animal is a mammal simply by considering its appearance and activities.

Knowing what visitors are expected to learn tells a teacher exactly what he or she will need to teach. It makes constructing introductions, and all other aspects of the tour, far easier and less cryptic.

The rule to remember is that learning should always lead teaching, not the other way around. When learning leads, creating a lesson is not a mysterious process of hit-or-miss, but a deliberate route for directing visitors toward a better understanding of “the big idea.”

Docent Gary Outlaw, who volunteers at the Denver Zoo, gives an introduction to the herpetology exhibits using a living participant. His introduction will establish a construct for learning about reptiles and amphibians.
Transitions …

The Workhorse of a Tour

The image of a draft horse comes to mind when I think of the role transitions play in a tour. They do a great deal of the work, even though their content may not appear to be extraordinary. Transitions pull the tour along, providing continuity as new examples are presented or new ideas are introduced. And, they work on behalf of both the docent and the audience.

For docents, transitions are like a rein, holding the line of thought to the theme. In settings such as a botanical conservatory, where 2,000 uniquely different plants are on display for multiple reasons, the temptation to wax encyclopedic about each plant is great. To do so, however, would defeat the goals of the tour.

Transitions can garner the audience’s attention and prepare them for learning facts by focusing their interest. Consider, for example, a visit to the chocolate tree on a tour relating the value of plants to humans. A docent could talk about: the part of the plant from which chocolate comes; the process by which chocolate is made; who “discovered” chocolate; how it was used by native peoples in Mexico; where it originated and is now in cultivation; the structure of its pods; the shape and color of its flowers; its natural habitat; and so on. A transition statement, such as, “It is amazing to think that some of our most commonly available spices and confection flavors were once highly prized as money. Perhaps, after seeing the chocolate tree, we can understand why this was so,” prepares visitors’ by directing their attention, and relating the information conveyed to the tour’s theme. By focusing with a transition, the chocolate tree remains an example of an idea (its proper role) rather than becoming a symbol of a series of isolated facts and interesting trivia.

Transitions are not tools for the docent’s benefit only. They work for the audience, too. Well planned transitions create anticipation for the next stop. They offer visitors reasons to remain interested. For instance: “With the ant acacia, we have seen how ants and plants develop symbiotic relationships, where the ants protect the plant and the plant provides a home and food for the ants. Now, let’s look at a situation where ants “work” for plants in a different way — as farmers might, by providing supplementary fertilizer.” Another example might be: “When we get to the next plant, the Bougainvillea, I want you to figure out which plant structures are used to help this vine climb.”

When a new point or concept is to be introduced on a tour, transitions can give visitors linkage. During conservatory tours on the topic of color in plants, for instance, the color red is usually a focus of attention. Red is typically the color found in hummingbird-pollinated flowers. It serves as an attractant for these birds. We often explore the conservatory spotting different red flowers, taking a close look at each.

“How are the flowers all the same shape? What part of the flower is red?” Through this process, the audience becomes quite comfortable with the concept that pigment in flowers serves as a flag for particular types of pollinators.

Then, I may say, “As we move on to the next plant, here’s something to think about. Is red pigment only found in flowers?” Perhaps visitors have seen plants with red leaves. Their experiences would be confirmed and the ensuing discussion would examine the reasons for
red leaves. A transition such as this gives the visitor time to project his own experiences into the tour, while creating a foundation on which new ideas can be built.

Docents who make sure that each stop on the tour is relevant to the theme of their tour will have an easy time coming up with interesting transitions. Presumably, docents choose particular features during a tour in order to illustrate something about the tour’s theme. Transitions apply to the theme, not to the plant or object. “Let’s go see the banana,” is not a good transition. True, I’ve told you the name of the next plant we will see, but so what? In contrast, “Let’s go look at the banana to see how it reproduces, because it does not have seeds” points us in a definite direction where the theme is about reproduction in plants. Transitions hint at the reason for the next stop. They begin to answer the unspoken question, “so what?”

Transition statements need not be complicated. Long-winded transitions risk distracting their audience, or losing them entirely. “The next plant we will look at is a major tropical crop. This plant has been in cultivation for so long, no one really knows its origins. There are many different varieties of it; however, we only see one or two of them in the stores. Let’s go see how the cultivated banana reproduces because it does not have seeds.” What was the point? An effective transition requires only a sentence or two to get its point across.

As seen with the examples above, provocative statements, questions, summaries, directives, introductions, and contrasts all make for good transitions if concise and to the point. Comments from the audience can be another source for transitions. Docents need to be open and flexible with their tour plan to take advantage of such opportunities, however. Suppose someone offers you an answer that wasn’t quite correct in one situation, but it would apply to another point in the tour. You might use that answer as a transition. “A few minutes ago, Mrs. French mentioned that some plants develop tiny plantlets along the edge of the leaves. As we move into the arid house, think about why some plants might do that. We will be looking at several examples of this phenomenon.”

Transitions need not be entirely verbal to be effective. On a tour with fourth graders, I discovered that I could emphasize the difference between two habitats through actions rather than words. The transitions did all of the work for me. We had been walking for nearly a half mile along the banks of a creek. The vegetation in this area is that of riverine floodplain. The youngsters were quickly picking up the repetition of plant species that grow in this area. It was getting a bit monotonous for them. While the Matthaei Botanical Gardens is located at the edge of a glacial moraine, there is little evidence of the moraine on the trail. Only one small hump of upland woods appears in the middle of the floodplain. You would not notice it until you came upon it.

Before we arrived at this spot, I told the students that we were about to enter a different world, but that we needed to use all of our senses in order to see it. I had each of them put on blindfolds (no peeking allowed) and place their hand
on the shoulder of the person in front of them. As we proceeded slowly up the hill, the kids comments became very descriptive. “Hey, the ground is crunchy” (gravely as opposed to soft or “spongy”). They noticed the increased effort required as we walked up the hill. They could hear the water flowing, so they knew we were still creekside. They knew something was different, but just how different had to wait a minute. When we got to the top of the hill, I carefully led them onto a side trail. Their silence spoke volumes when they removed their blindfolds to find themselves in a sea of white trillium under towering oaks. The answer to the question, “what is it” was hardly important. They had arrived in a new habitat which they already knew through the use of their five senses. Each child could honestly say, “I was there.”

Because of the complexity of material covered in our docent training course, I have found it easiest to introduce the technique of using transitions towards the end of training. By participating in cumulative practice tours, docents-in-training at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens build on their skills. With time, the value of each skill becomes more obvious to them. Initial practice tours focus on selecting and relaying information about plants, adjusting to time constraints, mastering voice projection, eye contact, and other presentation techniques. The next level emphasizes questioning techniques so that the audience becomes a vital, participatory member of the tour and the docent no longer is in the “tell it all” role.

Subsequent practice tours focus on themes. Docents first learn how to develop a theme tour, to select the points they wish to make about the theme, and to select which plants will best highlight a given point. Their first efforts with theme tours, while appearing coherent on paper, sometimes come across as fractured. Their tendency is to go to a selected plant, work to make a point and then move on to another plant to make another point, and so forth. For the practice that follows this stage, I assign the use of transitions in tours. Through the resulting contrast, docents learn that their tours hang together better. Once docents experience the difference transitions make to the process of giving tours, they make a point of working them into their plan.

Many docents think of transitions as bridges. This is an appropriate analogy. They help link the various points of the tour. A tour that ignores transitions shatters into bits and pieces. Whether we are conscious of it or not, transitions do a lot more for tours than make connections. That is why I like to think of them as workhorses. They heighten awareness of the points being made; they provide sustenance for the audience between experiences; and, they help the listener relate to prior experiences. They help set the stage for surprise.

Regardless of the source or type of transition, each should relate directly to a central idea, rather than to an object itself. When you use transitions effectively, you will find that the draft horse of the tour will carry much of your load.

Transitions allow objects or living things to remain examples of an idea rather than becoming the symbols of a series of isolated facts and interesting trivia.

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America Preserved

The Library of Congress is offering an all-new, comprehensive checklist of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record collections. This illustrated publication is hardbound and available for $74 (including UPS shipping). To get further information, or to order, call (800) 255-3666, or TDD (202) 707-0012.

Museums on Your Computer

Big changes are coming to museums. New, high-tech tools are bringing “flawless” computerized images of museum objects to home computers. Some museums, such as the National Gallery in London, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Smithsonian Institution are participating in the development of new CD-ROM technologies, making their collections accessible to home computers. Among the latest to enter into the CD-ROM arena is Art Treasures of Russia, a survey of the collections of Russia’s major museums. The electronic publication has rights to 90,000 pieces of art from the Hermitage and Pushkin museums, as well as several other important institutions.

Most museums find themselves far behind the few who are taking advantage of this technology. Will this difference create further rifts between small and large institutions; or, will new and exciting bridges be created?

How will these new technologies impact upon museum teaching and visitation? The reproductions available are said to be flawless. Will the public still feel that there are valid reasons to see the originals? How will the technology adapt information and appreciation to the viewer’s interests, experiences, knowledge, and age? What becomes of discussing the work with other people? What’s behind this high-tech door — the lady or the tiger?

What’s It to You?

The Japanese people have a saying, “It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive.” What implications might this saying have to teaching?

Submit an Article!

Share your thoughts, ideas, and insights with others. The Docent Educator invites staff and volunteers to submit articles and ideas for possible publication. To receive a copy of our writer’s guidelines, send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

A Second Take

The authors of Touchstones to the Past, an article appearing in our Spring 1995 issue, would like interested readers to have the unabbreviated version of their text. If you wish to receive a copy, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Hilarie M. Hicks
2404-G Griffin Avenue
New Bern, N.C. 28562

Project MUSE Amuses Us a Little and Delights Us a Whole Lot

It is always exciting and reaffirming to learn that educational scholars and researchers are “discovering” and praising a form of teaching that museum educators and docents have been using for years. Over the past two years, researchers at Harvard University have developed a program entitled “Project MUSE” (which is an acronym for Museums Uniting with Schools and Education). The goal of Project MUSE is to develop a variety of learning tools that teach students with ranging interests how to look at artwork, ask questions about it, and make connections between art and other disciplines, such as science and writing.

Lead by Harvard researcher Jessica Davis, Project MUSE has constructed an exercise known as the “generic game,” which poses a series of questions about art that starts off simple and become more complex. The questions begin with personal preference (i.e. - Do you like it?), move to what viewers see (i.e. - What colors do you see?), and continue with the image’s narrative qualities (i.e. - What is going on?). Ultimately, the questions ask viewers to determine if there are connections between the art and their own lives (i.e. - Is this work important? or Can you write a story based on what you find?)

Though many educational tours of museums are still heavily fact-based, a sizable number have been using inquiry and interpretative strategies for years. Questions like “What do you see?” and “What might be happening?” are hardly revolutionary to most docents, but, now that they are receiving Harvard University’s approval, should seem even more valid.

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Using Transitions to Teach Touring

At the Tempe Historical Museum, we do not expect our tours to be based on memorization and recitation of exactly the same information each time. Instead, docents are encouraged to vary their tours within defined parameters so that their lessons are interesting to, and appropriate for, the particular groups they are leading. It is important, therefore, that docents graduate from our basic training class ready to lead tours through our main exhibition hall in a manner that is both flexible and accommodating.

This has not been easy to accomplish. Several techniques have been tested, including mentoring — pairing new docents with senior docents so they have someone to observe and with whom to work. Frequently, however, the new docents become dependent upon their mentors and say that they need even more time to observe, or that they just aren’t ready.

In response to this challenge, the Museum has changed the way basic touring techniques are taught to new docents. In the early stages of training, new docents are taught how you get from “point A” to “point B” rather than about exhibition content. In other words, they are taught using transitioning phrases. A “transition,” as defined in Webster’s Dictionary, is “movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another.”

When touring our main exhibition hall, transitions become the mechanism for docents to move from one location to another, while helping them remember the concepts taught by our institution. This approach encourages the trainees to find a flow within their tours. Once they learn this flow and know where they are going and how they will get there, they can relax and concentrate on the ideas presented rather than on their ability to remember isolated facts.

Our expectation that docents will take a flexible approach to touring makes the use of transitions even more useful and important. When docents know how they are going to proceed through the tour, they feel free to elaborate at each location as much as is useful. This allows docents to fine tune the information shared to the interests of their audience, without worrying about how they will connect the discussion to the next location.

During training, the docents first experience the tour using only the transitions. This may sound awkward, but it keeps them focused on the major concepts they will be teaching. At the next session, the docents recite the transitions at the appropriate locations. They also receive a synopsis of a sample tour in writing with the transitions in bold type for quick identification. Then it is time for them to give a general tour. Each time the tour is practiced, docents first go through and reiterate their transitions. The tour no longer seems so immense.

Transitions quickly become cues (just as the lines in a play might be) for the docents to remember what to discuss next. If, on the other hand, they had memorized the whole tour and then forgotten something in the middle, it might be more difficult for them to recover or remember what comes next.

Transitions can take many forms. In our tours, transitions are often questions. For example, one of our transitions is … “As we move into the later 1900’s, we see that growth increases dramatically in Tempe. Why?” Other transitions can be in the form of provocative statements for
visitors to ponder as they move to the next location. For instance, “Let’s see something that was unique to the developing community of Tempe.” Both transitions establish expectations so that visitors will want to stay with the tour and discover answers. Each also sets the stage for the next topic while “leading” the docent through the tour. In addition, such transitions permit any number of activities to occur at the next stop, from historical comparisons with other urban locations to identifying how Tempe’s history continues to impact upon life, here, today.

Our first transition is the lead-in to the main exhibit hall and tour. It emphasizes the importance of introducing Tempe history, communicating the purpose of the tour, and providing general information about the museum to visitors. These important beginnings can sometimes be overlooked by a docent who is nervous about remembering information or who is more focused on knowing the information than on understanding the reasons for touring.

Our training also reveals how transitions can give continuity to a tour. Consider, for instance, the transition, “We started by discussing agriculture as the major economic factor in the founding of Tempe. After all these people began moving in, what do you think is happening to agriculture?” A transition such as this reinforces what was previously learned and connects it to what is coming up next. Moving from an agricultural to an urban environment has been a major factor shaping the development of Tempe. By emphasizing this in the transition, the docents are sure to get the point across to visitors.

The results of this approach have been rewarding. Graduating docents have been far more willing to venture out and start leading tours right away. While there are still concerns about not knowing answers to all of the visitors’ questions, the emphasis on transitions has helped docents feel prepared and willing to literally walk out of graduation right into our main hall.

In addition, the senior docents who helped with training classes observed the teaching of transitions and asked that this technique be presented to them as well. Even experienced docents seem to appreciate the idea of training with transitions, and they say that it makes the tour much more cohesive. They also feel it reinforces the introduction and conclusion of the tour.

We have been using transitions as a teaching tool for a little over a year now, and have had positive results. Identifying the role of transitions, and developing that role into a technique for preparing docents for touring, has enabled our volunteers to be more comfortable with the public and more effective as guides.

Anna Johnson is Curator of Education at the Tempe Historical Museum, and a past President of the Museum Association of Arizona, past Co-chair of Museum Educators Council of Arizona, and member of the Coordinating Committee on History of Arizona. Ms. Johnson has a certification in secondary education and a degree in history. She has taught many subjects and grades, and has been the Director of the Frontier Historical Museum in Glenwood Springs, CO. Ms. Johnson co-authored The Elusive Dream, A Relentless Quest for Coal in Western Colorado.
A Hop, Skip, and Jump Away from a Great Tour
Transition Techniques for Little Ones

Young children learn differently than older children do. For instance, young children tire easily unless they’re moving. Transitions that allow active movement from exhibit to exhibit make it possible for little ones to focus and pay attention longer.

I don’t teach kindergarten, but my sixth graders are “buddies” with our school’s kindergarten children. We are their “computer tutors,” we give them a Halloween party and an Easter egg hunt, and, once a year, we accompany them on a trip to the zoo or science museum. This year, when I complimented my class on their ability to provide their “buddies” with an exciting, yet safe, outing, one of my students commented, “Oh, it’s easy, Mrs. Littleton. You just have to hold on tight and not lose them.”

“Holding on tight and not losing them” can be quite a challenge to museum docents working with pre-school and primary age children. Good beginnings, and age-appropriate transitions, however, go a long way toward providing great tours for these youngest visitors.

It’s a paradox, but young children tire easily unless they’re moving! Consequently, those times when they must be still to listen should always be times when they are seated. The introduction to the museum, zoo, or nature center should be made while the children are seated, as should all discussions about particular exhibits or displays.

Transitions with this age group should be times of movement and, sometimes, noise. Allowing active movement during transitions from exhibit to exhibit not only makes it possible for little ones to pay attention longer, but it helps focus their attention on the objectives of the tour. The following are samples of transitions that could be used with young children in a variety of museum settings.

Zoos or Nature Centers

▲ When leaving a bird exhibit, children tuck their hands under their arms as wings and walk to the next exhibit as they’ve observed birds walking. Walking like a particular bird or animal is always a popular way to move from place to place within a zoo. Besides being fun, though, it also helps the focus on the ways
animals move. These walks can be made with or without accompanying animal/bird sounds (depending on the nerves of the docent and the tolerance of the animals and other visitors.)

When leaving a reptile exhibit, children are given a rope the same length as the longest snake. They must walk carefully as if they were carrying the snake to the next exhibit. In addition to helping get from here to there, this transition lets young children internalize a concept of size.

Carrying things works as a transition even when the children aren’t really carrying anything. Pretending to carry a bird’s egg or a very tiny animal is just as much fun for this most imaginative age as holding the real thing. Again, size concepts are emphasized when children recognize that some things can be carried in your hand, while carrying other things requires lots of help.

“Look for” are also fun. Looking for different kinds of food that animals eat; animals that live in the zoo, but aren’t zoo animals; leaves or plants of a particular size or shape; or something specific to the path they will take to the next stop helps keep primaries interested and focused. “Look for” ideas are limited only by the tour’s theme.

**Science Museums**

Many of the same transitions that work for zoos and nature centers work in science museums, particularly in the life science areas. In the physical sciences, children need other motivations. Museum exhibits that use a mascot character such as a robot or offer a perfect way for children to move from place to place; they simply become the character.

Simple laws of physics can often be clearly demonstrated in a transition from exhibit to exhibit. For example, even the youngest child can experience friction if he tries to move by scooting his feet rather than lifting them. Docents should be warned, however, that only part of Newton’s first law (“... a body in motion tends to remain in motion, and a body at rest will remain in a state of rest unless acted upon by some outside force”) applies to small children!

**Art Museums and Galleries**

As in other institutions, tour themes and objectives determine the kinds of transitions to be used with children. A tour theme about fine, of course, provides wonderful ways of moving from place to place. The children can walk in different kinds of lines or even follow actual lines painted on the museum floor or discovered on the floor covering.

A theme of color should at some point let children explore how different colors make us feel, and this offers other transition possibilities with children moving as if they are yellow, blue, red, or their favorite color.

While moving from gallery to gallery or from painting to painting, primary children can be asked to look for a particular subject, shape, color, or texture. They might even be able to locate a shape, color, or texture from their own clothing that is found in one of the paintings.

**History Museums or Historic Houses**

In museums or historic houses where clothing is exhibited, a good transition involves pretending to wear high button shoes, a top hat, a feather-bedecked hat, or (by pushing in tightly with your hands around your waist) a corset while moving to the next exhibit. If you’ve actually been able to try on replicas of such clothing, the pretending works even better as children see how clothing determines or restricts movement.

Different modes of transportation, too, offer ways to travel from one exhibit to another. Guiding a team of mules, riding an old-fashioned bicycle, or, better yet, becoming the horse pulling the wagon makes moving from place to place wonderful fun.

Closing a tour with pre-school and primary children, as with all visitors, must be more than simply, “And that concludes our tour. I hope you had a good time.” Sitting once more, these young learners should now have an opportunity to “learn what they’ve learned.” “Do you remember” questions help bring to mind the different points of the tour, as do opportunities to tell what they like best. “How many of us did it take to carry the python?” The final transition, however, should send them home with something to do.

“On the bus ride back to school, look for all the things that work using electricity.”

“When you get back to school, I want you to walk from the bus to your classroom wearing your favorite hat.”

“When you see your principal, be sure to show her what parallel lines look like.”

“I’d like you to measure your classroom to see if the giraffe could get inside.”

“Remember to show your family how you could hold the hummingbird egg in just one hand.”

Holding on tight and not losing them is more than a matter of physically keeping younger children under control. The fascination with museums that makes some adults able to entertain, amuse, and educate themselves wherever they go throughout their lives is encouraged or stuffed out with a child’s first visits to such places. Using every moment of a child’s time in your institution, including the walk from one exhibit to another, to fully experience the tour’s goals is the best way I know to really hold on tight and not lose them now and for the future.

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Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor
Integrating the Arts

From Conclusion to Classroom

Escher, Einstein, and Ellington? Warhol, Wagner, and Washington? Seurat and Dr. Seuss? Balanchine and basketball?

There are those who consider the arts as separate, elite, apart from the regular world, mysterious, and unknowable. But, no child finds it "mysterious" to dance with delight before he knows how to express that delight in words. No child finds it "unfathomable" to paint and draw an idea, or to hum a newly-created little tune, or to enthusiastically relate a story. The arts come naturally to the young: music, dance, art, and drama flow freely through us at the beginning of our lives.

What can we, as educators, do to encourage, nourish, and maintain that creative and inventive spirit as our children journey to maturity?

One way is to ensure that the arts remain a significant part of their education. Research has shown that ongoing activities in the fine and performing arts benefit young minds by stimulating learning in a number of ways. Students learn self-discipline, social interaction, analysis, and self-motivation. They learn to take criticism from their peers, teachers, and audiences. They experience pleasure in their own accomplishments: they gain self-confidence. They learn to be problem solvers, to be creative thinkers, to be decision makers, to become life-long learners. Further research indicates that exposure to, and study of, the arts aids comprehension and stimulates interest in the traditional academic areas of the curriculum. In addition to all this, the arts prepare students for the real world by teaching them that most problems in life have multiple solutions.

How can the arts be integrated into the everyday classroom?

Classroom teachers often complain that they can not take time out from the core curriculum to teach units that

prepare students for an arts encounter. Therefore, educators serving within museums, galleries, and performing arts facilities might introduce and conclude their interaction with young people in ways that assist the classroom teacher connect the arts to major subject areas such as math, science, social studies, and language. In addition, museum educators and outreach docents could suggest introductory activities that integrate the arts directly and efficiently into the mainstream curriculum for the classroom teacher to use.

How can this be done?

As follow-up to institutional visits, classroom teachers can be given arts-related materials. Photographs, postcards, prints, posters, slides, books, videotapes, cassettes, and CDs can be used to illustrate and reinforce various ideas and principles.

Here are a few examples.

In MATH class, the geometrically precise paintings of Victor Vasarely or Piet Mondrian are placed around the room for students to observe and ponder. To illustrate the concept of pattern and repetition: a Japanese kimono design, a popular song with a recurring chorus, the columns on a city building, the measured steps of modern dance. To indicate an understanding of the function of certain numbers, a student-written skit is performed presenting a little "conversation" between fractions.

In SCIENCE class, the study of animals and plants is augmented by images such as Albrecht Durer’s “Hare,” or a Navajo drawing of a sheep, or Diego Rivera’s “The Flower Seller,” or Constantin Brancusi’s sculpture “Bird in Space.” Many composers are inspired by nature: Alan Hovhaness’ “Symphony No. 50: Mount St. Helens,” Camille Saint-Saens’ “Carnival of the Animals,” Michael Jones’ “Seascapes.” A unit on the human body includes images of the human form in motion found in paintings, sculpture, and dance. A close examination of students’ artwork under a microscope reinforces techniques in laboratory science.

In SOCIAL STUDIES class, interested students research society’s view of musicians, dancers, artists, or actors during a particular time period, or trace it from anonymity in ancient times to celebrity status in present day. A unit
on map study includes Ando Hiroshige’s “Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road” and the handcrafted stick-charts of the Micronesians. Photographs of historical homes and period rooms or furnishings reflect the ideas and preferences of their time. A study of American history includes a mention of three unique and indigenous art forms: jazz, modern dance, and musical theater.

In LANGUAGE class, art postcards are used to create a personal alphabet book for younger children, while older students find parts of speech in contemporary songs. Children select an artist, musician, playwright, or choreographer whose birthday coincides with (or within the same month) as their own, and polish their library skills researching that life. Vocabulary expands rapidly with the addition of words used in connection with the arts: discussions of art and music provide adjectives, while adverbs predominate in dance and drama. A unit on compare-and-contrast is augmented by using pairs of art prints or selections of music. Perhaps most significantly, the arts provide creative inspiration to young writers.

To make school educators more aware of the relevance of the arts to students’ future success, and because so many students enjoy enjoyment in the arts, teachers should be acquainted with careers not only in the arts themselves, but in careers related to the arts. If a child excels in math, loves to dance, but has no desire to become a professional dancer, he could be encouraged to consider being an accountant with a dance company. If a child is drawn to chemistry, loves painting, but has no desire to become a professional artist, she might consider a career as a conservator in an art museum. A student who is interested in history, loves the theater, but does not see himself as a professional actor, could be a research historian for a film production company. A child who has talent for language, loves music, but has no desire to be a professional musician, might consider a career as a publicist for a local orchestra.

What part do museums play in integrating the arts into the everyday classroom?

It was museum educators who first linked and connected various areas of knowledge and presented them to their community’s school children in tours of their collections. Museums can reinforce their support for integrating the arts into the classroom by demonstrating routes for integration to teachers and administrators during in-service workshops, and by designing outreach materials, classroom visits, and tour themes in consultation with supervisors of school curriculums that reinforce links between institutional collections and curricular competencies. In addition, museums can make their libraries accessible, develop traveling collections, and provide teachers and children with a valuable place to explore ideas and acquire knowledge.

Gayle M. Southworth is arts consultant for Phi Delta Kappa International and provides workshops they sponsor on integrating the arts into the everyday classroom. A former classroom teacher, Ms. Southworth has been a museum educator at the Honolulu Academy of Arts in Honolulu, HI, the Witte Memorial Museum in San Antonio, TX, the McNay Art Institute in San Antonio, TX, and the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.
It Works for Me
Sharing successful techniques and ideas.

Two years ago, a visitor to the National Gallery of Art wrote to the editor of The Washington Post complaining that a tour he had heard interrupted his appreciation of a work by Rembrandt. I felt the need to respond, but by the time my letter was approved by all who needed to do so at the museum, it was too late to publish it in the newspaper. I would like to take the opportunity to respond in your publication.

Dear Mr. Gunderson:

There are many levels from which one can approach a work of art, from the most basic, subjective “I know what I like” to a substantial knowledge of the cultural and artistic context of a work. At any level, a viewer may feel intense empathy with a work of art, a sense of very focused communication. Some people describe the experience with words like those you chose to describe the Rembrandt: “the painter was still alive ... something he found 300 years ago was still shining.” But what is that “something” and how did he capture it?

Recognizing that many visitors to the National Gallery want the opportunity to learn about different ways to look at and understand works of art, we offer tours, gallery talks, discussion groups, single lectures, and lecture series. The Gallery also mounts temporary exhibitions, provides wall labels, brochures, etc. The talk which you described in your comments was undoubtedly an introductory tour, the purpose of which is to introduce visitors to the collection, highlighting a number of works and offering various approaches to understanding. The tour most likely included discussions of art appreciation, technique, symbolism, history, biography, and the formal language of art based on the visual evidence of individual works.

Take, as an example, the Rembrandt Self Portrait that you admire. According to your own description, the docent said that the painting “was one of many self-portraits.” During his lifetime, Rembrandt sketched, painted, and etched images of himself for close to fifty years in order to perfect his ability to convey the most subtle nuances of human character and emotion. The result that you see in the 1659 work at the National Gallery is something, then, that was honed over nearly a half-century of painstaking experience. And what is there? An old man whose flesh is wrinkled and sagging but whose eyes are intense with the experience of life. And why do we read this expression as life? Because Rembrandt had become so adept at manipulating oil paints and glazes, building up the surface and adding highlights, that we are convinced of the human truth of what we see. In addition, the fact that Rembrandt shows himself in a half-length pose, dressed in dark, ill-defined clothes, set against an almost equally dark background eliminates any possible distraction. The luminous oval of Rembrandt’s face shines forth and there the artist’s facility and experience captures life itself in paint.

Does such information interfere with or enhance the appreciation of his work? And even if you or other visitors choose not to make use of it, does that render the information invalid and useless to all? We sincerely believe that such tours are an aid to many visitors in understanding Rembrandt’s artistic achievement. Through them and our other programs, interested museum-goers can learn to sharpen their powers of perception, to “read” images and thus begin to understand some of the ideas in a work of art that can be grasped by intelligent looking.

Our programs do not diminish the appetite for the contemplative, aesthetic experience, but offer avenues toward their enhancement.

Lynn Pearson Russell
Head of Adult Programs
National Gallery of Art
Washington, D.C.
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