Entertainment and Education

- Food for Thoughts
- Let Us Entertain You?
- Learning from the "Roadshow"
- Walking Through Outdoor Installations
- Games and Activities that Teach
- Tools in My Educational Arsenal
Food for Thoughts

"E at your vegetables!" That battle cry resounded through our house when I was growing up, and the mealtime encounters that ensued could range from tense to all out warfare. The problem wasn't really the vegetables, but my dear mother's cooking. She didn't enjoy cooking and it showed. She did little to enhance food preparation or embellish tastes. Vegetables simply went from the can to the saucepan, were heated, and then put on the table. What a discovery it was to learn how a few spices, a bit of butter, or a light sauce could make green beans tastier or spinach more palatable!

As flavors can be enhanced or diminished when cooking, visitor enjoyment can be diminished or enhanced when teaching. Much depends upon the effort put forth in lesson preparation and presentation. Lessons can be delivered in a "canned" fashion, diminishing their appeal, or they can be enlivened (spiced, if you will) to become more engaging. Much depends upon a willingness to put forth the effort it takes to make learning more entertaining.

♦ First, Make It Nutritious.

Allow me to be clear and emphatic — I believe our first obligation when constructing or delivering educational programs is to promote learning. I use the term "entertainment" in conjunction with education only to refer to audience interest as expressed through involvement, exploration, and discovery. I do not equate entertainment to "applause," the "wow" factor, or the type of passive stroking one might experience when watching situation comedies on television.

Recently, I had an opportunity to visit a new state-of-the-art, hands-on science center and museum. Among the attractions hawked in their promotional materials is a Simulation Center, which promised an "educational examination of how the brain interprets sound, light, and motion."

The Simulation Center presentation did not turn out to be "educational programming" but an amusement park ride! The audience was shown a movie of an alien attack while sitting in seats that shook in synchronization with the movements of spaceships projected on a giant screen. Though fun, it was a game and a trick — there was no actual attempt to teach anything. Regardless of this program's popularity or draw, I consider such programming a prime example of how the desire to entertain can supercede an institution's educational goals and responsibilities.

The "nutrients" in educational programming are only "ingested" when one learns what is being taught, not simply by having fun. That doesn't mean that fun is unimportant. But, it does mean that entertainment should be considered the "spice" in educational programming and learning objectives the "food."

♦ Now, Make It Delicious.

Audience interest is an appropriate way to measure the entertainment value inherent in educational activities. Using that criterion, however, places the burden of entertaining squarely on the shoulders of docents since the interest and fun associated with learning can be enhanced or diminished by the manner in which lessons are taught.

Nature works in the docent's favor. Most institutional collections are inherently engaging and interesting. Therefore, fostering interest in art, history, or science collections should be relatively easy, as long as nothing is done to squelch curiosity and interest. After all, the desire to satisfy an aroused curiosity is as natural to human nature as is scratching an itch.

Curiosity and interest can be stifled, however, if the docent teaches in a manner that inhibits access and involvement. For instance, if a docent gets hung up on such inhibitors as "imposing order over creating exuberance," "testing memorization over ensuring comprehension," or "imparting information over encouraging inquiry," he can effectively squish the motivation to learn and defeat any chance for participation.

That is why teaching methods that incorporate active learning opportunities are so critical. They build upon our natural curiosity. Teaching people through passive techniques, such as "show and tell" or lecturing, are the educational equivalents of culinary "heat and eat." At best, these techniques merely warm up what is "canned." Even more importantly, such lessons proceed in precisely the same manner regardless of whether visitors understand what is being taught, or not.

Simply being told what authorities have learned offers few opportunities for involvement or excitement. Furthermore, such a teaching strategy places all of its evaluative weight on what is being
taught and precious little on what is being learned. Therefore, visitor satisfaction doesn't account for much. That's not a recipe to make education "tastier," but more bland or unpleasant.

*Spice Things Up!*

A well-stocked kitchen usually contains a variety of spices, each one ready to lend its own special flavor and flare to foods. Similarly, a well-versed educator should know a variety of active learning techniques, each of which can add flavor and flare to a lesson by magnifying the excitement and satisfaction that is inherent in learning.

Spice things up by challenging visitors to find information on their own. Get them involved! Then, give them the confidence to continue learning by telling them what they have accomplished. Help visitors become more observant by giving them reasons to look.

For instance, ask them to compare the appearance of crystals to that of minerals. Or, have them describe the look and the feel of a room in your historic house. Get them to see the many colors an artist used to create skin tones in a portrait. Or, have them discuss the fragrance of different flowers or herbs in your garden.

Asking visitors to participate answers the unspoken question, "Why should I care?"

Have visitors use their imaginations (to pretend) or develop hypotheses (to make educated guesses based on evidence). What can you learn about the past from a painting? Have visitors consider how a landscape, executed in the late 1800s, might be different were it painted today? Why should I care about early attempts at flight? Well, what would our lives be like today if we had never known the benefits of air travel?

Who cares about invasive plants? Ask visitors to consider how their ecosystem might be affected if a foreign plant were introduced? What can be learned from looking at a kitchen on an historic property? Ask visitors what seems most difficult or most hazardous about working in a 18th century kitchen?

The appropriate route for infusing entertainment into our educational programming is not trickery, rides, or other gimmicks, but through activities, questions, and other pursuits that demonstrate how much fun learning can be. If we try to compete with amusement parks, movies, and other forms of entertainment, we will lose on "foreign turf." We are educational institutions. Our strength grows from our ability to generate interest and stimulate engagement with collections that are fascinating and worthy of elaborate consideration.

If your museum installs a Simulation Center that provides rides, develop lessons that make the visitors' experience truly significant. Build programming around it, rather than let it substitute for a lack of programs. Provide a forum for visitors to discuss and interpret their experiences. Challenge them to place things into context and enlarge upon meanings.

Just because our institutions serve things that are nutritious does not mean they can't be delicious. But, if they are simply delicious, and have little nutrition, then they are merely mental "junk food." And, in a world that already has too much mental junk food, that would be a tragedy. Let us strive to create programming in our museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens that tastes good, but let us first and always ensure that they are good for you!

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor

---

**THE DOCENT EDUCATOR**

*The Docent Educator* is a quarterly publication dedicated to improving the performance, status, and job satisfaction of volunteer and staff educators teaching within museums, historic sites, gardens, parks, zoos, and classrooms. The publication is available by subscription to individuals, as well as to groups and institutions.

*The Docent Educator* welcomes unsolicited articles, announcements, comments, general correspondence, and advertising inquiries. The views expressed or implied in this publication do not necessarily represent the official position of the publisher, and efforts are made to present a variety of viewpoints for the reader's consideration.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, or used in any manner, without the written consent of the publisher. All rights are reserved.
Walking through Outdoor

This is awesome! Look at that dinosaur spine made of sticks!

“Wow! The ‘spiral vortice’ is really a wooden whirlpool!”

Such comments were heard over and over again as all the third and seventh graders from the public schools in Brockton, Massachusetts, enjoyed ten outdoor installations in the woods adjacent to the Fuller Museum of Art in Brockton. The visit was the result of negotiations by the education program coordinator at the Fuller and the Brockton School Department, which agreed to pay for buses and an admission fee of two dollars per student. Over two thousand students were led by docents who had been trained to interact with the students before, during, and after the walk through the woods.

Questions such as “How do you prepare students to go outside the museum to see an exhibit?” and “What sort of questions do you ask students when making the transition from “indoor” art to “outdoor” art?” were discussed among the docents prior to the students’ arrival.

Docents felt that these particular tours were wonderful opportunities to encourage viewer participation, which is a crucial part of our teaching responsibilities at the Fuller. Prior to the walk outdoors the docents called attention to the word “docent” on their badges. Many of the students knew its meaning, having been prepped by their teachers using materials sent to them weeks in advance of their visit. We docents have found these pre-visit materials to be most helpful in preparing the students and teachers for the tour not only in their expectations and understandings, but also in behavior.

In the walk-throughs the students were well prepared to stay on the path and follow the docent, rather than running ahead in excitement which could have resulted in lost children and confusion.

Groups of approximately ten students began the tour by touring an orientation gallery titled “Walking Through: Ten Outdoor Installations,” in which the artists’ plans (some with elaborate drawings and some with models) were viewed and discussed. Some of the questions that were asked by the docents included the following:

• Why would a person want to create art in the woods?
• What are some problems that artists might have to think about when constructing an outdoor sculpture? (Weather, vandalism, animals, etc.)
• Have you ever made a sculpture using only sticks or leaves?

After all the students had had a chance to answer and ask questions they were eager to go outdoors to the woods behind the museum.

A correspondent for The Boston Globe described the ten works, which were installed along a pathway, as “an art play-land ... works that feel as if the fairies have been up all night spinning magic in the trees.” When this correspondent made reference to fairies she was probably thinking of the Fairy Houses made by Ted Hirsch and his 11-year-old son, Ben. Visitors are invited to follow the artist’s lead and build their own houses of sticks and branches, resulting in wonderful creations throughout the pathway.

As they gathered twigs, sticks, and leaves to build their own interpretations of “Fairy Houses,” the students revealed that they were actively involved in the tour and were eager to use their own creativity. One class continued to build Fairy Houses after they returned to their school and sent photos of the proud creators and their works of art.

Artist Kate Dodd’s “Membranes/Placeholders” provided an entry and an exit from the pathway with its curtains of mylar-encased paintings of scenes in the woods. Immediately upon moving beyond the “curtains” the students began to spy (and they were participating in a spying game to see who could spot colors first) the dead but graceful branches artist

Rebecca Doughty had painted in soft, vibrant colors. Exclamations that included, “There’s a pink one” and “Look how that orange one is bent” demonstrated that visitors to the woods were actively involved in viewing nature from a slightly different vantage point than they had had before — one of the goals of our tours.

Each of the ten installations were greeted with the same enthusiasm — each being distinctly different from ones they had seen earlier or were about to see.

For instance, artist Grace Pond Cain gathered Post-its™ and other bits of paper with notes scribbled on them and placed a protective coat of laminating material on each one. Then she mounted them on chickenwire fences surrounding the tree trunks. Students demonstrated their delight as they scurried to read the dozens of notes. And, when admiring “Spiral Vortice” created
Installations

While visually exciting, outdoor sculptures like this one called "Spiral Vortice," which is being assembled by its creator Frank Vasello, can be challenging for visitors unless docents provide the appropriate methods to engage audiences and focus their attention.

By Frank Vasello, visitors speak of how the sculpture imparts a sense of motion, pulling visitors toward the center of rock formations framed by his addition of branches.

During the walkthrough docents discuss questions, such as "How would these installations be different if they were made of materials not found in the woods? (Steel, cotton balls, cardboard, etc.) and "How would this sculpture be different if we took it out of the woods and placed it inside the museum? What would change?"

One installation invited visitors to do more than participate with their eyes. Wesley Reddick's "Swing Beams" consisted of two giant swings that hung from wooden beams and that encouraged visitors to climb up and take a swing. Young and old found this installation a delightful way to truly become involved with a work.

The outdoor installations have become an annual tradition at the Fuller Museum of Art and, judging from the reactions of the students and other visitors, it will continue. This exhibition has been exceptionally useful to the museum's education department, as it attempts to create a more thoughtful relationship between the environment, works of art, and people. Such works entertain and educate visitors by actively engaging them, while challenging them to commune with the artists' intents.

Miriam Johnson is a docent at the Fuller Museum of Art in Brockton, MA. After receiving a Ph.D. from Boston College, Dr. Johnson served in the Brockton Public School System for several years in various capacities. She finds that a background in education has helped her in her work as a docent.
Learning from the “Roadshow”

One of public television’s most entertaining shows painlessly educates the American viewing public about antiques. “Antiques Roadshow” offers some tricks for combining education and entertainment that museum educators might do well to consider.

During its first year, “Antiques Roadshow” traveled to 13 cities in 17 weeks and managed, by the end of the season, to entice 1,000 people to bring their treasures to be discussed and appraised. As they enter their fifth season in the U.S. (they are derived from an equally successful BBC production), the “Roadshow” is the most-watched series on Public television with more than 14 million viewers each week and attracts as many as 7,000 people at each taping location.

Peter Cook, executive producer, says this current season should “provide … broader and deeper explorations of our diverse and sometimes paradoxical cultural history.”

What are some of the secrets of their success that docents might consider as they seek to make their educational tours more entertaining?

✓ Telling the story

“Roadshow” visitors are usually asked by the appraiser to tell all they know about the object before the “expert” fills in the blanks. According to Chris Jussel, a former host of the show, most people are not primarily interested in the monetary value of their object. “They are much more interested in the other questions: Who made it? When was it made? Where was it made? How do I care for it?”

Try encouraging visitors to your institution to share their knowledge and to tell you what they would like to know about an object in the collection.

✓ Establishing the value

While monetary value often provides the “Wow” for the “Roadshow,” most of the objects brought in to the show turn out to have a nominal extrinsic value.

• “Well, I’d never sell it.”
• “It’ll be passed on to my children.”
• “I just fell in love with it.”

Comments such as these indicate the real value of the objects to their owners. Allow time in your tour to let your visitors tell you which objects are most valuable to them and why. You may be surprised at the connections!

✓ Selecting the object

On the “Roadshow,” people bring the objects that they are most interested in. They may be family heirlooms or tag sale treasures, but their owner has a personal interest in each object. In a museum setting, instead of pre-selecting the tour objects, docents might allow their visitors to select objects to discuss with which the visitor has some immediate curiosity or interest.

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor
Announcing the publication of a book that presents
the inquiry teaching techniques
and questioning strategies
taught by Alan Gartenhaus
in his “minds in motion” workshops.

*Questioning Art*

an inquiry approach to teaching art appreciation

by Alan Gartenhaus

presents methods that will engage museum visitors in thoughtful dialogue with artwork
applied to full-color reproductions of diverse works from the collection of the Wichita Art Museum.

To reserve copies of this limited-edition text
send check or money for $49.95 plus $5 shipping and handling
(plus $9 USD for shipping if sent to an address outside the US)
to:

*The Docent Educator*

P.O. Box 2080
Kamuela, HI 96743-2080
Attention: “Questioning Art”
The National Docent Symposium

The volunteer docents of the Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas, are hosting the National Docent Symposium on October 6–10, 2001. The theme of the Symposium is *River Odyssey . . . An Extended Journey.*

In addition to the McNay, other institutions with volunteer docent programs will participate in the Symposium. The Witte Museum, the Alamo, King William District of historic homes, the Botanical Gardens, San Antonio Zoo, San Jose Mission, San Antonio Central Library, and the Southwest School of Art and Craft are among those facilities that will host off-site presentations. You will also have an opportunity meet with Jackie Littleton, Associate Editor of *The Docent Educator,* who will represent this publication at the “Marketplace of Ideas” and who will conduct back-to-back workshops on “Taming Troublesome Teachers.”

For further information regarding registration, call Joann Neal at (830) 980-9779, or fax her at (830) 980-4948.

What’s in a Name

AASLH reports that the first Internet address expansion since the 1980’s was approved recently, and includes .museum. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) approved the creation of seven new top level domains out of forty-seven applications. This means museums will have the option of creating Internet addresses using the new extension .museum in addition to .org.

The new address allows the Internet community to distinguish museums from other non-profit organizations and enables researchers to more efficiently locate cultural organizations in their communities.

Existing domain names will not be affected by the new offering. Museums will have the opportunity to create new address and keep old addresses or pick one or the other.

Organizations that represent museums, such as national, regional, state, and local associations, will also have the opportunity to use the new top level domain. For more information visit: www.musedoma.org.

Museums, Fun, and the Internet

www.metmuseum.org — A 1960’s Campbell Soup dress, a 1400’s alabaster sculpture of a mourner, Cezanne’s *Still Life with Apples and a Pot of Primroses*— exploring at New York’s on-line Metropolitan Museum of Art is a dizzying adventure. You can browse through the museum’s extensive permanent exhibits, plus sample special shows.

www.tnm.go.jp — The Tokyo National Museum is worth a visit for its Japanese and Asian art. View items like the serene 17th Century screen — *Family Enjoying the Evening Cool* —

Japanese families have been involved in this form of agriculture from its inception, and they pioneered some of the technology that took Hawaiian coffee farming from a fledgling industry to one that competes on the world market.

Now school children, community members, and tourists can learn about the acculturation of Japanese immigrants, about rural life in Hawaii during the early 20th century, and about the labor-intensive demands of small farms. When touring the modest Uchida family home, visitors will have experiences that delight their senses of sight, taste, and smell, while learning about Japanese, local Hawaiian, and European customs, traditions, and farming techniques.
that shows a mother, father, and child resting by their home.

**memory.loc.gov** — You can spend weeks with the pictures, songs, videos, and other items at the American Memory site of the Library of Congress.

One photo shows a crowd lined up for hot dogs at Brooklyn's Ebbets Field. There's also a series of recordings of American fiddle music and a 1903 Alphonce and Gaston film clip, to cite just a few of this site's offerings.

**www.hermitagemuseum.org** — Russia's premier art collection is in St. Petersburg's Winter Palace, onetime home of Russian czars and now a museum. Virtual tours show both the art and the gilded surroundings.

### Think of the Message

Before being escorted into a gallery in a science museum, a group of visitors were told by a "facilitator" that they would be viewing a five-minute, educational video. Then the facilitator turned to his audience and said, "I know, I know, 'education' is a dirty word. But this short program isn't bad."

What kind of message does that send to visitors? Such statements reveal the importance of forethought and the benefits that can be derived from frequent evaluations.

### It Works for Me...

Sharing Successful Techniques and Ideas

Baldwin Hills Charter/LEARN Elementary and Magnet School has embarked on an exciting new model project to create ongoing links between Los Angeles' rich community-based arts programs and classroom learning. The goal of this innovative program, tagged "Arts in the City Improves Literacy," is to improve student achievement and encourage active citizenship and lifelong learning by participation in the city and its arts.

Partially underwritten by a two-year California State Public Schools Grant (given to only a handful of schools from hundreds of statewide applicants) this program, if successful, could have a major impact on the way California school children view and use their city's arts resources. Despite research that links arts and academic success, school arts programs that reach from the curriculum to the community and back are very rare.

Baldwin Hills Elementary — 86% African American, nestled in a leafy residential area within sight of downtown Los Angeles — is 15 minutes or less from the major museums and performing arts centers of the city and two blocks from one of the most devastated areas of the 1992 riots. The school remains a beacon of achievement and stability even as its neighborhood and school district have struggled. Yet its children remain isolated from the rich cultural resources surrounding them.

Baldwin Hills Principal Jo Anne Polite hopes to change that, to expand the school's role in the neighborhood and the city. "I envision a time," she says, "when our students will see their city as an extension of their classrooms, when they will connect their interest in arts to active citizenship." By taking the students into the community, by making the arts part of their lives and the lives of their families, she anticipates improved student literacy scores. She also anticipates improved "cultural literacy"—knowledge of, familiarity with, and pride in community; a sense of comfort and self confidence in using and participating in the arts; an ease in using the vocabulary and customs of participation, observation and criticism of the arts.

The plan has several initial phases. 1) "Exploring the Arts" — an on-campus lecture series for faculty. 2) Taking field trips — including some unusual ones — with more curriculum connections and more community arts components. 3) Integrating school curriculum and community arts by arranging pre- and post-field trip activities on campus with artists and arts experts. 4) Establishing student arts journals, field notebooks, portfolios and assessment tools. 5) Creating campus murals, banners, and arts bulletin boards to encourage children, their families, faculty and the neighborhood to make the arts-city-school connection.

_Cameron Taylor-Brown and Amanda Parsons are community arts consultants and partners in Access Community Arts & Education, of Los Angeles, CA. They are actively working with the school to establish long term, cost effective, and curriculum-based links with the community._
Where Should We Draw the Line?

Let Us Entertain You?

Who are some of the great entertainers? What qualities do they have in common?" So began panelist Dana Conte-Hurst at the recent Virginia Docent Exchange, a biennial conference for docents serving in Virginia museums. Held at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, the title of this year's meeting was Wearing Many Hats — Docents: Educators, Entertainers, and Explorers. Conte-Hurst went on to encourage participants to generate similar lists for famous educators and explorers. As the lists grew and overlapped, participants began to realize how the fields of entertainment, education, and exploration could provide models of best practices for docents.

So, who are some great entertainers and what qualities and abilities do they share in common? Depending on your generation, your answers might include Frank Sinatra, Carol Burnett, Wayne Newton, Barbara Streisand, Milton Berle, Siegfried and Roy, or even Madonna. Though worlds apart in many cases, all of these individuals are charismatic and engaging. They are prepared, but they think well on their feet. And they relate well to their audiences, often through humor.

Certainly, none of these qualities are at odds with being a docent. Quite to the contrary, they are the very attributes that are highly sought after in prospective docents. But the content of what these performers do could hardly be described as anything but entertainment.

Definitions of the word "entertain" differ somewhat among dictionaries, but there is general agreement that "to entertain" is to help, especially a group of people, pass the time — usually a short time — pleasantly; to lightly or frivolously engage; and to divert, often with humor, and often through contrived methods. The most common synonym is "amuse." Other words associated with "entertainment" are enjoyment, distraction, and relaxation.

Though movies and plays are sometimes mentioned, singing, dancing, and telling jokes are activities most often associated with entertainment. Adding weight to entertainment's emphasis on "light weight" content are television programs like Entertainment Tonight, which glosses over substance in favor of style, and publications like Entertainment Weekly.

Standing in line at the grocery story recently, a headline jumped off the cover: "Lips! Hips! And Super Powers!" I am quite sure the corresponding story was not about global politics.

Given the above definitions, the ultimate goals of entertainment are at distinct odds with those of education. While educators, like museum docents, seek to engage visitors in a pleasant manner, frivolity and diversion are anathema to our aims. And while we certainly encourage visitors to enjoy themselves, often via a "contrived" or "constructed" learning environment or process, we certainly do not view our primary goal as diverting, distraction, or even relaxation. Stimulation and provocation, yes. Relaxation, no.

That's Entertainment?

Still, entertainment and education are not necessarily mutually exclusive terms, hence the term "edutainment." According to Ann Dearman, education director at the Old Coastguard Station in Virginia Beach, "Edutainment" is not a bad word and maybe it best describes what we try to do." She explains, "Kids are different today and we must compete with a lot. Just ask any classroom teacher."

However, in an attempt to "compete," museums often miss the mark. A friend recently reminded me of a scene I had described to her — though her recounting of it was more colorful and literary — in which a horde of school children in a museum "surged around setting off every educational bell and whistle in the place and pretty much created a sound and fury signifying very little."

The dividing line between the two "E's" for educational institutions seems to be whether entertainment is the means to an end or the end itself.

Are there depths to which we should not stoop? Is there a point at which we have sold out to pure entertainment? Dearman answers those questions with this analogy: If one brings in a juggler to juggle balls for a class, that is entertainment. However, if one brings a juggler in to juggle balls that are named after shipwrecks and the juggler recites the names as he juggles — and has the students join in — that is education or, perhaps, edutainment. Regardless, the students have been engaged and they have also learned. For Dearman, any program or
method that effectively and successfully addresses one's educational goals and objectives is legitimate.

**Mission: Possible**

Anna Holloway, education director at the Mariner's Museum in Newport News, Virginia, seconds. She maintains that, "Education is that which fulfills the museum's (educational) mission." At the Mariner's Museum, their mission is to "illuminate mankind's experience with the sea and the events that shaped the course and progress of civilization."

As Holloway explains, "Every program, exhibit, publication, label, panel, etc. that we do in the education department is done with that mission in mind. If it does not fit in — then it does not belong in the education department." (Like many museums, both the Mariner's Museum and the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, VA, have marketing, development, and/or special events departments. These department mount programs unrelated to the mission of the institution and serve, instead, a fund-raising or audience development function, e.g. — Easter Egg hunts, wine tastings, and the like.)

**Complementary and Interpretive**

About 15 years ago, when I was newly hired in my first position as a museum educator, the director of the museum distinguished between two different kinds of programming, a distinction that I still find useful today. They are interpretive and complementary. Both, he felt, were the appropriate purviews of museums. Interpretive programming is more strictly "educational" and is that which is intended to most directly increase the public's understanding of the objects exhibited, e.g. — tours, gallery talks, and lectures. Complementary programming generally has a higher "entertainment" value and seeks most often to contextualize the exhibited objects, e.g. — concerts of music from the same era as exhibited objects and theatrical performances thematically related to the exhibition.

A current grant-based touring program at the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia (CAC) is based on an increasingly popular educational model that integrates both interpretive and complementary programming. In this case, fourth grade students come with their classes on two-part field trips designed in conjunction with two contemporary landscape exhibitions. Part One of the experience is an interactive docent-led tour of the exhibitions. Part Two is a slide-illustrated folk music concert in which the two musicians perform songs inspired by artwork in the exhibitions, discussing the reasons for their selections with the audience. Previous tours at CAC have followed similar formats using different exhibitions complemented by thematically-related performances of theatre, dance, or storytelling, in place of music.

**Let the Show Begin?**

Among the kinds of entertainment and edutainment strategies docents are most likely to employ in the galleries are the use of costumes, recorded music, creative movement, puppets, and art-making activities. I can only speak for my institution, but none of our docents are likely to burst into song, dance, or a juggling routine on a tour, not that

*Continued on next page.*
I would necessarily discourage it. In fact, for a contemporary African exhibition a few years ago, one of our docents did dress in costume and played a Bob Marley recording (to which she had the students dance) as part of an interpretive strategy for a clay sculpture that was a tribute to Marley. I also know of another local art museum with a docent who is a dancer. She incorporates creative movement for certain age groups into gallery tours.

With any of these methods, we should ask ourselves two questions and provide honest answers.

1) Why are we using this approach?
2) Is it effectively meeting the intended goals(s)?

■ Missing the Point

It is not uncommon to think a program or activity meets an intended goal, when it actually does not. For instance, a fifth grade teacher recently told me that a fellow teacher created a very popular lesson for a social studies unit that did not meet the objective, but only related to the unit’s theme.

The objective stated that, “The student will describe colonial America with emphasis on life in the colonies during the specified historical period. But, it does not, as the objective states, increase their understanding of the lives of people from different strata of the society.

A simple adjustment solved the problem without losing the diorama activity that the students (and teacher!) loved. Each student could be assigned to design either a plantation, a farm, or a workshop from the perspective of an owner, a slave, a woman, etc. Presentations from each student and a group discussion about differences in the economic and social lives of the people concluded the project and made it meet the learning objective.

■ Is the Medium the Message?

In museums, especially in the case of costumes and music, it is sometimes easy to make a similar mistake; confusing thematic gimmicks with educational strategies.

If your intention is to use costumes or music to “bring to life” or to draw special attention to exhibited objects, those are worthy goals, though they are not necessarily educational. However, if discussion or other kinds of activities asks visitors to compare and contrast what they hear and see in order to increase their understanding, then the strategy is educational.

In the example of the Marley piece mentioned earlier, the artist had tried to echo, through the sculptural form and content he chose, the characteristics of Marley’s music. By comparing the music with the sculpture, students could better understand why the sculpture looked the way it did. If the recording had been played as the students entered the gallery, without the discussion, the music would have perhaps set a tone, but it would not have advanced the docent’s instructional goals.

Dancing to the raggae music was, on the other hand, an admittedly intentional “gimmick,” designed...
to encourage young students to "burn off a little steam," and was, admittedly, not an educational, but rather a behavior modification, strategy.

- Move It or Lose It?
Most docents are familiar with learning styles and know that there are kinesthetic learners who understand best through moving their bodies or imagining doing so. Activities involving actual dance or movement may or may not be practical or advisable within your museum context. If they are options for you, I would suggest that they are most effective with younger students, as older visitors may be too inhibited.

A few years ago, we exhibited a few extremely large, highly realistic and very poignant drawings of hands in poses taken from sign language. Interpretive gallery activities included making shadow puppets and a version of "Charades." However, those kinds of gallery games can quickly become mere games if the docent does not continually help students see connections — and not just the superficial ones — between what they are doing and the exhibited works.

A number of years ago, one very popular so-called "interpretive" kinesthetic strategy was "tableau vivant," in which selected student were asked to mimic the poses in paintings or sculptures. That strategy — and other similar ones — can very quickly become an empty exercise in keeping students busy. While students may enjoy it, that is hardly the point if education, rather than entertainment, is your goal. In evaluating such a strategy, we must simply ask, "What new understanding will the students gain by doing this?" If we have difficulty coming up with an answer — or if the answer is not the intended one — perhaps we need to rethink our approach. If, on the other hand, it is through movement that students will best understand the impetus driving the action painting of Jackson Pollock or Franz Kline, for instance, then, by all means, employ movement.

- Give Yourself a Hand (Puppet)
The use of hand puppets, especially during pre-school tours, can be a very effective strategy. We know from the likes of Sesame Street and Barney that
children can be far more eager to learn what a puppet can teach them than what an adult wants them to learn. The main consideration when using puppets to interact with children is that the puppet not upstage the exhibited objects lest the children come away knowing everything about the puppet and very little about anything else they were intended to learn.

■ Make It and Take It?

Some art museums are increasingly allowing certain simple art-making activities taught by docents, if not in the galleries then in multi-purpose classrooms or studios. One thing is a given — virtually all children love to make art. The question for educators then becomes, “Have I designed the art making activity so that I reinforce the most important concepts in the tour, or am I just providing a pleasurable, tangentially-related experience to keep students busy?”

For the sake of example, consider students touring an exhibition of landscape paintings by the Hudson River School artists. Let us say that the main concept that docents want high school students to understand was the relationship between the Hudson River School and the concept of Manifest Destiny, which was a guiding principle of westward expansion in the 1800’s. Would the most effective way to teach that concept involve having students create a collage landscape with a foreground, middle ground, and background or to have them create a political cartoon with landscape elements about westward expansion? I would suggest it is the latter. On the other hand, if docents want students to understand the notion of the “sublime” in the same paintings, perhaps then the creation of a “sublime” landscape using collage materials would help reach the objective.

■ When the Curtain Falls

When all is said and done, how do you know if your tours and other programs are merely entertaining (or not entertaining enough)? Ask! Some kind of assessment or evaluation — formal and/or informal — is essential to discovering whether you are meeting the educational goals and objectives established by museum educators working in concert with teachers and other group leaders. The understandings that students leave with may be very different from those intended, and the only way to know is to inquire.

The process of evaluation need not require the development of a survey instrument and the attendant photocopying and postage. Instead, docents might simply ask at the conclusion of the tour what ideas or concepts students will carry with them. In the case of CAC’s landscape tours and concerts, we might ask, “Who can recall one sculpture that dealt with human control of nature? How did it appear?”, or “What song did the musicians sing about this piece and why did they sing it?”

When it comes to education versus entertainment within museum education, it appears that the ends justify the means. But, as educators, we must be clear about what the “ends” are in order to know if we achieve them through any means.

Betsy Gough-DiJulio is Director of Education for the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia, in Virginia Beach, VA. She received her M.A. in art history from Vanderbilt University and an Ed.S. in Curriculum Instruction from The George Washington University. Ms. Gough-DiJulio is a regular contributor to The Docent Educator. Her last article was entitled “Technology in Art Museums,” and appeared in the Summer 1999 issue (Volume 8, Number 4).
By Mary Peterson

Tools in My Educational Arsenal

By nature, we are tactile creatures. People want to touch, hold, or feel what they look at. Tactile experiences add another dimension to the learning experience. They help the learner form a mental image of an object and provide another route toward understanding what an object represents. Adding a tactile dimension to my teaching became a personal challenge. Though most museums, including my own, routinely discourage touching objects in their collection, I wanted to find a way to allow for it.

As I developed a resource of "touchable" educational objects for use in the Corning Museum of Glass, I also discovered other ways to make my teaching both entertaining and educational.

The tour begins when I ask fifth graders visiting our American Gallery to imagine that we are "Time Travelers" who have gone back in time 150 years to the middle of the 19th Century. We compare our contemporary lives with those of children who had no electric lights, television, computers, movies, clean water, indoor plumbing, antibiotics, or even aspirin. These were the children who worked 12-14 hours a day, 6 days a week in the nation's factories, including those that made glass.

We discuss some of the challenges that might have faced a 10-year-old working in one of these factories. The students always come up with some very valid concerns about workplace health and safety, including fire, cuts, repetitive injury, and air quality. I point out that going to school was not an option for these children. After working 12 to 14 hours in 140-degree heat, these children were not likely to attend classes even if they could have afforded them.

We look at the basics of what glass is made from—batch material in a large glass bottle and another bottle of an orange-colored syrup that approximates the consistency of melted glass. They handle and manipulate hand molds and a cast iron pressing machine that were used to make pressed glass, a cheaper product that gave American consumers an alternative to more expensive cut glass.

Role play is another tool in my educational arsenal. I ask one of the students to volunteer to come and work for me in the glass factory, and we play out the hours he must work and the amount of pay he will receive. At the end of his "day," I pay him with a $2.00 "glasshouse shiny," the common form of payment for workers in this industry. The glass factory printed this money that their employees could redeem only at the company store. Since the group already knows that their classmate was supposed to earn 50 cents per day and worked six days a week, they soon realize that he was cheated out of $1.00 in wages. This helps reinforce the problem of not going to school and consequently not knowing enough mathematics to be aware he had been cheated.

I promise to send my worker to apprentice school once he reaches the age of 16 if he remains in my employ. When he reaches that age, he then discovers that the laws of the labor union might prevent him from going to apprentice school.

I close our discussion by explaining that a Congressional investigation of the glass industry in 1912 found 1,700,000 children between the ages of 10 and 16 working in the industry. To help the students visualize the enormity of that number, I ask several children to stand one behind the other in a row. I tell them that 1,700,000 children standing in such a row would reach nearly 322 miles. I then tell them that if they were in a car traveling at 55 miles per hour, it would take them nearly 6 hours to drive past all those children standing in a line. The looks on their faces tell me they understand that, indeed, a lot of children were involved in making glass during the first part of the 20th century.

When I go into a classroom, I can make use of videos, demonstrations, and the chalkboard to list properties and things made of glass. I carry with me touchable items that demonstrate some of the properties of glass; the children find them endlessly fascinating.

We also play a derivation of a popular television game show. During the game, based loosely on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," the children answer questions using the information they've learned about glass and the glass industry. Each team wins a large glass pebble for every correct answer. If they couldn't come up with an answer they thought was correct, they could also use one of three lifelines: they could ask a member of another team; they could ask another team; or they could ask their teacher for a hint.

Continued on page #20.
Games are more than child’s play. They are one way in which children learn about their culture and what is expected of them within that culture. Games also are an excellent way for museums and other institutions to make learning fun.

In many cases, games already exist that can be used to teach within the museum setting. Rolling a hoop, making tin-can stilts, turning cornhusks into dolls — games and toys of yesteryear at a history museum or historic site can help young visitors recreate the experiences of children from a different time. Books and internet sites describe hundreds of games played by youngsters in various Native American tribes that can be adapted at historic sites with ties to specific tribal groups. David C. King’s *American Kids in History* series provides games, activities, crafts, and recipes from each of six different eras in American history — colonial, pioneer, Civil War, wild west, Victorian, and World War II — that can be adapted to a museum setting.

Playing one of the multitude of simulation games found in publications from *Project Learning Tree*, *Project Wild*, and/or *Project Aquatic Wild* is an outstanding way for nature centers, zoos, and aquariums to let children explore complex concepts about the world around them. *Earth Child 2000: Earth Science for Young Children: Games, Stories, Activities and Experiments* by Kathryn Sheehan and Mary Waidner is also a valuable resource for science museums, botanical gardens, parks, and nature centers.

Some games and activities are useful, as well as fun, in many different venues. Re-creating a thaumatrope at a history museum allows children to play with one of the more popular “toys” of the 1800’s. Making one within a science museum can help children understand concepts about the brain and senses. Creating this “moving picture” in an art museum gives children the opportunity to put their artistic talents to work and to discover the sense of movement present within still images.

Many common childhood games, such as “Twenty-One” (a.k.a. “I Spy” or “Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral”) and treasure hunts can be easily adapted to use with the art, specimens, and artifacts of many museum collections. Such games teach children facts about the collection as well as helping them practice careful observation. In a follow-up activity, children can be encouraged to create board games that incorporate aspects of the museum tour they’ve just completed.

Sometimes, though, just the right game may not exist until some creative docent “invents” it. To develop a game or activity that is unique to your collection, try following the steps.

- Select a process skill or concept that you can teach with your collection.

  Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for fourth graders in language arts and reading mandates that the successful student listens critically to analyze and evaluate a speaker’s message. In order to achieve this skill, the student is expected to distinguish between the speaker’s opinion and verifiable fact. This process skill, which is probably part of the standards of most state education systems, could be easily taught in a museum, where facts and opinion are everyday tools of the trade.

- Consider the learning characteristics for those students in the grade level you’ve chosen.

  Upper elementary children, such as those in the fourth grade, are curious. They love to explore. They love to touch and take things apart. They are very energetic. Even while they are listening, they may be moving some part of their body. In other words, they are active learners.

  They enjoy being with their peers, and they like to work together to plan and carry out activities. They want the approval of both their peers and adults. They appreciate begin given opportunities to perform within their abilities.

- Examine your state education agency’s curriculum standards for both process skills and concepts.

  This may mean looking in areas of the curriculum that are not directly related to the stated mission of your institution. For example, it’s pretty obvious that there are concepts in social studies curriculum that can come to life through the exhibits of a history museum or historic site. Many process skills from math, language arts, and science, however, can be taught effectively in a history museum.
Activities that Teach

Treasure hunt activities are useful for teaching children about the objects in a collection and for helping them practice careful observation skills necessary for acquiring information on their own. Another benefit of treasure hunts is that the activity can easily be adapted to suit all subject areas, collections, and institutions. These children and their adult chaperone are exploring the Egyptian artifacts at the British Museum, in London, England, using a handout provided by the Museum’s Education Department.

✓ Think of games you and your audience are already familiar with.

An excellent source of common childhood games is www.gameskidsplay.net. This website lists and describes more than one hundred classic games. The games are listed by category (e.g. ball, chasing, circle, international, etc.) or can be accessed by name. Such games that can be adapted to new situations are ideal since most children will already be familiar with the basic rules.

✓ Put it all together.

Using a standard “treasure hunt” format, a game called “Fact or Opinion Collection” can be created for almost any type of museum setting (as long as there is space for movement and guards that don’t object to a little childish noise.) This game allows fourth graders to move around, work with their peers and independently, adapt information to new situations, and succeed in a non-threatening environment. It gives them an opportunity to learn the difference between facts and opinions while learning some facts about art, historic objects, scientific specimens, zoo animals, or other artifacts.

Continued on next page.
Many docents and staff educators have modified games and activities specifically suited to their institution's collections and educational objectives. In another manifestation of the treasure hunt game, school children at Seattle's Museum of Flight dress in "Design Engineer" lab coats and look for, and make notes about, various aspects of aircraft design and construction.

A Sample Activity
The Fact or Opinion Collection

Materials: a small clipboard, paper, and pencil for each team (If "real" clipboards are unavailable, substitutes can be made with heavy cardboard and a large paperclip.)

Players: The class or touring group is divided into teams of from 3 to 5 members. The game works best with a group (12 to 30 children) that allows at least 3 teams. Each team is given a clipboard with paper and pencil attached. Each team should select one child to be the recorder and carry the clipboard.

Procedure: Team members should listen to the docent-directed tour for both facts and opinions. After each gallery or exhibit, the docent allows no more than 3 minutes for each team to record at least one fact and one opinion they heard during the discussion. At the end of the complete tour, each team, in turn, reads the facts they have collected. With docent help, the entire group should verify each as a fact.

The team receives one point for each verifiable fact they recorded. Then each team, in turn, reads the opinions they have collected. Again, they receive a point for each opinion the group "accepts." The team with the greatest total points wins the game and applause from the other teams.

Try it out on real kids.

Practice the game you have developed, as well as those you've borrowed from other sources, before you use it in a tour. Work with other docents to perfect the logistics of your game. Where will it be played? How long does it take to play? Where does it fit in your overall tour? How can the directions be given most clearly and concisely?

When you think the game is ready for "real kids," ask a teacher with whom you've worked and whose judgement you value to let you test it on her class. Let the kids in on the process. Tell them you need their input, and listen to their suggestions. Make changes in the game or in the directions as needed.
Put it in the program.

Once you have a game that teaches a concept or process skill, make it part of your regular tours. Make teachers aware of this new part of the program so they can include the concept or process skill in their field trip application. Continue to refine.

Playing games is the natural business of children. Using games to teach in a museum setting is a natural way to make learning fun ... and effective.

---

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

---

A Sample of Game Resources


If they answered a question incorrectly, or couldn’t answer the question, they lost one of the pieces of glass they had already won. After the class, each student was given a small glass pebble to thank them and to remind them of their participation in the learning process.

The children’s enthusiastic involvement in gallery and classroom instruction, and their ability to answer questions about glass and the glass industry, helped me to understand the importance of making my classes participatory and hands-on and, thus, both more educational and more entertaining.

Mary Peterson has been a docent at the Corning Museum of Glass, in Corning, New York, for the past 13 years. Her educational training is in pediatric nursing. While her first love at the museum is the scientific aspects of the Glass Center, she enjoys the challenges of providing comprehensive, interactive experiences for school children.
Digitization of The Docent Educator was generously sponsored by museum educators from around the globe through their support of Museum-Ed’s 2014 Kickstarter campaign:

**Full Series Supporters:**
- J. Marshall Adams
- Marianna Adams
- Christina Alderman
- Anonymous
- Autry National Center Education Department
- Bayou Bend Docent Organization
- Birmingham Museum of Art
- Mary Ann Bloom
- Brooklyn Museum
- Berclee Cameron
- Carnegie Museum of Art
- Jennifer Chowning
- Susan Chun
- Edith Copenhaver
- The Corning Museum of Glass, Rakow Research Library
- Karen L. Daly
- Herminia Din
- Robin Dowden
- Julia Forbes
- Robin Gabriel
- Courtney Gerber
- Golden History Museums, Golden, CO
- Kimberly Hanson
- Phyllis Hecht
- Anne Henderson
- Victoria Hughes
- Kathleen F. G. Hutton
- Indianapolis Museum of Art Docents
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Johns Hopkins University Museum Studies
- Carole Krucoff
- Judith Landau
- Jean Linsner
- Beth Maloney
- Laura Mann
- Melinda Mayer
- Museum Education Roundtable
- Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
- Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland
- Museum Partners Consulting, LLC
- Diana Musslewhite
- Elisabeth Nevins, seed/ed consulting
- Ayumu Ota
- Lauren Patton
- Sandbox Studios
- Roger Sayre
- Susie Severson
- SFMOMA Research Library
- Arthur Smith
- Ellen Soares, Peabody Essex Museum
- The Softtalk Apple Project and
- FactMiners.org Developers Community
- Marcos Stafne
- Nicole Stutzman Forbes
- University of Michigan Library
- Katherine Yount

**Volume Ten Supporters:**
- Alice Novak
- Poudre Wilderness Volunteers

**Volume Ten, No. 4 Supporter:**
- Corinne Zimmermann