Familiar Strangers

Hands-On History for Teens

Considering Diverse Learning Styles

Collaborative Programs that Personalize Learning

Making It Real; Making It Relevant

Transforming Lives Through Art
Perhaps you might salute a group of arriving eighth-graders with the same slogan I'd use, "Hail mighty contrarians!" These awkward, yet occasionally articulate, fourteen and fifteen-year-olds reflect the many challenges and dichotomies inherent when transitioning from childhood to adulthood.

Young people in this age range are full of a restless energy that contrasts starkly with the orderly silence of most museum galleries. Their adolescent pre-occupation with each other seems incongruous when contrasted against their physical size and adult appearance. Their self-conscious reticence often foils their highly developed verbal skills and ability to express sentiment. And, their desire for recognition and status as adults seems constantly undermined by their diffident or even defiant demeanors.

Students in grades six and up are enigmatic and yet completely known to us. After all, who hasn't been a teenager? Odd how these "familiar strangers," simply by being themselves, can as easily intimidate or frustrate us as they can delight or energize us.

Shifting Your Focus

If you are wondering how you can control teenagers long enough to impart some information, you are traveling down the wrong track! You can no more dissuade teenagers from being themselves than you can hold back the flow of a river. Better to go with the flow! Use who they are, what they need, and how they interact to get them involved and learning. Change your thinking because in the brief time you have with them, you won't change theirs. The first step is to shift your focus from watching their behaviors to examining your own. Rather than thinking of ways to "control" teenagers, find ways to "engage" them.

Most efforts to control other people fail and, in the case of teenagers, can have the unfortunate consequence of sending them spiraling off in the opposite direction. People learn in museums, zoos, gardens, and parks because their interests have been piqued and they are intrigued.

You must find ways of presenting your collection or resources in ways that will interest this age group. You can not get teenagers to learn simply because you, as the group leader, have requested their orderly and quiet attention.

Similarly, if you are trying to "impart" information to teenaged visitors — forget it! Let's face it, even under the best of circumstances it's tough to "impart" anything to teenagers. (I believe the expression "learning the hard way" was originally used to describe this age group.)

Casting one's self in the pivotal role of information provider is counterproductive anyway. Teens are on a quest to make their own sense of things. So don't even try to be a purveyor of information.

Establish activities that will "direct" their attention and request their involvement with an object, specimen, or artifact, and that allow them to make discoveries for themselves. For instance, instead of entering a gallery and taking students to the object you have chosen, try permitting the students to make their own selection. Tell your students to look around and give them a few moments to do so.

Then, have them tell you which of the objects they find most intriguing. Begin your discussion by asking them why they think that particular artwork, specimen, or artifact 'spoke' louder than the others did.

Going With the Flow

Young people in grades 6 through 9 are experiencing their most creative and most conformist time of life. While they are rebelling against convention and their perceived view of adults, they often seek adult approval. Though they can appear to be exceptionally tough, they are actually quite vulnerable to criticism and particularly concerned with acceptance by their peers.

Their preoccupation with peer and adult approval makes teens better candidates for participating within group activities than for posting ideas and responses individually. Working within groups of three or more permits teenagers to enjoy a measure of anonymity from the critical eyes of their peers, and allows them to strive for the approval of adults without seeming to "kiss up."

Teenagers are extremely sensitive to the attitudes conveyed by adults. Any hint that you think of them, or will be treating them, as children will send them into a protective or antagonistic stance. Teens should be approached with respect and with appreciation for their maturing abilities. Because of their personal vulnerabilities, teens should not be singled out for their behavior or appearance. If you are gracious and good natured, the pressure brought by peers to act or participate appropriately will be far more effective than anything you can accomplish by isolating, cajoling, threatening, or ridiculing.
Teenagers are going about the difficult work of “creating” their own identities, constructing their own ideas, and sorting through the values, ideas, and attitudes presented by parents, guardians, teachers, and other adults. Because of these efforts, they are particularly familiar with such mental activities as comparing and critiquing or evaluating and judging. By finding ways to use these “skills” (yes, when properly directed these mental activities are skills), you will be going with the flow rather than against it.

Encouraging Teens to Make Discoveries

Have groups of students in grades 6 through 9 investigate your historic site or collection by challenging them to make a list of reasons why life would be “radically different” if they were living in that time period rather than in contemporary times. Have them reference these differences directly to the objects or evidence surrounding them.

Inspect a work of art by asking groups of students to make a list of its particular attributes, such as its appearance, subject matter, style, palate, etc. Tell them to use this work as a “standard by which all other works will be measured.” Then, have them critique other works by contrasting them to the “standard.” How have other artists followed or broken the rules by conveying images similarly or differently than their predecessor?

After introducing your facility and its collection, have groups of students brainstorm criteria for selecting one work of art, scientific specimen, plant, animal, object, or artifact that they feel best fills their criteria. Following this, have each group discuss how it made its determination and selection.

What impact would the loss of a type of bird, insect, fish, or plant species have if it were to become extinct? Have your visitors make a list of the potential impact. Then, investigate how the loss of other species has changed ecosystems.

Making It Work

No matter who your audience is, you cannot simply insist upon their undivided attention. You must earn it. There is no audience for whom this is truer than one composed of students in grades 6 through 9. Garner the attention of these eager, able, and challenging visitors by engaging them in conversations and presenting them with activities that are thought-provoking, interesting, and that will give them an opportunity to “do it for themselves.”

“If you are wondering how you can control teenagers long enough to impart some information, you are traveling down the wrong track! You can no more dissuade teenagers from being themselves than you can hold back the flow of a river. Better to go with the flow!”

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor
Imagine a hypothetical situation in which an out-of-town couple asks for directions to your museum. In all likelihood you would give them directions that you, yourself, feel most comfortable following. If you have a good sense of direction, you might tell them to go “north on 5th Avenue.” Alternately, you might pull out a map and direct the couple by pointing to particular streets. Or, you might give them directions filled with visual landmarks to follow, such as “take your first left after the fountain and a right when you see the lake.” Perhaps, you might direct the couple using mileage such as “go 1.2 miles on the highway. Then go 300 yards on 6th Street.” Or, you might simply say, “I’m going that way why don’t you just follow me?”

This hypothetical situation illustrates that we all approach the world with diverse learning styles or intelligences. If you are particularly comfortable with directions that involve street names and the cardinal points, then you are an individual who possesses strong verbal and kinesthetic learning styles. On the other hand, if you are good with maps, you might be more mathematically inclined. If you need visual landmarks or an actual car to follow, then your greatest strengths are being visually or spatially aware.

If you are teaching pre-teens and teenagers, and want their involvement and participation, you must understand and enfranchise the many learning styles they bring to your institution. In 1983, Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University, published Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. This study gives us a construct for comprehending learning styles.

Gardner proposed seven learning styles or intelligences. The two language-related intelligences Gardner labels “verbal/linguistic” and “musical/rhythmic.” The three object-related intelligences he terms “logical/mathematical,” “visual/spatial,” and “bodily/kinesthetic.” Two person-related intelligences he calls, “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal.” These intelligences are developed through one’s lifetime and are affected by outside factors such as one’s environment, schooling, and relationship to others. While everyone is born with all seven intelligences, over time, one relies more on certain intelligences resulting in areas of strength and weakness.

**Applying Multiple Intelligences to Students in Grades 6 through 9**

Pre-adolescents and teenagers are becoming more self-conscious, independent, and may become bored easily. When you add the variable of differences in learning styles, the prospect of touring this age group can become daunting indeed. However, capitalizing on your

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**The Multiple Intelligences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Key Components</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal/Linguistic</td>
<td>Reading, listening, writing, speaking, conveying information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical/Rhythmic</td>
<td>Music, rhythm, keen awareness of sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical/Mathematical</td>
<td>Critical thinking, abstract reasoning, interested in patterns and numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual/Spatial</td>
<td>Creative, imaginative, interested in colors and art media, abstract thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily/Kinesthetic</td>
<td>Tactile, interested in sports and fitness, agile, keen awareness of how body relates to outside world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>Reflective, comprehends emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Gets along well with others, team player</td>
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Learning Styles

students' multiple intelligences will increase the odds that your secondary school groups will be more interested and eager to participate during a tour. While you cannot know in advance how many in your school group are predominately verbal, kinesthetic, or visual learners, you can prepare your content and approach to accommodate diversity. The following are some examples of interactive, interpretative techniques that engage multiple intelligences. While you may already incorporate some of these approaches on your tours, realizing that they tap into diverse intelligences will help your tours become even more all-inclusive. It may even garner greater participation from an age range that is known for being somewhat reticent.

Verbal/Linguistic

Brief writing activities work well for students with heightened verbal or linguistic abilities. Not only does this “Thought Bubble” activity enable students to use their writing skills, it encourages them to use careful looking skills and their imaginations. Begin by distributing pieces of scrap paper, writing surfaces (such as cardboard), and pencils. Students simply need to select a character within a work of art, create a “thought bubble” (those clouds that appear over the heads of comic strip figures), and write a phrase or sentence that records that character’s thoughts. To generate a character’s thought bubble, have students carefully focus on their character’s pose, gesture, expression, clothing, and interactions with others. Finally, have students share their “thought bubbles” aloud so the group can guess which thoughts and characters go together.

In addition to stimulating the verbal/linguistic learners, this activity also serves as a wonderful “ice-breaker” for tours with pre-teens and teenagers as it calls for everyone to become involved (through writing) and provides a non-threatening forum for participation in front of one’s peers.

Another way to get verbal/linguistic learners involved is to initiate your discussion by asking students to write down the first word that comes to mind when they look at a work of art. Then, you can gather the words and, as you hold up a word, ask the group why this word may have come to mind. This will cause your students to look closely at the work of art for specific details that give visual form to their first impressions.

Musical/Rhythmic

Of all the intelligences, it is the musical or rhythmic intelligence that emerges earliest. As babies, we were soothed by lullabies, we learned our first animal noises through songs like “Old MacDonald Had a Farm,” and as toddlers, the rhythmic cadence of nursery rhymes entertained us. Individuals who maintain a strong musical or rhythmic learning style might find it particularly interesting to approach art through a song or poem. While taking this approach does not necessarily mean that you’ll be singing in the galleries, it can involve sharing a song’s lyrics or a few stanzas of poetry with your visitors.

After the lyrics or words of poetry are shared, ask your visitors how the words resonate with the artwork you are focusing on. Or, have the students select artworks of their own choosing that they feel are the most appropriate matches for lyrics or poems from a range of works available in a gallery.

Visual/Spatial

Students with a strong visual and spatial learning style are known for their creative imaginations. They also possess a special interest in visual elements. From overall composition, to texture, quality of line, and the effect of shapes and colors, those with a keen visual or spatial intelligence are easily able to perceive the various components and effects within a work of art.

Ask students to isolate details or to embellish upon their response to works. For example, using a painting that depicts a Civil War soldier’s return home, you might ask students which details are used to convey the emotions of this soldier and those around him. Then, to engage imaginations, have the students imagine this scene prior to the war. What would be different?

Logical/Mathematical

Most museum galleries are organized chronologically, stylistically, thematically, or geographically. Engage the logical/mathematical learners in your group by having students imagine they are curators responsible for the installation of a particular gallery. Encourage them to take a few moments to wander around the gallery and to think of another way to categorize the art besides “20th Century Art” or “African Art.” As students share their alternate categories, call their attention to the diverse range of subject matter, styles, etc. that they have identified.

This activity makes both students and docents look at gallery

Continued on the next page.
installations in entirely new ways, is interesting and fun, and provides a change of pace for the tour. Pre-teens and teens are especially appreciative of such activities as they offer a brief bit of the independence they crave.

Another gallery activity that fosters students' independence while simultaneously tapping into their logical/mathematical learning styles is a brief drawing exercise. Distribute pieces of scrap paper, writing surfaces, and pencils. Have students select a work of art within a specific gallery, identify any patterns or repeated geometric shapes the artist has created, and quickly sketch the arrangement or dominant ones. Then, have students discuss what effect (if any) the patterns or repeated shapes have on the composition of the work, such as balance, movement, or tension.

**Bodily/Kinesthetic**

The bodily or kinesthetic learning style is characterized by a keen awareness of one's own body and an understanding of how it interacts with the environment. Dancers and athletes are counted among the people with this intelligence.

Individuals who prefer this learning style enjoy using their sensory perceptions. Capitalize on this by having students imagine themselves within a work of art. Next, ask them to describe what they see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. Depending on where students imagine themselves within the artwork, the sights, sounds, textures, aromas, and flavors may be above, below, behind, or in front of them. To sum up their imaginative forays into a work, have students discuss how the artist was able to conjure up such vivid sensory inputs using paint, stone, wood, or metal.

Another route to engaging the senses is to have students use similes and metaphors to describe sensory impressions. For instance, a student's texture simile might be, "the silver goblet was like a smooth, shiny mirror." In addition to being a sure hit with language arts teachers, this approach engages both the bodily/kinesthetic and verbal/linguistic intelligences in your students.

**Intrapersonal**

Characterized by an ability to understand one's own feelings, the intrapersonal learning style can be stimulated by an interactive gallery activity that is a take-off of the activity called "Token Response." In this version, students are given only two symbols or tokens — a heart, symbolizing appreciation, and a frowning face or "yuk" symbol, indicating dislike.

Give the group 1 minute to walk around a gallery of works. Then, have students place the heart token on the floor in front of the artwork they like best and the frowning face token on the floor in front of the work they dislike most. Next, go to the work of art that amasses the most "tokens." Have students explain why they put their tokens in front of it. Why might some works have both types of symbols and others have none at all? By promoting an understanding that art provokes an emotional response in us — be it positive or negative — this activity taps into the highly individual, intrapersonal intelligence.

**Interpersonal**

In contrast to the intrapersonal learners, the interpersonal learners are sensitive to the feelings of others. Therefore, they tend to work well in teams or group activities. An activity entitled, "Academy Awards," brings together the art world with popular culture while appealing to those with a more highly developed interpersonal intelligence.

Divide students into various groups and assign them the task of selecting the work of art in a particu-

lar gallery that is most deserving of "Best Color," "Best Costume," "Best Action," "Best Plot Line," or "Best Lighting" (or any other superlatives that fit your collection). After several minutes, have each group share their choices. Then, have the group of students as a whole vote on "Best Artwork" from the pool of nominees that incorporate many of the category superlatives. In order to be successful, the students will have to work together toward the goal of identifying the winner. This activity challenges students to use their critical thinking skills by requiring them to support their judgments about works of art they think deserve awards.

**In Conclusion**

Keeping students in grades 6 through 9 interested and involved during the duration of a tour can be challenging. As typical pre-teens and teenagers, these students are less likely to volunteer ideas and opinions, are more self-conscious, and are crucially aware of how slow-paced the art museum is when compared to other aspects of contemporary life. Considering multiple intelligences will promote participation by making your tours more inclusive, interactive, and interesting.

Katherine M. Bunker is a Chicago-based museum educator and co-director of Learning Through Art, a partnership providing resources, training, and evaluation for museums and schools. She was formerly assistant director of student programs in the department of museum education at The Art Institute of Chicago (1996-1999). This article is based on docent training conducted at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, GA. For more information, Ms. Bunker can be reached at: learningthroughart@earthlink.net.
It Works for Me...
Sharing Successful Techniques and Ideas

Docents at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, have long had access to copies of The Docent Educator as it arrives throughout the year. However, upon the recent death of my mother, a life-long teacher who clearly understood the role of art education, docents made a contribution to the Education Fund in her honor. I could think of no better investment of that memorial than to obtain a group subscription to The Docent Educator. Each quarter ten copies of the magazine arrive at Sheldon. Each copy is given to a docent who has been honored in the past year with the distinction going to a docent who earns an award, for example, for Most Overall Tours, Most Tours by a New Docent, etc.

Since we all know that there are "no free lunches," those "winners" in turn are required not only to share the magazine with others, but also to report at a monthly Docent Briefing. This has been a tremendous use of The Docent Educator and, as a result, far more docents have access to its rich content, as a result.

This wonderful publication also is utilized in other ways in the museum community on the UNL campus.

I teach a graduate course, "Museum Education," in the University's Museum Studies Program. As part of that course, students receive copies of the publication in advance of the segment on docent training and then report on the contents to the class. Students in that course, most of whom hope to end up in the perfect museum education career, are pleased to learn of the existence of The Docent Educator and are eager to incorporate its valuable tips and techniques into their planning as well as their library holdings.

One of Sheldon's seventy-plus docents, an annual winner of a Memorial Prize copy of The Docent Educator for giving the most tours, also teaches pre-service art education at the University in which she routinely uses the information contained in the publication with her students.

Karen Janovy
Curator of Education
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden
Lincoln, Nebraska

Submit an article for possible publication.
Develop a text addressing the theme of an upcoming issue.

Inquiry and Participation Autumn 2002
Submission deadline: June 1, 2002

Open Forum: Topics of Interest to Writers Winter 2002-03
Submission deadline: September 1, 2002

Teaching Challenges and Solutions Spring 2003
Submission deadline: December 1, 2002

To receive writer's guidelines send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope or e-mail us at arg-de@aloha.net.
All articles are edited for publication.
Collaborative Programs that

If all the world is a stage and we are merely players ... then is history our script, in serial form and full of cliffhangers? Will we repeat the same plots or produce a new version of our story? How can the past help us find meaning and direction in an unruly and surprising present?

As "actors," visitors can do more than simply recite their lines. Exhibit interpreters can guide and coach visitors in "method acting." That is, they can introduce them to a setting and the objects in that setting, and encourage them to imagine themselves involved on a personal level. Museum educators, and especially docents, know the power of objects to summon a scene from the past — an artist's sense of color, an engineer's ingenuity, or a turning point in the story of a city. What more can be done, however, to make objects live vibrantly, and to give a visitor ownership of the moment that those objects summon?

At the Spertus Museum in Chicago, visitors enter the ARTIFACT Center to find a replica dig site and a Marketplace. They have experiences with ancient writing, agriculture, pottery, trade and travel, as well as with musical instruments of the ancient Near East. The exhibits invite visitors to take up tools and recording materials, make archaeological discoveries, conduct research, enter data in a field computer, and time-travel to the Israel of 2500 BCE. Actual and reproduction artifacts from millennia ago surface as the dig proceeds. Visitors compare their finds to objects displayed in the Marketplace. They get a real feel for archaeological fieldwork and the importance of record keeping. (Such realistic experiences have led sixth-graders to declare their intentions to be archaeologists when they grow up. Talk about role-playing!)

The core exhibit of the ARTIFACT Center is a replica of a "tell," a 32-foot-long and ten-foot-high dig site, with twelve test pits serving as digging stations. Each of the test pits contains an assemblage of real and facsimile artifacts. An actual tell is a large mound commonly found in the Near East that comprises many layers of successive human habitation. Each test pit in our tell is specific to one of the time periods represented by its layers.

Every visitor to the tell, whether in a tour group or as individuals, has the opportunity to explore the site and discuss his finds with the exhibit interpreters present. With this guidance, and the resources surrounding the exhibit spaces called the Marketplace, visitors experience the materials and techniques of archaeology, as well as games, clothing, and other hands-on experiences that reinforce a sense of immediacy.

In an effort to expand upon this experience, the Spertus Museum initiated collaborations with two other Chicago museums. Following their digs at the ARTIFACT Center in the Spertus Museum, school group visitors travel to either the Art Institute of Chicago or The Field Museum of Natural History for the second part of their tour. At all three museums, the role of the exhibit interpreter is key. Students offer these "experts" their hypotheses about the functions of the artifacts they find. The docents guide students to areas of the gallery that provide additional information and, then, they discuss their conclusions in light of other evidence. In this way, the young explorers discover resources that help them piece together the "puzzles" they unearthed.

When students participate in The Journey of an Archaeologist tour, which ends in the Ancient Egypt exhibition at The Field Museum, the theme holding the experience together is "olive oil." Olive oil was an important commodity in the ancient Near East. Students identify the ways that people used olive oil and the kinds of artifacts related to those uses. Then, they search for such artifacts on the tell. Once found, they pack up some of the objects used for olive oil, load them into a crate, and take them on the bus from the Spertus Museum to The Field Museum.

At The Field Museum, students sketch the artifacts they have brought over in a crate, and discuss the importance of detailed archaeological documentation. The exhibit interpreter brings them into their Egyptian marketplace gallery, provides them with a sheet of questions about the objects both in the gallery and in hand, and directs the students to areas of the gallery that offer further discoveries.

Tours in conjunction with the Art Institute of Chicago, entitled Passport to the Past, follow a similar pattern but have different objectives. As with The Field Museum project, the experience includes a dig on the tell at the Spertus Museum, and discussions about findings.
In this case, however, students have mock passports and visa forms to fill out. On their travel documents, they state the purpose of their visit and list the objects they expect to discover. Then, they imagine themselves traveling to the lands of the cultures represented in the ARTIFACT Center and in selected galleries of the Art Institute, exploring the ways that collections give insights into life centuries ago in locations around the globe.

Encouraged by the success of this collaborative program, the ARTIFACT Center at Spertus Museum has joined in more collaborative efforts with Chicago arts organizations. The synergy produced by combining resources creates an environment for learning that has great momentum and scope. Such collaborations benefit all the participants and provide the institutions with additional opportunities to expand their perspectives and to learn from one another.

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Hands-On History for Teens

by Penny Gómez

"History? Ho-hum." A spoken or body language response that is every history educator's nightmare, whether his student is of elementary school, junior high, or college age. How does a docent make the past come alive and resonate relevance to people living now? A group of dedicated and determined docents of the Museum of New Mexico Palace of the Governors, the state history museum located on Santa Fe's historic plaza, wrestled with this challenge and found a successful solution that can be adapted to other museums and institutions of learning.

In the mid-90's a handful of Palace docents met with the museum's educator to discuss their concerns about school children's limited knowledge and lack of interest in their multicultural, historical heritage. Even high school-aged visitors, on the brink of adulthood, were unaware of the significance of the interaction among the Indian, Spanish, and Anglo/African-American people of New Mexico in shaping the development of what is now the southwestern United States. Names such as Coronado, Esteban, Ofiate, Popé, and Vargas which had been repeatedly drilled by seventh-grade social studies teachers a few years earlier, produced only blank faces denoting unfamiliarity.

Nor did most of our charges know that the Palace of the Governors, or Casas Reales (Royal Houses), the construction of which began in 1610, is the oldest continuously used public building in the United States.

As a result of the docents' observations, SIGLO, a not-exactly-accurate acronym for "Seventh Grade Guided Learning Opportunity, sprang into being. The word siglo, Spanish for "century," seemed an appropriate title for the educational program that evolved.

Seventh-grade classes were targeted for several reasons. First, our State Department of Education curriculum guidelines at the time specified that all public school seventh-grade students would take one semester each of the history and geography of New Mexico. We hoped to amplify their curriculum and help teachers meet state competency requirements. Second, most of our field trip visitors were of the elementary school category; seventh-graders appeared to be underserved. Third, we decided that hooking and maintaining the interest of hormone-heavy teenagers during a tour of a historical museum would be the ultimate test of docents' skill and patience.

Dreamed, Designed, and Delivered

The original version of SIGLO was designed to accompany and supplement the exhibitions "Another Mexico: Spanish Life on the Upper Rio Grande" and "Society Defined: The Hispanic Resident of New Mexico, 1790." The central theme of each was that Nuevo México, which the conquistadores and first settlers hoped would yield gold and silver like Mexico to the south, was "remote beyond compare." Day-to-day survival was hard, amenities were few, and faith was an imperative companion.

Ten SIGLO docents, three of whom were retired schoolteachers, met with the educator and/or curatorial staff for several months during the planning phase. The resultant primary goal was for participating students to gain an awareness of how their lives compared to eighteenth-century New Mexican counterparts. How were transportation, formal education (or lack thereof), clothing, work, leisure time, and food different from or the same as today?

The seed idea for SIGLO originated with Rhoda Barkan — docent and local tourism writer. Rhoda created a fictitious letter, written by Felipe, the 15-year-old literate son of a recently widowed carpenter living on the outskirts of Mexico City in the year 1790. The letter was addressed to a New Mexican teenage cousin who lived in a village near Santa Fe, the Spanish colonial capital of Nuevo México. Felipe, who together with his bereaved father and younger sister Josefina would be migrating north to Santa Fe to make a new life, proffered many questions in his letter. He wanted to know about problems and dangers of travel along the Camino Real (royal road and primary route for the 1600-mile journey), as well as the climate, food, social customs, and type of housing in New Mexico. Our planning team hoped that following their SIGLO experience, students would be able to write an informed letter back to Felipe.

School-Museum Partnership

The effectiveness of SIGLO depended upon communication and cooperation between museum staff, docents, and teachers. After a mass mailing to all seventh-grade social studies teachers throughout New Mexico, those who were interested
contacted the museum to schedule SIGLO for their classes. The SIGLO program consisted of four components:

- Introduction of Letter. Prior to docents visiting the classroom, teachers introduced the letter from Felipe (provided in both English and Spanish) to their students to familiarize them with topics concerning life in eighteenth-century New Mexico.
- Pre-Museum Visit. Two to four docs made a classroom presentation comprised of a slide show depicting Spanish colonial life and a hands-on activity. The activity is called "Curators' Quest for Colonial Cues." Assuming the role of museum curators, groups of 3 or 4 students worked in teams to answer questions about several historical artifacts assigned to them. (Both de-accessioned artifacts from the museum's collection and reproductions were used.) An antique iron door lock and key, chispa (curved piece of iron used for fire-starting, which produced sparks when struck against a piece of flint) and a drop spindle with sheep wool kept students actively involved. After they identified their objects, determined how they were used, and decided why the objects were important to people of the 1700's, the participants passed along their artifacts to the other teams. A reporter from each team then informed the entire class as to her group's findings about the artifacts, demonstrating how to operate them. Additional ideas about the artifacts were solicited from the other class members. At the end of class, the teacher received a SIGLO packet that included a map of the Camino Real in 1800, a portion of an inventory from a will written in 1784, and an artist's conception of how the Santa Fe plaza looked in the late 1700's.

- Museum Visit. Students visited the Palace of the Governors for a 100-minute SIGLO docent-guided museum experience. Classes were divided into groups of ten students or less. Each group, accompanied by at least one teacher or parent, followed a docent to four locations within the building. Walking along the creaky wooden floors of the 400-year-old structure with its six-foot-thick walls of adobe (mud brick) seemed to help students time-transport back to when the Palace served as a presidio (fort). The smell and sound of soldiers' horses in the courtyard, the hustling activity of government officials attending to colonial business, and even the boisterous play of...
Continued from the previous page.

Junior high school students try to envision using a "carreta," the pick-up truck of the 18th Century, for transportation during New Mexico's earlier days. photo: Penny Gómez

the governor's children in residence could be retrieved with a switch of the imagination.

After the docent explained historical concepts represented within a particular room (engaging students with hands-on-artifacts and open-ended questions) pairs of students worked on exhibit-based tasks. By recording notes in their SIGLO journals, they compiled data they would need to complete their post-visit assignment. Below are examples of exhibit tasks:

* Juana Lujan was a woman of the 1700's who owned ranches near Santa Fe. List 5 items noted in the inventory of her will.
* Locate and list 8 items that Felipe's father would use to build a chest. How/where would he get these things in 1790? Where would he get each of them today?

* About 100 governors had lived and worked in the Casas Reales by 1912, when New Mexico became the 47th state in the Union. Find and write the name of the person who was governor in 1790. Write down names of two governors whose last names are the same as people you know today. Beside each governor's name write the first and last name of the person you know with that governor's last name.

The museum visit finale was sensory. Students sampled bread freshly baked in outdoor adobe ovens by contemporary Pueblo Indian women from villages near Santa Fe. They discovered that at least in the category of edible experiences, New Mexico isn't so different now that it was centuries ago!

**Post-Visit Assignment.** Back in the classroom, students reconvened in the same groups within which they toured the Palace. Student pairs who worked together in the museum shared the information with the rest of their group so that all students recorded answers to all journal questions. Then, students individually wrote letters to Felipe to describe what their lives were like as Spanish colonial teens in Nuevo México.

The teacher sent an evaluation of SIGLO along with copies of students' letters to the Palace educator in the stamped envelope provided.

**SIGLO Revised**

The original version of SIGLO continued as an educational program until 1998, when the exhibitions, "Another Mexico" and "Society Defined" were removed. Today a revised SIGLO has been implemented to complement the current exhibition, "Jewish Pioneers of New
Mexico. Palace docents now teach students about nineteenth-century Jewish New Mexicans with surnames such as “Ilfeld” and “Spiegelberg,” in place of the eighteenth-century Spanish names like “Anza” or “Miera y Pacheco.” Visitors learn about the importance of the Old Santa Fe Trail, which opened up trade from the eastern half of the United States to isolated New Mexico.

From the extension of well-established north-to-south commerce along the Camino Real, Jewish merchants capitalized on both American and Mexican business. Eastern manufactured goods as well as the English language and social traditions of the Midwest combined to add a new layer to the rich Hispanic and Native American flavors of New Mexico’s essence.

History continues to weave its spell on youth of New Mexico. Docents of the Palace of the Governors, through both the SIGLO program and general tours for families, reach out to grab the attention and curiosity of children in order to plant seeds of interest in history. As Southwestern folklorist J. Frank Dobie once wrote, “I want not only to know about my home land, I want to live intelligently on it. I want certain data that will help me accommodate myself to it. Knowledge helps sympathy to achieve harmony.” Harmony with history beats “Ho-hum” any day.

Penny Gómez, an independent museum education advisor, specializes in docent training and children’s interactive, hands-on programs. Since 1988 museum education has taken her from the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio to the Museum of International Folk Art, the Palace of the Governors, and the School of American Research in Santa Fe.
the "three Rs" of old have been replaced in the modern middle school. Reading has become literacy; writing is now called composition, and 'rithmetic is, more often than not, pre-algebra. Nevertheless, four "Rs" are still available to help museum and classroom teachers make learning real and relevant for these "tweenagers."

Reinforce Something They Already Know

Parents and teachers who bring eleven to fourteen-year-olds to your institution would appreciate it if you could reinforce something they're trying to teach. They believe that a pre-teen is more likely to relate to and remember facts, opinions, and values that come from "another" adult. While this isn't entirely true, there is a grain of truth imbedded in that belief. One of the struggles of early adolescence is the struggle to become one's own authority. In doing this, pre-teens like to "try on" different opinions and hear from different voices. They are interested in people, and they will be curious about you, your volunteer position, and the other people in the museum, as well as the collection you are going to discuss.

It's relatively easy to discover what middle schools are trying to teach. Textbooks and curricula are generally available for public examination. A quick call to your local Board of Education should lead you to these materials. A pre-visit discussion with the classroom teacher who has arranged the tour can fill you in on the specifics she'd like to have covered.

Paying attention to the books, movies, and television shows that are popular with 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders is another way to find out what this age group knows, or at least, has been exposed to. Be careful, however, in how you use this information. Fads and favorites change rapidly, and using last week's slang or yesterday's out-of-style reference can be deadly. Students in this age group are not interested in having you be "one of them."

So, how do you find out what your middle-school visitors really know? Try this. As you enter a gallery or approach an exhibit, ask the kinds of questions that will give students a chance to tell you what they already know without putting them on the spot.

"Have you studied the Westward Movement yet? What was the most unusual thing you learned about the period?"
"Your teacher mentioned that you are studying cell division. Have you been following the controversy about cloning? Complicated, isn't it?"
"Do you have regular art classes in your school? Which type of art do you find more interesting to create, realistic or abstract?"

As you walk from exhibit to exhibit, make it a point to walk with the group, not ahead of it. Engage different group members in conversation as you walk, trying to meet a different student during the interlude. "Have you been here before?" is okay, but better questions arise from carefully listening to students during each tour stop. If one student seems particularly interested in some aspect of the exhibit, or asks an especially provocative question, use this "walk" time to follow up. If you learn something you think the group should know, ask if you may share it with the group. One of the things parents and classroom teachers would also appreciate is your helping them enhance the fragile self-image many middle schoolers carry. Treating them as intelligent, knowledgeable visitors is a good way to do that.

Reveal Something They Don't Know

An interviewer once asked filmmaker Steven Spielberg to comment on his movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

"Your mother was a musician," the interviewer began, "and your father was a computer programmer. When the two species meet in the key sequence, they make music with their computers and learn to speak to each other."

Spielberg smiled broadly, nodded vigorously, and said, "I wish I could say I meant that, but it just now occurred to me!"

There are two remarkable facts to be gleaned from this encounter between artist and interpreter that docents working with middle school students need to remember.  
1. The viewer of the "art" brought his own interpretation to the event, based on his own frame-of-reference; and
2. The viewer's interpretation gave even the artist new insights into his work.

When touring middle school students, docents are able to make their museum's collection both real and relevant when they allow students to bring their own interpretation to the event. And, their interpretation may give the docents new insights if they are open to the experience.
Making It Relevant

This does not mean, however, that middle school visitors can or should interpret your collection without guidance. Context is vital for meaningful interaction with art, historic artifacts, natural history specimens, or any other collection. In a historic house from the turn of the century, for example, a docent might remind her visitors that the owners were only one generation away from immigrant or pioneer background. "Let's find some things in this room that might help this family's new friends forget that they came from humble beginnings."

"What are some ways teenagers today try to impress their friends?"
"Do you think this is dishonest?"

Giving pre-teen visitors a "hook" on which to hang their new learning gives them freedom to explore many possible interpretations. Providing information that will enable their discovery of connections between your collection and their own lives validates their contributions to the discussion. And, as Martha Stewart would say, "That's a good thing."

Realize Where They Are

Your youngest middle school visitors were born in 1991. Most have never known a time without cell phones, computers, CD's, DVD's, and the internet. They've only been aware of two presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. They've never had prayer in school, and many of them have never recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. They haven't owned records. Their parents have always thrown away unwrapped Trick-or-Treat candy, and many of them have always had to pass through a metal detector to get to class. The year they entered first grade was the year both Princess Diana and Mother Teresa died. The Vietnam War ended 27 years before they were born, and the Civil Rights Movement started 15 years before that. In comparison, 27 years before I was in junior high (not middle school), Buster Keaton was still making silent movies and my mother was dancing the Charleston. When I ask middle schoolers to consider the Civil Rights Movement, it's as if someone asked my pre-teen self to relate personally to Jane Addams' work at Hull House.

Why is it important to know the generational position, the demographics, and the culture of these young visitors? The more you know about any visitor, the better able you are to find areas of connection. Knowing what is relevant in your visitors' lives helps you show them relevant aspects of your collection. Be careful, though, to avoid stereotyping by remembering that each member of the class on your middle school tour is a special individual still searching for his or her identity. Call them by name, if possible. Avoid "group" names ... "okay, kids" or "Let's move along, girls." They will enjoy being treated like adults; they will not enjoy being "lumped" together as members of a particular age, gender, culture, ethnic group, etc.

Remember Where You Were

All of you reading this were once teenagers. Most of us faced the same kinds of challenges that today's teenagers face. No one understood us. No one had such a difficult life. No one struggled so with relationships. Putting yourself back into those years in your imagination (realizing that you did survive and, actually, turned out quite well) may give you an extra bit of patience, sense of humor, and curiosity that will make you an excellent docent choice to work with this special age group caught between childhood and adulthood.

Parents and teachers who bring eleven to fourteen-year-olds to your institution would appreciate it if you could reinforce something they're trying to teach."

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor
The 2001 National Docent Symposium was held in San Antonio, Texas, in early October 2001. Despite the tragic and unnerving events that transpired on September 11, 2001, nearly all the docents who registered for the symposium chose to attend, and the event was a resounding success!

Jackie Littleton, associate editor of The Docent Educator, was among the workshop presenters. She also represented the publication with a booth where handout materials were available for public distribution.

The next National Docent Symposium is scheduled for 2003 and will be held in Chicago.
Transforming Lives through Art

The Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston, is a non-collecting institution, so all its programs focus on an active series of changing exhibitions. It is located on the campus of an urban university, in a quadrant of Houston populated primarily by Latino and African-American families of limited means. And, the university campus is neighbor to many of the public schools attended by the children of these families.

Perhaps because Blaffer is a university museum in an explicitly educational setting, we were able to seamlessly integrate educational efforts and programs into the museum’s totality. There was never a notion that education programs or docent activities somehow came AFTER the fact — as add-on benefits to an exhibition or installation. Rather, they were integrated into the very core meaning and possibility of each exhibition.

One of the advantages of any museum set in an urban environment, and the Blaffer was no exception, is the diversity of its audiences, potential audiences, and volunteers. Houston afforded us docents of all backgrounds — so much so that we were eventually able to offer our tours to school groups in seven languages (including American Sign Language)! Also, being affiliated with a university, we were able to recruit and cultivate docents from the university community — an educated, interested group — and many of them graduate students themselves.

Our docents offered a 3-part tour program. First, they traveled to school classrooms in advance of each tour visit — offering a slide show to set the stage for the exhibition students were about to see (and making connections to classroom curriculum). Then, they led an interactive tour at the museum. Finally, they followed up with a hands-on art-making activity inspired by the exhibition.

We learned a great deal while refining this program. Importantly, we learned firsthand that individuals receive information in many different ways, and if we could provide stimulus to accommodate these multiple learning styles we’d reach the maximum of our audiences. So, the 3-part tour program offered opportunities for visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

However, as anyone who has ever given a tour knows, there are always a few slackers in any group — those who fall behind, whose eyes and minds wander, and who are rarely reached even by our most extraordinarily skilled docents. We cannot always explain the reasons why we are able to reach some members of a school group and not others, but it happens. We decided, with the help of a pilot grant, to try to remedy this situation, to see if we could design an adjunct program in which we identified these “unreachable” students and a way to reach them.

We focused on our high school groups, where we saw the worst of the problem teenagers. It became pretty clear that many of these drifters were also those students whom their schools identified as “at risk.” Some came from difficult family situations, or from dangerous neighborhoods, or from gang backgrounds, or any number of other circumstances that left an imprint on their attention-level and behavior.

Working with a core group of docents, our sole education staff member, and a number of teachers committed to the undertaking (these comprised a “steering committee” for the program), we devised a pilot program to reach these students.

We learned a lot about learning. We listened to our students at every step of the way, and they helped guide us through refinements that continued to improve the program immeasurably. And, just as we all try to be life-long learners, I believe that the best organizations are indeed those that are learning organizations themselves.

Here’s how our pilot was to work:

Continued on the next page.
We called it the Mentoring Arts Workshop. During the run of an exhibition at the museum (approximately 8 – 12 weeks) we would invite (with the assistance of our teacher friends) a dozen at-risk teens to come to the museum every day after school (Monday through Thursday). Working with the expert guidance of a few select docents, students explore every aspect of the artwork on view in depth — delving deeply into its history, social context, intellectual underpinnings, cultural significance, medium, and techniques of its creation.

Intermixed in this deeper learning would be a hands-on component, learning to work with like materials, similar techniques, mastering the art form itself. And finally, the culmination — with the background knowledge and inspiration of the art on exhibition, and the technical and material knowhow — our teens would create their own works of art, inspired by what they had learned and also by their own voices, perceptions, and expressions. These, then, would go on view in their own exhibition at the museum in an adjacent space, in time to be viewed in juxtaposition with the original exhibition that inspired them.

Now, here was the tall order: how to get the right mix of expertise to guide the students in all facets of this process. Sometimes we found every ounce we needed among our own docent ranks. We discovered that several of our docents were accomplished artists in their own right, and they were very willing and able to teach the practical portions of the program as well as the art historical. Other times, depending on the content of the workshop, we brought into the team a professional artist from the community to partner with our docents in the workshop setting.

Let me walk you through a typical Mentoring workshop. An exhibition of Sol LeWitt’s work (from the Museum of Modern Art, NYC) opens at our museum. The show focuses on LeWitt’s voluminous output of prints, including his extraordinary artist’s books. The students are selected, with the help of our advising teachers, from two neighborhood high schools, and they walk to the museum after school. (Later as the program expands to include schools further away, we arranged with City Schools for transportation, which is always a challenging issue.)

Docents take the opportunity to teach the workshop students the history of graphic media, looking at all manner and techniques of printmaking. They also look at the history of books and text printing. Working in partnership with the hired mentor artist, our docents introduced the students to all aspects of making multiples and about making books. They visit print studios, bookbinderies, and even a publishing house. They then set about creating their own books, which they decided to call “Dream Books.” (It soon became a tradition that the student groups devised their own theme for their works and their own exhibition title.) Some interpreted the theme as describing their actual dreams or nightmares. Others decided to address their aspirations. Each student nuanced the notion of what a book could be, and created something original and personal. Many were quite stunning, including a book that took the form of a treasure chest, where the future hopes of the artist each popped out of the box as a symbol of a coming decade in her life.
Upon completion of their own works, and with the help of the docents-led team and student-artists, we mounted an exhibition of these works. We held an opening reception, inviting the students, their families, teachers, peers, and museum members, as well as the press. Let me tell you there is nothing more wonderful than seeing a 16-year-old, whom society has previously written off, standing before a live television news reporter talking about her future, and about how far she has come. All the kids absolutely glowed.

We knew we were really onto something when, some weeks later, the teachers started calling to say that these slackers, these former “troublemakers in the classroom” were now the leaders of the classroom. There was a huge bounce in their sense of pride and accomplishment — a sense of possibility many had not known before.

Additionally, these students developed some useful skills in critical thinking and creative problem solving and their self-esteem soared.

For each forthcoming exhibition, our docent-led teams sketched a curriculum for an appropriate workshop specific to the exhibition. Later we worked through details of scheduling, transportation, fieldtrips, and material needs with the artists and sometimes the student participants themselves. Each exhibition required a different mix of docent skills, artistic mentoring, and off-site itineraries, as well as a huge amount of commitment and major leaps of faith.

For an exhibition focusing on video art, the students learned about the history of the medium, its use in contemporary art and film, and then all the technical aspects of video-making, including scripting, story-boarding, cinematography, equipment-handling, sound production, editing, and the all-important gala preview screening! Two of our grads from this program ended up with internships at the PBS television station in town, furthering their experience in television production. The program was not without flaws. We had a lot of listening and learning to do ourselves. One challenge was gaining the students’ enthusiasm and commitment to attending the workshop. They needed incentive.

The promised exhibition of their own work was enough for some. Others came reluctantly and got hooked pretty quickly. Still others came and went.

We decided to draft a contract with the selected students, one that described exactly what we as an institution were willing to provide and what we expected of them. We signed and had them sign. We also had their parent, parents, or guardian sign. That worked.

We also heard that the name “Mentoring Workshops” turned some students off. We pondered what else we could call such a program and delved into conversations with our students. It turned out that their problem with the name was that it emphasized the MENTORS, not them. They were right! So we floated a new name, focusing on their participation.

We rechristened the Young Artists Apprenticeship Program in the 2nd year. Another success!

Next, we learned something we already knew: that one of the difficulties in recruiting was that the program seem like an extension of school hours after school ended.

Continued on the next page.
We needed help in promoting participation and vouching for the fun and value of the program. One of our early graduates took on this task. Misty Campbell, a 16-year-old African-American young lady (who very poignantly described for us the crack houses in her neighborhood that she passed every morning on her way to the bus) was among the book-making group. She took it upon herself to design a comic book, which was easily reproduced, and used photos of her group's workshop and RAP music lyrics touting the joys, fun, and rewarding aspects of the program. Misty also volunteered to go with us to the schools and talk about her experiences. Soon we had more students applying than we could handle, and we eventually were able to expand the program’s frequency.

Finally, in the program's second year, we secured ongoing, regular funding to ensure its continuation. Now, it is in its 6th year. And, in that 2nd year, the museum received an unsolicited grant to endow a scholarship program so that one student from each class could receive a funds toward higher education, with an additional fund in that student’s name going back to his or her high school.

The first award presentation ceremony was, as you might expect, a very special and emotional time for these young people and their families. The participants remembered being washed off as slackers and troublemakers. And now, they were making out applications for college and thinking seriously about their futures. They were participating in creating futures for themselves as we had worked to transform lives through art.

I believe that docents are indeed the key to any museum’s successes in its community. After all, docents are our front line — the human face and liaison with the art works. And in every way, every day — from the daily tours, to workshops that engage visitors for 8 weeks at a time, docents have the potential to change the individuals they meet. Docents can offer something very special, access to other worlds. They — YOU — are the agents of change that make our museums’ visions work. Docents have the power to transform lives through art!

Don Bacigalupi has been director of the San Diego Museum of Art since 1999. Before that, he was director and chief curator at the Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston. He has also served as curator of contemporary art at the San Antonio Museum of Art, chief curator for the Whitney Collection in Austin, Texas, and the director of galleries in New York and Massachusetts. In addition, Dr. Bacigalupi has taught art history at several universities.
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