Outreach

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Taking Education on the Road

O
of all the educational activities conducted by museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens, few are less understood or appreciated than outreach. Outreach, or programming that occurs in locations other than the originating institution, is perceived by many staff members as the bane of their responsibilities, and is often discounted as extraneous, non-essential, and a waste of precious resources.

The irony is that “extraneous, non-essential, and a waste of precious resources” is how many members of the public view the very institutions we represent and cherish. Perhaps one reason for this is that our institutions are perceived as insular — separate, self-contained, and self-congratulatory — removed from most people’s everyday lives and experiences.

Outreach programming is an important way to give our institutions greater relevance and presence in the community. Outreach serves a significant public relations function while furthering such educational goals as generating interest in the subject area, enhancing the public’s desire and ability to learn from collections, and serving audiences that are traditionally underserved.

Outreach programming, like its in-house counterpart, is totally consistent with institutional mission statements and with Excellence and Equity, the guidelines set by the American Association of Museums for institutions as they move into the 21st century. Regardless of whether that outreach program consists of a “picture lady” who travels to schools preparing students for their first visit to the art museum, or a naturalist who conducts bird watching trips for families on the weekend, or a docent who goes to hospitals offering stimulus and diversion to patients, outreach is yet another measure of an institution’s commitment to educating the public.

Outreach to Prepare for Future Visits

Schools and interest-oriented organizations, such as garden clubs, visit museums and other such institutions with educational rather than recreational intentions. However, the type of learning that occurs in our institutions — learning directly from objects, artifacts, or living things — is unlike the usual, formal educational experiences of most students and adults. Thus, the quality of these encounters may be hindered or slowed by unfamiliar processes and methods.

One major benefit derived by those who receive pre-visit contact is that it prepares them for “object-based interactive learning,” or learning that requires active involvement through the making of careful observations, reflections, interpretations, and analyses. Having such learning experiences prior to a visit, in the form of a practice run, improves the quality of the educational encounter once on site.

Another benefit of pre-visit contact is that it reinforces recollection and comprehension. Having an opportunity to see reproductions of, or things similar to, what will be viewed while on site creates awareness while heightening interest. Students are usually excited to discover familiar objects when making an institutional visit and eager to tell the docent touring them what they learned about the object or artifact they’ve seen before. In turn, the docent can teach toward greater depth as there is recognition and awareness of the object or artifact already working in the lesson’s favor.

Outreach should not be a “show and tell” of institutional collections, however. It should be an educational experience that stands on its own merits. Those educators who design outreach programming must develop complete educational lesson plans with learning objectives that do not leave questions unanswered or hold out the promise of completion once visitors are in attendance on site. Invariably, there will be those who do not make the institutional visit; tours will differ from what was promised or intended; and, though most students will remember broad aspects of what was learned through outreach, some may not remember the lesson in detail as too much time and other learning activities will fall in between.

Outreach to Expand Institutional Resources

Outreach programming is an excellent way to extend institutional collections or connect them to a larger universe. Guided expeditions to local wildlife preserves allow learners to see living examples of the mounted specimens encountered at the museum, and to gain an understanding of how important habitats are to survival. Trips to archeological sites engender a greater appreciation for other cultures and time periods showcased within an institutional collection, and can reveal the painstaking work of the scientists who unearth, preserve, and interpret the artifacts an institution presents. Opportunities to witness artists creating paintings, prints, or sculptures can increase the public’s respect for, and appreciation of, the process of art-making as well as the finished products exhibited in institutional galleries.
While all learning experiences are valuable, programming sponsored by museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens ought to have a purpose that is identifiably relevant to the sponsoring institution’s collection. Learners should be made aware of how the outreach lesson ties into an institution’s collection and area of interest. In this way, the institution becomes a focal point for follow-up learning, and outreach serves to reinforce and build institutional audiences.

Outreach to Reach New, Underserved, or Different Audiences

Outreach programming that seeks to reach new audiences should make a special effort to connect learning back to the institution and should spell out precisely how a visit to the institution allows learners to build upon the interest generated through the outreach lesson (i.e. use of the library; access to staff members; additional examples in the collection; etc.).

Outreach programs serving audiences that are unable to visit an institution, such as residents of long term health care facilities, must make a special effort to take learners into account. Begin by contacting the administrator in charge of the facility to be visited. Talk about the people housed in their facility. What assistance will the facility’s staff be able to offer during the outreach session? Are there any physical, emotional, or intellectual disabilities that should be accounted for?

Outreach lessons for those who cannot make a follow-up, institutional visit must be self-contained learning experiences. This does not mean that outreach programs should be disconnected from an institution’s purpose; rather, it means that programs should be as independent and complete a learning endeavor as possible. Bring objects of secondary importance to the collection to reproductions so that the lesson will be object-based. Construct an introduction, activities, and a conclusion based on a theme or set of ideas. Do not make the program a display of what might be seen if the audience could visit the institution. Make the program a satisfying and valuable learning experience in-and-of itself.

Unless offered specifically as “continuing education,” which is an entirely different educational endeavor, all outreach programs are meant to bring an institution’s resources and identity to the community. Outreach programming has a strong public relations dimension which must be discernible by its audience to be successful.

Good public relations should be educational, and educational programming makes for good public relations. No institution need passively accept poor audience attendance, nor need it be satisfied with walk-in traffic alone. Outreach is an important vehicle for reaching new audiences in a manner consistent with an institution’s reason for being. Keep in mind, however, that public relations involves the art of persuasion, not coercion. People must learn of an institution’s worth; they can not simply be told of it.
Designing an Outreach Program

The opportunity to design and pilot an outreach program for the Education Department of the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia, began when two anthropologists who had lived among the Kuba people of Zaire donated over thirty Kuba objects to the Museum for use as a teaching collection.

How would we use these beautiful objects to show students a “slice of life” of the Kuba people? How could we design an exciting program that would help students relate a relatively obscure culture to their own lives and the world at large? What pathways to learning about the Kuba culture could be created to nurture individual differences in how children learn? How would we plan the logistics of such a program? From the beginning, we knew this particular project would set the stage for the approach to other outreach programs for The Chrysler Museum of Art. As the project emerged and took on a life of its own, a number of considerations in planning and implementing any outreach program came to light.

Collaborating with Schools

The first and most important step for the project was to invite curriculum specialists from regional school systems to be a part of the planning. We also talked directly with teachers from public and private school systems in the area. We listened as they told us that the program should match the Standards of Learning for art, social studies, and English curricula at the appropriate grade levels. In the end, we also included activities related to the math and music curricula. Curriculum specialists advised us the teachers would appreciate pre- and post-visit materials and activities that help put the program into context for the students. The curriculum specialists also offered advice on class sizes and fee structures.

Researching Content

Researching the Kuba objects in the collection and the history of the Kuba people was a necessary step in the program design. What we learned about the fascinating Kuba people and the individual objects provided us with ideas for exploration of the culture through the experiential activities of the outreach program. The research phase of the project was also important because it was necessary for the presenters of the program to master the content. Our research became the text for training future presenters of the program.

Designing Activities

After six months of collaborating with educators and researching the people and objects, it was finally time for the real fun to begin — designing activities for the classroom. Our goal was to devise participatory activities that serve numerous purposes. One purpose is to allow students to examine the objects. That was easy. We borrowed an activity from Alan Gartenhaus’ Minds in Motion: Using Museums to Expand Creative Thinking. The activity encourages children to make hypotheses as to how mysterious objects were used following a brief discussion of how curators and anthropologists examine objects to determine their uses. Having students carefully handle the object is a meaningful element of this activity. During the pilot period, many of the students’ imaginative conjectures came surprisingly close to what early explorers of the Kuba culture thought.

There were further goals for the activities as well. We knew they should be flexible enough to take into account differences in grade levels and disciplines of the classes taught. In addition, the activities needed to respond to the differences in how children access information. We also wanted some of the activities to be multidisciplinary and to work for any grade level. Finally, we wanted to develop activities and materials that would enable students to relate the Kuba culture to their own lives and the world at large, allowing them to recognize the many characteristics and needs that people have in common regardless of their cultural differences. The rich Kuba culture inspired us to include activities that center on characteristics of the culture such as: contemporary music from Zaire; the naming ceremonies of African children; the Kuba monetary system; proverbs and fables that speak of everyday Kuba life; drawing activities related to royal dress; and the game of Wari which requires strategic thinking and great patience.

As these and other activities developed, they were divided into classroom protocols for elementary, middle, and high school levels with a different theme for each level. Pre-visit packets provide background for teachers and students, include slides of everyday life in Kuba villages, and suggest activities and discussions that can be used before the classroom presentation.

Planning the Logistics

Before the program could go into the classroom, logistical considerations needed to be worked out. We found these “minor details” key elements in the success of the program. While the Education Department of The Chrysler Museum of Art is the first point of
contact for interested schools, we found it to be essential that the presenter speak directly to the teacher in advance of the program. This allows teachers to make decisions about the presentation's length and focus. It also enables the presenter to take care of the museum's needs such as the most appropriate classroom size and setting, how the fee should be paid, and the need for special audiovisual equipment. We learned that the length of the program should be flexible enough to accommodate the various schedules of schools. It was decided early in the planning of the program that it is most appropriate as a hands-on classroom activity for a limited (forty or fewer) number of students and not appropriate as an assembly program.

Piloting and Evaluating the Program

Many of the educators with whom we collaborated were happy to pilot the program in their systems. We presented the program to a number of grade levels from second through high school during a three month period. Scheduling visits and taking the objects to the schools proved to be less of a challenge than we expected. Suitcases with wheels and plenty of bubble wrap helped immensely. One of the greatest challenges of piloting the program was not knowing individual classroom situations from school to school. We learned to expect the unexpected, such as a teacher who left the presenter alone in the classroom with an unruly group of students. Other surprises were pleasant ones, such as the class where a local businessman who had sponsored our visit was present and actively participating with the students. With a few surprises under our belts, we learned to go over every last detail with teachers before the visit.

Evaluation of the Kuba Outreach Program was done by engaging students, teachers, and curriculum specialists. Students and teachers completed an evaluation at the conclusion of the program. Curriculum specialists, who had been present during the early stages of the project, were brought back together after the pilot period to see and hear the results of their initial efforts and to offer recommendations for further refinements. Evaluation proved to be a valuable tool in the development of the program. Through this process we learned that, above all, the opportunity to examine or carefully handle the Kuba objects as an anthropologist might engaged students from all grade levels successfully. We also learned that this opportunity was an important element of the program from the teachers' perspective. Teachers let us know that the interdisciplinary approach to the classroom activities was important to their curricular planning. Students' questions and reactions to the pilot presentations influenced the inclusion of additional activities into the final design of the program.

Hitting the Road

Now that the pilot period for the outreach program has ended, the task of promoting the program has begun. We have learned that some schools would like to have the program come to them, but they cannot fund the modest fee that covers our costs. To generate enthusiasm, we have offered to present the program, with the fee waived, at faculty and PTA meetings and for organizations that might be recruited as sponsors. We are also pursuing grant funding for the program to be made available for a specific grade level throughout the entire school system.

Lessons Learned

Planning the Kuba outreach project provided us with a blueprint for the design of future programs that will take a part of the museum into the community.

(Continued on page 7.)
Lending the Past
Sharing “Hands-On” Collections in Alaska

Alaska is fortunate to have two institutions in its state museum system — the Alaska State Museum in Juneau and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka. Both facilities collect, preserve, and exhibit the material culture and natural history of Alaska. The Alaska State Museum exhibits all aspects of the state’s cultural and natural history, while the Sheldon Jackson Museum focuses on Alaska’s native cultures.

In order for all people of this physically huge state to enjoy and learn from the collections, the two museums have numerous outreach programs. Two of the most popular are the “Learning Kits” and the “Hands-on Loan Program.” Both of these outreach programs are used by teachers, librarians, docents, interpreters, program coordinators, and individuals, many of whom are located in remote villages and communities far from either institution.

The inclusion of actual objects, illustrations, and graphics in our outreach kits and programs places the essence of learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking where it belongs: literally, in the hands of the learner. At the Alaska State Museum, interpreters and docents armed with objects from our hands-on collections not only grab the attention of their audience, but help dispel some of the “mystery” of the artifacts exhibited. For instance, visitors have many questions about the atlatl, or throwing boards, on exhibit. They accept that an atlatl increases the force and velocity of a dart, but have trouble visualizing how a hunter held the atlatl and delivered the dart. By placing a reproduction in the learners’ hands and having them go through the motions of using it (without the dart in place), we help answer the question — “How do you hold it?”

Raw materials such as spruce roots, beach grasses, sea mammal intestines, and baleen help the docents interpret artifacts on exhibit in the museum. To most visitors these exotic materials seem unlikely for the production of goods, but with the opportunity to handle them, they learn first hand of their important contributions to the material culture of Alaska Natives.

Both museums make use of their hands-on collections while hosting school groups. Hands-on objects allow students to see, feel, and touch things the same way, or similar to, those they will see on exhibit — an important step in the development of learning skills. Objects are also integrated into museum activities, passed around, tried on, or left on a table for students to look at while working on an activity.

Traveling learning kits reach those who can not come to the museum or those who may visit following their use of the kits. These kits arrive equipped with objects, lesson plans, and reference materials. Teachers or librarians check out the kits for a specified amount of time, using the kits in whatever way best accommodates their needs.

A related program of “lending the past” began developing nearly ten years ago at the Sheldon Jackson Museum. After I completed an off-site visit to a child-care center, the teacher hesitantly inquired about the possibility of borrowing the objects. She explained that it would be helpful if the children could spend more time with these unfamiliar objects. Upon returning to the museum, I posed this question to our director. Fortunately, our farsighted and flexible director recognized the importance of allowing students longer exposure and interaction with the objects. She suggested some sort of loan agreement and tracking system be developed and that the program be initiated.

A couple of dozen objects comprised the collection when we made that first loan. Today, our Hands-on Loan collection includes nearly 500 objects of reproduction artifacts, video and audio tapes, books, posters, photographs, and 3,000 slides. All but a few of these objects can be checked out by teachers, librarians, or anyone using them for educational purposes. (Some items are just too large or fragile to be shipped or handled and are used on-site only.) Teachers integrate the objects into their regular curriculum in a variety of ways. Some use the objects in classroom exhibits, others encourage role playing or use the pieces as models so students can create their own reproductions. Other teachers have students use the objects as primary research material for oral and written reports or inspiration for creative writing or drawing projects.

One program involves fourth graders studying trade patterns between the Tlingit people of Southeast Alaska and the Athabaskans of interior Alaska. The introduction of hands-on objects begins during the students’ visit to the museum. The fourth graders handle objects similar to those exhibited in the museum and then take the hands-on objects back to their classroom for more in-depth study.

Once in class, the students expand on what they learned at the museum by continuing a trading game using animal hides, an abalone shell, a knife, a spruce root basket, and other items traded between the two cultures. Later, they use the hands-on objects for inspiration in writing a story about what they might have done, seen, and felt if they had been part of a trading party 150 years ago. By using hands-on objects, the students took charge of how and what they were learning.

Another classroom activity developed by teachers borrowing the hands-on objects involves clusters of 3 or 4 students working cooperatively in
groups to analyze the material culture of Alaska Natives. Each group is given a “Learning through Anthropology” work sheet. By inspecting the hands-on objects, referring to their museum notes, and making hypotheses, students fill in the work sheets with the name of the object, its cultural origin, its specific location (noted on the classroom map), the materials the object is made from, and its possible uses. In addition, students draw a picture of the object.

Another popular program for fourth graders begins similarly — with a museum visit and discussion of the various types of collections our museums house. The class is then divided into four “archeology” research groups. The groups go to their assigned “archeological site” within the Museum. At their site, students find a bag of artifacts — hands-on objects. Students work secretly to develop a list of clues for each of the objects in their bag. Upon returning to the classroom, each group takes turns presenting their clues to the others. In turn, the audience can ask questions of the presenters, such as: “Is the artifact plant, animal, or mineral?” or “Would it have been used by a man, woman, or child?”

The Alaska State Museums have found that hands-on collections help direct individuals toward self-guided learning, and can extend the museum resources beyond its walls. The use of hands-on objects encourages essential skills in research, problem-solving, critical, and abstract thinking. We believe that lending the past is a cogent and successful means of preparing learners for a future where the ability to learn is fundamental.

Rosemary Carlton is curator of education for the Alaska State Museums.

Designing an Outreach Program
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These lessons can be applied to any outreach program:

• Collaborate with schools early in the planning of any outreach project. Find out the needs of the school system you hope to serve. Listen to what teachers, administrators, and students have to say!

• Produce a document, no matter how informal it may be, that will serve as a required training manual for anyone presenting the program.

• Design program activities that actively involve the students. Teachers do not need a museum outreach program for a simple slide lecture. Convey the excitement of the museum in the classroom activities you present.

• Provide pre- and post-visit materials such as slides and activity suggestions.

• Do not overlook planning the logistics of the program. The most exciting museum outreach presentation can turn into a disaster if details such as the number of students or the length of the program are not agreed upon in advance.

• Get feedback from the first few presentations even if you are not able to conduct a pilot program. A simple evaluation form filled out by teachers and students will provide a wealth of information.

• Be willing to invest some time to promote the program in order to get it off the ground. Although a fee may be charged by the museum to cover the costs of presenting the program in the classroom, waiving the fee for potential sponsoring organizations will go a long way in generating classroom visits.

Trish Pfeifer and Ellen Henry are contract educators with The Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, VA. Ms. Pfeifer was previously an art educator, the curator of the Children’s Museum of Virginia in Portsmouth, VA, and a member of the exhibition design team for Inventre Place in Akron, OH. Ms. Henry was the education director of the Peninsula Fine Art Center in Newport News, VA, and the museum representative to the Virginia Fine Arts Leadership Coalition. Ms. Henry has contributed other articles to The Docent Educator, including “Art Teachers in Museums,” which appeared in the issue “Research and Trends in Education” (Volume 5, Number 2).
Outreach for Audiences with Special Needs

by Kim Milliken and Isabel Rosenbaum

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is a large urban institution with a strong commitment to providing educational outreach programs to diverse audiences throughout the southern California area. Outreach programs include those for elementary and middle schools, a traveling insect zoo, and a loan service that allows museum members to check out artifacts and specimens. In an effort to reach out to underserved audiences, however, the museum developed two programs for groups who are unable to make on-site visits — Special Education Outreach and Senior Outreach.

Special Education Outreach Program

The Special Education Outreach Program visits educational facilities, traditional schools, and hospitals to provide free educational programs for students with special needs.

Each program consists of a twenty minute storyboard presentation using a felt board and large animal illustrations. This brief interactive presentation is followed by a longer period of hands-on inquiry with large, touchable objects, such as taxidermed animals, skins, bones, antlers, fossils, and shells. In order to ensure individualized attention, three to four museum docents work with a group of no more than 15 students.

The docents are trained to adapt the presentation and interaction to meet specific needs of individual students. They are introduced to a variety of disabilities they may encounter and applicable teaching techniques. Often, people who have never worked with special education students are a little apprehensive. Training strongly emphasizes that the students are individuals, who happen to have special needs. Many barriers faced by people with special needs are attitudinal.

Museum docents are trained to concentrate on students’ strengths and to remember that these students have more in common with their non-disabled peers than not.

The special education population that the museum visits includes students who have a speech, hearing, or vision impairment or who are physically, emotionally, cognitively, or learning disabled. Within each category of disability, the range and variability of personalities and traits are as extensive as in the non-disabled population; for example, there are bright and average hearing impaired students, or shy and friendly learning disabled students.

While there are specific teaching techniques for working with particular disabilities, a few general tips are useful for working with students with special needs.

1. Plan a few extra minutes for the students to arrive and settle down for the presentation.

2. Vary the presentation in order to reach the diverse needs of a group.

3. Allow the students to directly participate by handling or actively discussing objects.

4. Be aware that nonverbal praise, such as smiling or nodding, is as important as verbal praise to encourage and motivate.

5. Keep in mind that some students may be on medication and appear lethargic.

6. Most importantly, remember that enthusiasm can create a successful program.
Senior Outreach Program

Improving socialization for elderly residents is one of the goals of the Senior Outreach Program. Like the Special Education Outreach Program, this program is also free of charge. The Senior Outreach Program provides educational programs to elderly residents of nursing homes, board and care facilities, and retirement homes in Los Angeles County. The program encourages learning by integrating the participants’ past experiences with new knowledge. Connecting new information to prior knowledge is a very effective retention technique for learners of all ages.

Many seniors are unable to participate in the diverse educational opportunities offered by cultural institutions throughout the vast Los Angeles area due to lack of funding or staffing to arrange transportation for field trips. Others are no longer physically able to make such a trip. Twice a month, museum docents gather to bring a variety of artifacts and specimens to this often overlooked audience.

The first presentation offered helps to recreate participants’ memories of their childhood. 1913: Do you Remember When? encourages participants to explore the early 1900’s with a special emphasis on the year 1913, the year of the museum’s founding. Museum docents dressed in period costumes present historical events and artifacts, period kitchen appliances, tools, magazines, and newspapers against a backdrop of a 1913 kitchen and garage. The seniors are encouraged to handle and explore each item and share their memories of childhood, home life, and other anecdotes.

Another presentation, Chaparral: A Walk in the Wild, takes participants on an armchair nature walk through the chaparral, a native southern California plant and animal community. The outside world is brought to confined elderly through the use of taxidermied and botanical specimens, animals sounds, and video tape.

In an effort to represent the vast collection of the Natural History Museum, the newest presentation, Life in Native America, explores three different Native American cultures from California, the Southwest, and the Plains regions. Participants compare family life, daily chores, ceremonies, and music of Native Americans with hands-on artifacts and reproductions. Docents lead seniors in discussions about stereotypes of different cultures and about Native American life today. The participants often choose to share experiences they’ve had as immigrants and stereotypes they encountered.

As with the Special Education Outreach Program, the logistics and training have contributed to the success of the Senior Outreach Program. This program also requires a larger number of museum docents, usually three to four for each presentation. In addition, the presentations are limited to 25 seniors. The high ratio of museum volunteers to participants is an important factor ensuring individualized care and attention. To prepare the volunteers to work with elderly adults, they are introduced to the senior adult population, to characteristics of older adult learners, and to appropriate presentation techniques.

The senior adult population is diverse and the age composition of elderly people at different types of facilities varies greatly. Nursing home residents are generally more frail and infirmed than participants in residences and day programs. Often, nursing home participants appear to be uninvolved or disoriented, but it is important to remember that people benefit in ways that may not be readily noticeable. Though they may not be actively (Continued on page 10.)
Outreach for Audiences with Special Needs

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This docent encourages a senior to recreate memories from her childhood using a turn-of-the-century appliance as the catalyst for conversation.

involved and retaining the subject matter presented, they are experiencing invaluable socialization and stimulation that is different from their daily routine in the long-term care facility.

As with most groups, the education level, background, and physical ability of seniors within each group can vary greatly. Some may have only finished grade school, while others have advanced degrees. Common experiences and life experiences, however, tend to blur the differences in educational levels.

There are specific characteristics of older adult learners that need to be considered when teaching to them. With age, people become slower in their reaction time to stimuli. However, this does not mean that older individuals are unable to learn. When older adult are presented new materials, they are as likely to remember it as their younger counterparts, as long as the material is meaningful and grounded in prior knowledge.

The following are a few presentation techniques useful for working with seniors:

1. Make certain everyone can see and hear. Try to minimize extraneous noise in the room. Use microphones or hand-held personal amplifiers if necessary.

2. Speak slowly, loudly, and clearly without shouting or straining. Face the group when speaking.

3. Stand in a lighted spot to facilitate lip reading. Don't stand in front of a window; the glare will prevent you from being seen.

4. Seat participants in a semi-circle. This makes it easier to reach the seniors, who are often in wheelchairs.

5. Ask permission before relocating or moving a person in a wheelchair. Remember that wheelchairs contain individuals. They are not pieces of furniture!

6. Seniors in nursing homes may sleep due to medication. They usually appreciate being gently roused and encouraged to participate.

7. Request to have trained facility staff present during the program in case of unforeseen events or emergencies.

Kim Milliken is the outreach coordinator at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and is primarily involved in the implementation and development of the docent outreach programs. She received a B.S. in marine biology at the California State University of Long Beach and a M.S. in science education from the University of Southern California.

Isabel Rosenbaum coordinates the volunteer programs at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Prior to her staff position, she was a docent at the Natural History Museum for 12 years. She received a B.S. in nursing at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, and a M.S. in gerontology from the University of Southern California.
Museums Create a Sense of Place in Phoenix

The city of Phoenix, Arizona, is using museums to help create a "downtown" in this sprawling city of 2.4 million residents. Over the last five years, the community has built a swath of entertainment and cultural facilities at its core, including a history museum, an expanded art museum, and a science center, in addition to a new baseball stadium, theater, and refurbished concert hall.

When completed in early 1997, the $48 million Arizona Science Center will be the largest of the projects. The Science Center will house a planetarium, hands-on children's exhibits, and a theater with an Iwerks movie system that will make viewers feel as if they are part of the action.

City officials hope that these cultural assets will create a vibrant tourist destination and lure for business. What a testament to the power, prestige, and importance of art, history, and science institutions, and the central position they can have in bringing cohesiveness and a sense of place to communities!

Don’t Forget the Motor City!

This year marks the centennial of the invention of the automobile. For those of you who might be visiting Detroit, the automotive center of the United States, be certain to enjoy the city's major museum attractions.

The Detroit Institute of Arts, (313) 833-7900, is one of the nation's largest art museums. Among its permanent collection are exceptional murals by Diego Rivera. The Museum of African American History, (313) 833-9800, includes a permanent exhibition entitled "An Epic of Heroism," which tells the story of the underground railroad in Michigan. Music fans should enjoy the Motown Historical Museum, (313) 875-2264. Visitors can see the original recording studio where the careers of such notable groups as The Supremes, The Four Tops, The Jackson 5, and Martha and the Vandellas were launched. Among the exhibitions on view at the Detroit Historical Museum, (313) 833-5342, is one that shows how cars are assembled.

The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village are in nearby Dearborn. The Henry Ford Museum is both an auto museum and an American history exhibit, chronicling transportation from early bicycles to prototypes of future cars. Greenfield Village is a collection of innovators' homes that Henry Ford had moved to Dearborn from all over the country, including Thomas Edison's workshop, brought from Menlo Park, N.J.

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Reaching Out to Head Start Families

Building Bridges of Trust

Few museums target or have any great success reaching low-income families. Typically, Head Start families do not take advantage of museums in their communities even when the museums make their programs available at little or no cost. However, when museums take their interactive, hands-on learning experiences into the community, they can begin building bridges of trust with these new audiences.

The dictionary defines a bridge as “something built across an obstacle so that people can cross over from one side to the other.” Docents and museum educators planning to work with Head Start Centers will build stronger bridges if they are aware of Head Start’s 31-year history and certain demographics relevant to this audience.

Head Start is a comprehensive, federally-funded preschool program for three, four, and five year olds from low-income families. Since 1965, Head Start has been successful in improving the lives of many low-income children and their families and has served as a national laboratory for early childhood and family support services. All parents who want to enroll their child in a Head Start program must commit to being involved in the classroom in some way. This structure provides museums working with Head Start access to teachers, parents, and children in one environment.

The following statistics help to define the families Head Start serves:

84% of Head Start families have incomes of less than $12,000/year; 63% of Head Start children are four years old and 27% are three years old; 37% of children are Black, 33% are White, and 23% are Hispanic; and 55% of enrolled children live in one-parent households.

The Delaware Museum of Natural History was well positioned within its community to develop a partnership with its local Head Start Center. The museum board’s long-range plan called for “increased community impact.” As a museum of natural history, its exhibits were user-friendly to a pre-literate audience. A variety of outreach programs were already ongoing, including “Natural Wonders,” a weekly museum program for children aged three to five and a parent or care giver. This program had a five-year history of success serving more than 3,000 children annually, and the experienced early childhood educator who had developed these classes was on staff to teach them. This same educator agreed to pilot the Head Start outreach lessons and later train docents to take over.

We contacted our local Head Start grantee. The idea was very positively received by the director of New Castle County Head Start, Inc. With eight centers within ten miles of the museum, we could expect to serve 532 children and their parents. Our project would also support New Castle County Head Start, Inc. in another way. In order to maintain their current level of federal funding,
Head Start has to match every federal dollar received with 25 cents in contributions from parents and/or the community. Our project fulfilled the match criteria.

But first, another community partnership was created — a consortium of four community businesses agreed to share all administrative and program costs, providing financial support for this partnership between a museum and its local Head Start agency.

Now, the museum was ready to build bridges of trust and reach audiences new to viewing museums as a personal and cultural resource. The Delaware Museum of Natural History (DMNH) Head Start Museum Visit Program would bring interactive, hands-on learning to all 532 preschool-age children enrolled in the eight New Castle County Head Start, Inc. centers.

Crucial to the success of our program was having Head Start personnel participate as equal partners to ensure that both the outreach and museum visit lessons were meaningful. Initially, the outreach portion of the program called for five visits to each of the eight centers. This was far too ambitious for both the museum staff and the amount of available time in the classroom. It also did not provide a balance between teaching outside the museum and bringing children in to see “the real thing.” We re-evaluated the concerns of all involved and decided upon one visit to each of the eight centers during the fall and early winter. Following the outreach visits, each center came to the museum for a follow-up lesson.

For the first outreach visit, in a program called “Animals A to Z,” we brought screech owl, spoonbill bird, porcupine fish, and armadillo taxidermy specimens. These animals proved to be far too unfamiliar to the children and we quickly lost their interest. By involving Head Start personnel in the planning, testing, and implementation of the lesson we were able to develop different strategies and adapt another outreach program, “Grinders and Gnashers.” In this lesson, children compare their teeth to elephant, shark, and bear teeth specimens and talk about how teeth tell the story of an animal’s diet. Using individual hand mirrors, children count their own teeth and talk about which teeth grind and which teeth cut. Using different tools and play dough, children experiment with the different ways teeth grind, mash, or cut food. Children match real animal teeth specimens to animal pictures and different types of diets.

After visiting all eight Head Start Centers with this outreach lesson, the children came to the museum where they enjoyed games, songs, and stories that reinforced the concepts of animal adaptations, habitat, and survival. The museum docents and outreach teacher were there to greet the children and reinforce the outreach-museum connection before dividing into smaller touring groups. During the museum lesson, children found the now familiar elephant tooth and bear skull in the children’s hands-on room as well as new specimens to explore on their own with their parents and teachers.

As part of the fall docent training, a licensed psychologist with prior experience as a New Jersey Head Start teacher conducted a two-hour session for docents and education staff. The special emphasis on preschool age children was invaluable to the Head Start museum visits. Docents teaching the museum lessons incorporated age-appropriate strategies and plenty of concrete hands-on experiences into their tours. Children touched owl wings and talons, became silent fliers and caught imaginary mice, slithered on the floor like snakes, arranged Whelk shells in a growth series, and camouflaged colored paper polar bears.

There is little question that the DMNH Head Start Museum Visit Program challenged the Education Department and the local Head Start providers. As a first year pilot program we gained a lot of insight into the 1996-97 program ahead. In a follow-up meeting with key Head Start directors many improvements were planned for the upcoming year. A Head Start teacher and aide’s workshop will be given on an inservice day in the fall to introduce both phases of the program and get immediate feedback from the teachers. The workshop will serve to give teachers a sense of ownership in the program as they see their ideas incorporated.

(Continued on page 15.)
Bringing History to the People

The National Archives and Records Administration, this nation's filing cabinet, has the three part mission of protecting, maintaining, and making available the valuable permanent records of the federal government. This last component, that of making available, is the inspiration for two outreach efforts that bring programs directly to the people.

Volunteer docents have discovered over the years that nothing brings history alive so much as touching the documents that shaped it. Reading about the revolutionary war soldier is one thing, but reading General George Washington's orders to the troops, studying the muster rolls (not "mustard rolls," as some of our fifth graders refer to them), and tracing the battles on the battle maps is something entirely different. Everyone knows there was a Declaration of Independence, but how many have heard its eloquence read aloud by a ninety-year-old resident of senior citizen housing?

The National Archives offers both community and school outreach workshops. The community outreach programs are designed primarily for adult groups, while the school workshops target groups from fifth grade through the first two years of college. Each of the offerings is based on the premise that the use of documents in studying history should not only be educational, but entertaining as well.

Community Outreach

Community outreach programs include general topics related to the mission of the Archives, including a general introduction to the Archives and slide shows that showcase current exhibitions. The specialized offerings, all of which are illustrated with full-sized facsimile documents, not only cover the 200 plus years of American history, but also reflect the richness and backgrounds of the presenters. A docent defines his or her own topic, assembles documents that best tell the story, prepares a workshop or presentation, and shares his or her enthusiasm for the topic with the appropriate audience.

Program titles have ranged from Genealogy and Family History to Federal Involvement in Great U.S. Disasters, and from Kindness in American History to Musical Memories at the Archives. Docents continually update their programs to reflect current events.

Over the years, the docents have developed certain practical guidelines for their presentations. The use of facsimile documents from the Archive's vast holdings is central to every outreach program, making it desirable to limit the size of the audience. A group of not more than fifty persons is the ideal audience. Some docents prefer to distribute copies of the documents that are being studied, so that audience members can examine them in small groups while the docent points out important aspects. Others prefer to read portions of the documents aloud and make them available at the end of the meeting for closer examination. Even if a listener has heard about President Franklin Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech, or has his own vivid memory of it, holding a facsimile copy of the actual draft, with the words "world history" scratched out and "day of infamy" inserted, is a special thrill.

Each docent develops the most comfortable and effective presentation, and many prepare a presentation in even greater detail than necessary so that colleagues can present the topic. After a program has been presented, the host organization is asked to evaluate both program and presenter. The docent is encouraged to complete an evaluation form as well.

The Community Outreach program of the National Archives has clearly created a win-win situation. The Archives benefits from the favorable and widespread publicity the program attracts. Community organizations gain from the entertaining and intellectual programs they are able to offer their membership. And, not least of all, docent volunteers get the feeling of satisfaction that comes from knowing they are filling an important need in the community.

School Outreach

The Volunteer and Tour Office has worked closely with teachers and curriculum specialists to develop several structured school workshops using a selection of full-sized facsimile documents relating to current classroom activities. Unlike the outreach programs that are driven primarily by the interests of the presenting docents, school outreach docents take their cues from classroom teachers. The facsimile documents selected for school workshops enhance and enrich the students' classroom work and encourage them to conduct research using primary sources.

Each August, information about the school outreach programs is sent to elementary, secondary, and high schools in the area. In the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, the teaching of American history begins in the fifth and sixth grades. Interest in our workshops is not limited to this age group, however. Teachers of older students also express interest in enriching their courses. Even teachers of other subject areas who find working with original documents important request our workshops.

Whenever possible, docents are assigned to schools in their home area, and they in turn contact the teacher to discuss the workshop date, class reading level, and the documents to be used. This important information allows the docent to tailor the workshop to the needs and interests of the students.

Pre-visit materials are sent in advance of the workshop so that the teacher and students are acquainted with the National Archives, its professional terminology, and the specific workshop they will receive. Ideally, students learn new vocabulary words and study
questions relating to pictures or documents so they are better prepared to participate in the workshop during the docent’s visit.

Typically, the docent will provide a number of facsimile documents and photographs relating to the specific workshop. Workshops with titles such as Westward Expansion, Declaration of Independence, and Immigration and Family History rely on the vast holdings of the National Archives to enrich the students’ basic knowledge and appreciation for research with primary sources. Pairs of students study documents, complete questionnaire worksheets related to the documents, and then discuss their responses with classmates. The lesson becomes student-driven and no two classes are alike. Docents must be flexible, often making adjustments to keep the students’ attention and their conversation on-track.

These school outreach programs have increased in popularity as the funding for buses and field trips has become more scarce. In an average year, outreach workshops serve between five and six thousand students. This represents a lot of work and dedication on the part of the docent corps. The reward comes when docents receive letters from students talking about what they enjoyed most about their workshop. Many express a keen interest in visiting the National Archives and conducting research there someday.

With the growing popularity of cyberspace, details of both Community and School Outreach programs are now posted on the National Archives’ homepage on the World Wide Web.

As increased visibility results in an explosion of requests, NAVA docents will rise to ever greater challenges of bringing history to the people.

Betty Moore, Mary Flitcroft, and Dena Greenstein are docents serving the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Ms. Moore is chair of the Community Outreach Committee at the Archives and also serves as a docent at William Paco House in Annapolis, MD. Ms. Flitcroft has been a volunteer docent at the Archives for eight years and is the past chair of the School Outreach Committee. Ms. Greenstein is the current president of the National Archives Volunteer Association (NAVA) and leads behind-the-scenes tours for National Archives visitors.

Building Bridges of Trust
(Continued from page 13.)

The outreach lessons will take place after the New Year when the children are more comfortable with their routines. The museum visits will be scheduled within a week or two of the outreach lesson for better continuity. Pending funding and recruiting of an outreach docent, we will expand the program to include an additional 200 children from a second Head Start grantee.

The challenges of conducting outreach require someone who can adapt immediately to new and different situations. Outreach is more physical, time consuming, and intellectually challenging than in-house museum teaching. You have to be willing to travel to new areas. (Street maps are strongly advised and come in handy when thrown off course by road construction, traffic jams, or other travel problems.) Because you bring “the exhibits” to the classroom, you need time to pack and unpack programs that can be bulky and/or heavy. It also means that set up may be different from one class to the next. In addition, classroom teacher support may be minimal and there is an increased likelihood of distractions.

Bringing the interactive, hands-on learning styles of museum education into the comfort of Head Start classrooms provides an initial, positive first experience for children, parents, and teachers. In the museum, we know what is around the corner and we don’t have to bring it there: the exhibits are predictable and already in place. With their daily routines left behind, children and adults can be more attentive in these new and exciting spaces. Yet, in the museum, intellectual, social, and economic barriers may prevent learning and discourage a needed level of comfort. Outreach visits to Head Start centers can prepare children for a museum field trip and familiarize them with the museum’s collections.

Reaching out to Head Start Centers gives museums the opportunity to “grow” new audiences who will take advantage of the educationally enriching programs that museums have to offer. And, these partnerships can create patterns of lifelong learning while building bridges of trust in the community.

Tamsin Wolff was most recently the director of education at the Delaware Museum of Natural History in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1985, she began the Outreach Division at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, where she was outreach specialist for five years. Topics of outreach programs she developed include quilts, 19th Century maritime life, Maryland Indians, using primary sources, and portraiture. She has also worked at the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Ms. Wolff has an M.A.T. in Museum Education from George Washington University and serves on the Board of the Museum Education Roundtable. She is currently a museum education consultant based in Chadds Ford, PA.
When History Comes to Life in the Classroom

Mehedawah, a Ponca Indian woman, walks slowly into the classroom, beating a soft rhythm on her drum. Even though she died more than 70 years ago, Mechedawah reappears for fourth-graders at an elementary school to tell of life along the Niobrara River in northeast Nebraska, how the U.S. Government forced her tribe to relocate to Oklahoma in the 1870’s, and how Chief Standing Bear won an important court case declaring that Indians were persons under the law.

Mehedawah’s story is one of many that come to life as they are told by first-person characters from the Western Heritage Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. Most of these costumed characters were people from Omaha and Nebraska history. An example is Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, the first Native American woman medical doctor. However, other characters are compilations of pioneer diaries and letters, like the character Sarah McDermott Mayhew, a pioneer woman who homesteads with her family in Nebraska.

The costumed characters are portrayed by staff interpreters who spent months studying the intricate details of their subjects’ lives and historical world. Six characters are currently visiting schools on a regular basis. These living history characters provide an interactive, first-person perspective that quite literally enables students to have a dialogue with the past.

Character Development

The six living history characters were selected in cooperation with area teachers to augment specific classroom studies. Once the characters were identified, the museum’s interpretative staff began researching the characters and creating their individual stories. Individuals with theater backgrounds are not necessary to carry out the presentations successfully. Prior to initiating this theatrical program, only one member of the museum’s interpretative staff had actually received theater training. Instead, these interpreters came to the museum with backgrounds in teaching, and the museum provided the necessary theatrical training. Local storytelling and theater consultants were brought in to work with interpreters both in a group and individually.

These storytelling techniques were used to bring the characters to life:

1. Organize and visualize. Draw three pictures to depict the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Instead of relying on a written script, visualize the pictures to help tell a story in sequence.

2. Add details. Add specific details to enrich each story. For instance, when telling about the early life of the Native Americans, an interpreter could describe how they used the animals they hunted, what vegetables they planted in their gardens, and what fish they caught in the waters.

3. Use gestures and body movements. Hand and facial gestures, as well as body movements, are an important part of any presentation, as long as they are natural and fit well into the story. When researching, try to get a feel for the personality of the character. As practice and development sessions progress, each character will begin to take on unique characteristics and personality traits.

Using Artifacts to Enhance the Story

Using historical artifacts helps set the stage and create an environment for the presentation. For example, the character Sarah McDermott Mayhew uses real butter churns and washtubs to carry out chores while telling of her pioneer journeys. Mary Creighton, another character, taps on a telegraph key while explaining how her husband built the first telegraph line into Omaha.

Storytelling and living history techniques are wonderfully captivating, and are highly effective ways to teach.
Artifacts can also create interactive situations with the audience. Mionbathin, an Omaha Indian character, shows reproductions of tools and clothes made by the Omaha Indians in the 1860’s to his audience. People of all ages learn better and enjoy experiencing artifacts directly.

**Teacher Resource Materials**

Pre- and post-visit materials sent to the teachers greatly enrich learning. The following information can be included in a packet: a summary of the character and the story; a vocabulary list of important terms or phrases used in the presentation; activity worksheets to increase the students’ knowledge and involvement with vocabulary and subject matter; a map activity to familiarize students with sites or areas relevant to the story; a list of suggested follow-up activities that require critical thinking skills; pictures of important people in the story that will give the audience a more personal look at the character; and a bibliography.

**Costuming the Characters**

The concept of creating costumes for living history characters presented several challenges. Since each costume would become associated with a specific person being represented, it had to offer an accurate and interesting portrayal of the time without detracting from the story. The need for comfort and portability meant that the garments also had to be non-constrictive — thus hoop skirts, corsets, and multiple layers were eliminated.

During the design phase for each costume, the character’s age, social standing, personality, and ethnic background had to be considered. For instance, Mary Creighton speaks in the later years of her life, when she is a widow of substantial means. Her clothing needed to reflect all these things.

By using illustrations from ladies’ periodicals of the time period, as well as examples from garments in the collections, the design for her costume was finalized.

Fabric selections were made with the input of the storytellers who would wear them. Personal tastes in color and texture were considered, so that they looked and felt good in their costumes. As with the designs, practicality was also a factor. The fabric would have to stand up to being carried, worn, and cleaned often without apparent deterioration.

While there are several sources of historic reproduction patterns for constructing garments, there is little choice within any specific time period. Therefore, it was necessary to use a combination of period and modern patterns to achieve the designs that best supported each character.

Finally, no costume is effective without accessories. Shoes, jewelry, and hair styles are elements that either enhance or destroy the effectiveness of the costume. Children notice the very smallest details, so it was necessary to research the appropriate accents for each character. Hair can not always be changed to fit the time period, so the suggestion of length was achieved with snoods and inexpensive hair pieces, and a hat was used to detract from short hair.

**Has It Worked?**

Marketing efforts were minimal yet strategically carried out. The initial advertisement to teachers was through brochures. “Word of mouth” recommendations brought additional requests. Because our program was unique to this area, news releases quickly produced front page articles, as well as numerous television and radio appearances. All of this helped us reach additional groups who were interested in the program.

We charge a minimal fee of $50 per performance to cover the cost of the interpreters and the reproduction of teacher packet materials. A grant from a local bank funded the initial development and paid for costuming and props.

More than 6,000 children and adults took part in 150 presentations during just the first four months. Teacher evaluations poured in with enthusiastic comments and praise. Elementary school supervisors are currently working to make the program a regular part of the school curriculum.

The program has been widely received as an exciting and rare opportunity for children to see history brought to life right in their own classroom. It offers them a memorable learning experience, while it provides their teachers with another tool for accomplishing their teaching goals.

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Deborah C. O’Donnell is the director of public programs for the Western Heritage Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. Ms. O’Donnell is currently one of the officers of EDCOM, the national museum education council of the American Association of Museums, and serves as the Education Committee Chairperson for the Nebraska Museum Association.

Judith McCormick Flint, Arleen Bailey, and Melinda Morath are interpreters for the Western Heritage Museum. Ms. Flint taught in the public schools for over 10 years. In addition to her teaching, she worked for Opera Omaha and several local theaters assisting with make-up and costuming. Ms. Bailey has taught school, developed educational programs for the Line Creek Archeological Museum, and supervised an after school program specifically designed to meet the needs of inner-city children in Kansas City. Ms. Morath holds a B.A. in Elementary Education with endorsements in English and Early Childhood Education.

Before joining the Western Heritage Museum, Ms. Morath taught in the Houston Public School system.
Playing by Someone Else’s Rules

There’s a scene in the movie Mr. Mom where Michael Keaton’s character has to drive his kids to school. He does it wrong. The kids in the back seat tell him so: “Dad, you’re doing it wrong!” The school’s yellow-slickered crossing guard tells him so: “Mr. Stevens, you’re doing it wrong!” It seems he has entered the school’s driveway from the south. He is supposed to enter from the north when dropping off, from the south when picking up. This is a very funny scene, but it wasn’t so funny when a real, live principal read me the riot act once for making a similar mistake when I was on my way to speak to a class at his school.

Outreach means getting out of your museum, off your own turf, and onto someone else’s playing field. When that happens, the rules are different. Your outreach visit to a school will be much easier if you know some of their rules ahead of time.

Getting There and Getting In

Getting to a school isn’t necessarily simple. Be sure to ask for directions and/or a map when you accept an invitation to appear at a school. Leave plenty of time for your trip; if possible, schedule your visit so you will not have to contend with rush hour traffic, or the traffic that builds around a school at the beginning and end of the day. Expect traffic tie-ups and no place to park whenever the school day begins and ends. If possible, make a trial run. You must not be late; antsy children and a teacher who doesn’t know whether or not to start the next lesson are waiting!

If you are going to a school to share part of your institution’s collection with a class, or to appear as a guest speaker for an all-school assembly, it stands to reason that you’ve been invited. Don’t assume that anyone else knows this! Teachers sometimes forget to inform the most important person on the staff, the school secretary. This is a major breach of security, and you won’t be able to get in the place without her okay! Be certain to ask the teacher who has invited you to give you the necessary credentials or good word that will allow you to get into the building. I’m not kidding! Also, don’t try to sneak in the back way. School secretaries have built-in radar that can detect an intruder better than any of our navy’s latest gizmos.

Seriously, schools are much more security conscious today than in year’s past, and for the protection of those inside, strangers are not welcome. Be sure to check in at the main office where you will probably be given a guide, or at least directions, to the classroom where you will be speaking.

And, with Michael Keaton in mind, follow the school’s parking regulations carefully.

Meeting the Kids

It always helps when making a presentation to be able to scout the terrain, set up your equipment, locate the rest room, and do a little meditation before meeting your audience. This rarely happens when making school visits. Generally, you are required to prepare all your “stuff” while being scrutinized by 25 or so pairs of eyes. No matter how many times you’ve set up a projector, handled animal cages, or arranged your notes, doing so with an audience of 10-year-olds will insure that all your fingers will turn to thumbs.

If you can involve the students in your setup, you will avoid wasting valuable “get-acquainted” time. Making the set-up part of the program can put both you and your audience at ease more quickly than will an arbitrary “Beginning of the Program.” It will also let the students see immediately that they will be an important part of the program. Just remember to be “politically correct” — don’t ask for a “big, strong boy to help me move this box.”

Above all, be flexible. The room and equipment you’ve been promised may not be available after all. Have back-up activities if you find that Plan One has become an impossibility. Better yet, don’t plan programs that are too heavily dependent on specific requirements of space and equipment.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

The actual presentation in a classroom shouldn’t be too different from a similar presentation in your museum. Except, of course, you’ll probably have fewer art, artifacts, or animals to work with. Discipline may be a little easier in the classroom because the students are “contained” and not moving from exhibit to exhibit. On the other hand, you’re in their world, now, and some may try to see if the same rules apply when the “teacher” is an outsider. As in the museum setting, students who are interested and actively involved are less likely to misbehave. You should not make presentations in schools when school personnel are not present; therefore, any serious breach of discipline can quickly be referred to them.

Remember that you are a guest. Just as you would not rearrange the furniture in a home you were visiting, don’t rearrange the classroom without permission. This includes not erasing
the chalkboard. Also, don’t overstay your welcome. Allow time for questions and don’t extend your presentation past your allotted time. Don’t ask the teacher if it’s okay to take a few more minutes. You put her in the awkward position of having to tell you to shut up (of course she’ll do it more politely than that) or run the risk of making everyone late for lunch! Stick to the time limits you both agreed upon in your pre-visit phone call.

And, speaking of pre-visit phone calls, be sure you make one. Find out exactly why you’ve been invited. Are you the opening act for a class visit to the museum, or are you a one-shot presentation that the teacher has substituted for a field trip? You will need to know how many students you will be working with (one class? the whole sixth grade? the entire school?), what sort of space you will have (a small table at the front of a classroom? an auditorium? an “open concept” room?), time limits, any rules and/or restrictions you should know about.

AND IN CONCLUSION

A major difference between an education program presented in your institution and in a school is the ending. When you conclude a program in your museum, zoo, or nature center, the teacher gathers her charges, boards a school bus, and drives away, leaving you the luxury of rearranging the room, putting artifacts away, and mulling over the program in peace and quiet. In a school, however, you will be required to bring your program to a close and pack up while the class goes on to a spelling lesson. This can be awkward unless you, once again, make the children a part of the program closure. Make the ending obvious, so the teacher knows when to say, “Now, children, let’s show Mrs. Littleton how much we appreciated her coming today.” Above all, don’t start an activity (such as an art project) and leave the teacher to clean it up.

A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP

Outreach serves as both lure and community service. In addition to working with students, museums can provide expertise for teacher education in the form of research assistance, in-service presentations, and special workshops. Many schools and museums enjoy a symbiotic relationship in planning and executing educational programs. Teachers are often used as consultants for museum programming; museum personnel can also be made available to assist teachers as they plan their curriculum. This beautiful friendship requires the mutual respect that comes from appreciating the differences inherent in the standards and practices of both institutions.

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

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THE DOCENT EDUCATOR
The last two years have brought a dramatic increase in Educational Outreach programs at the Pensacola Museum of Art. The following tips helped us develop outreach trunks.

Start with what you already have. Trunks can be developed on any theme — historical, cultural, scientific. The trick is to keep it focused. We started each of our trunks by using objects already in our permanent collection and material already developed for current exhibitions.

Make your material user-friendly. Don’t assume that the third grade teacher who borrows your trunk wants to spend a week becoming an expert on Japanese culture. Write explanatory material that is easily understood and adaptable to any age level or curriculum subject.

Make it fun. Include some fun facts and activities in your resource materials. For example, did you know that West African tribesmen carry miniature masks called “ma’s” for identification, and they carry them under their arms! After learning about the miniature masks and how they were used, students can create their own “ma’s” in paper or clay. Both teachers and students will enjoy the material, and remember it better, if it is presented as “edu-tainment.”

Make it practical. Our first trunk was so bulky and heavy that one person couldn’t carry it out to the car. Our next two were much better — one is a lightweight, heavy-duty Rubbermaid trunk with built-in handles; the other is a footlocker with built-in wheels.

Hold in-service training with your trunks. To help teachers in our county become familiar with the trunk materials, the museum hosted several in-service training events. We worked with social studies, language arts, and fine art coordinators to bring all of their teachers to the museum to learn about the trunks first-hand.
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