Games & Activities That Teach

- Building Upon the Gallery Experience
- The Docent Challenge
- Hands-On Fun at the Aquarium
- The Way to a Visitor’s Heart: Using Food to Motivate
- Kinesthetic Learning
- “Desert Detective”
- Highly Productive Fun
- Orienteering
**Highly Productive Fun**

Games in my institution? You must be joking! Our collection has been researched by scholars, our subject matter is serious and important, our approach is sophisticated, and our demeanor is dignified. Why would we play games in our galleries?

If you've perceived similar attitudes at your institution — staff or volunteers who look upon educational games and activities with disdain — know that these "armchair critics" are mistaken. When properly structured to promote learning, games and activities offer very sound strategies for teaching with institutional collections.

The idea that learning must be serious to be credible couldn't be farther from the truth. Just as good cooks know that eating well doesn't mean food must taste bland, good educators know that teaching well doesn't mean that learning must be staid. Learning can, and should, be dynamic and enjoyable.

**Why use Games or Activities?**

It is neither unsophisticated nor undignified to engage visitors with games or activities that stimulate, involve, and teach how to retrieve information. While scholars might prefer to be approached in a scholarly manner, the vast majority of visitors on tour at your institution are there to learn AND enjoy themselves. These motivations — learning and having a good time — need not be mutually exclusive. They can, and should, be a reinforcing partnership.

For younger children, game playing often is learning. Through play, youngsters develop their ability to concentrate, explore, persevere, and cooperate, essential skills that facilitate further learning. For older children and adults, activities that create opportunities for participation encourage the retention of what is learned and provide formats for further learning that can be easily replicated in other educational environments.

Countless educational studies have proven that we retain little of what we hear, but much of what we do and say. Games and activities capitalize on this, by creating active learning experiences in settings primarily structured for passive learning opportunities.

**What Games and Activities can Teach**

The purpose of labels is to identify and describe. The purpose of most text panels is to elaborate upon that identification. Therefore, labels and text panels accomplish the most basic level of an institution's educational responsibility — that of identification and description.

Educators teaching within museums, historic sites, zoos, parks, and gardens are free, therefore, to extend their reach beyond simply telling visitors what they are looking at to imparting skills that promote independent learning and reflective thinking.

Among the skills that everyone, from novice through expert, must use to acquire, organize, and make sense of information are: observing, comparing, classifying, summarizing, interpreting, hypothesizing, imagining, and deciding. Knowing this, an educator can develop games or activities that review and strengthen these skills, while providing visitors with the enjoyment of making their own discoveries.

**Let the Games Begin**

- **Observing.** Observing is a way of uncovering information. We learn to see and to note what we had not perceived before. We develop our powers of discrimination, which leads to intellectual maturity. Observing well is an absolute necessity for anyone working in the fields of art, history, or science.

  Observing well requires that visitors look carefully, inspect diligently, and be attentive. Most visitors will not do these things, however, unless they have reason to do so. Games and activities supply the reason. For instance, challenging visitors to make note of, or draw, the subtle differences in leaf patterns among trees in a garden or park encourages them to look closely and to see characteristics they might have glossed over otherwise. The same is true of asking visitors to become detectives, and to identify as many attributes as they can about a scientific specimen, animal, historic setting, document, or work of art.

- **Comparing.** Comparing means finding the ways in which two or more items are alike or different. The ability to make comparisons builds upon the skill of observation and involves a very basic form of description — telling what something is or is not like. In this way, everyone, regardless of previous knowledge or exposure, can participate in comparison activities.

  Have visitors describe the differences between two landscape paintings. Allow them to discover for themselves how the styles of realism and impressionism differ from one another. Or, ask visitors to find similarities between different life forms and the developing stages of...
a human embryo, or between two skeletal mounts. Other comparing activities might involve comparing examples of mimicry among insects, fish, animals, or plants.

- **Classifying.** Classifying allows us to bring order to the information that we accumulate. Classifying is an extension of comparing and involves the noting of similarities or differences and then assigning things to groups based upon those variables. All academic subjects, especially the sciences and art history, are reliant upon the skill of classification; and devote great energy to this endeavor.

  Classifications are correct if they are appropriate, even when they do not conform to traditional academic assignments. Remember that, for teaching purposes, emphasis should be placed on the development of groups and categories, rather than on confirming one particular system or basis.

  Ask visitors to classify the paintings in a gallery into groups of their own making. Their categories might focus upon subject matter, media, size, color palette, style, or any other recognizable attribute. Then, have them discuss their categories and any differences in their classifications. Or, have visitors categorize the major responsibilities involved in supervising a large estate, plantation, or forest preserve. Should you assign the task of categorizing animals, their answers might include warm-blooded, terrestrial, meat-eating, and egg-laying, just to mention a few.

- **Summarizing.** The skill of summarizing involves selecting the most cogent information among the vast array presented. It is an ability to select “what counts” — to find the essence or central idea and to express this essentiality succinctly. The difference between summarizing, and merely repeating what was learned is that, when summarizing omission is a creative act whereas when repeating omission is an error.

  Titling, subtitling, retitling, or captioning are important forms of summarizing and they can be fun to do. Have visitors retitle art based on the works’ emotional or intellectual characteristics. Then, ask the visitors to discuss how their titles serve to summarize their own responses to the works. Read visitors a brief folktale from the culture you are examining in the galleries. Have the visitors summarize the message or moral of that folktale. Challenge visitors to think of themselves as newspaper reporters who must write the headline for an event, scientific discovery, or period of history. What would they write?

- **Interpreting.** The act of interpreting imparts meaning to, or extracts meaning from, material, situations, or events. Interpreting involves saying something not already said by the given material or situation. Interpretations are not guesses. They should be defensible on the basis of logic or reason.

  Have visitors interpret the results of a scientific experiment they observe, such as the interaction between an acid and a base. Ask visitors to interpret the resulting benefits and detriments of introducing non-native plants or animals into new ecosystems. Or, have visitors interpret what can be known or understood about a people after examining their artifacts.

- **Hypothesizing.** Hypothesizing goes beyond the certainties of interpreting. To hypothesize is to suggest unknown possibilities based on what is known. It is to make a carefully constructed, educated guess.

  Challenge visitors to develop several hypotheses about life in the eighteenth century by examining a kitchen of that time period. Or, have visitors hypothesize as to why twentieth

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Highly Productive Fun

Continued from previous page.

century artists shifted from representational art to abstraction, then ask visitors to consider why some contemporary artists are moving back to representational depictions again. Prior to conducting science experiments, have visitors hypothesize several possible outcomes.

- **Imagining.** Imagining extends thought farther away from the known and into the realm of the possible, or even the impossible. Imagining can incorporate fantasizing or inventing. Though many people think of imagining as child's play, it is a higher-order thinking skill that lies at the heart of the creative process, whether that creativity is devoted to scientific exploration, artistic expression, or technological innovation.

An activity that requires the use of imagining could invite visitors to consider how a non-representational art work might sound if it were an auditory rather than a visual experience. Or, visitors might be asked to dream up an imaginary animal that possesses the combined attributes of many other animals. Or, visitors might imagine what few possessions they would take with them if they were to have immigrated from another country or traveled west in a covered wagon.

- **Deciding.** Deciding requires making choices based on criteria. Deciding, in an educational context, should be made for defensible reasons that can be supported with evidence, and which could be understood by those who might have come to different conclusions.

Visitors could be challenged to select a single object, plant, animal, or artifact that best describes a particular culture, place, ecosystem, or time in history. Or, visitors could be asked to defend their choice of a work of art that they believe would be most (or least) appropriate for display in a public plaza or town hall.

**Some Final Thoughts**

While your institution's collection may seem inherently interesting to you, it may not be equally so to your visitors. And, even when visitors are intrinsically motivated, they often do not know how to pursue in-depth relationships with your collection. Games and other activities supply visitors with reasons for prolonged engagement with a collection, and can teach visitors how to acquire new information and gain new insights.

To be educationally sound, the games or activities used in conjunction with touring collections must have teaching as their primary objective and learning clearly a part of their construction. Just because visitors are having fun doesn't mean that they are necessarily learning. enjoyment should emerge from learning in an active, participatory manner. When this occurs, the games and activities that created opportunities for participation have accomplished their goal, and proven themselves to be among the more useful, and enthusiastically received, of teaching strategies.

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**Submit an Article!**

Publish and share your teaching ideas and techniques. Consider addressing one of the themes of our upcoming issue.

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"Desert Detective"

How does a botanical garden teach specific scientific topics to children when, in most cases, the plantings were designed for beauty rather than education? How can we encourage children to explore and investigate the collection without hurting the plants or themselves? At many museums and botanical gardens, these challenges are met through the use of educational games. These games can be used by families or by groups of school children.

For the past 10 years, the Desert Botanical Garden has used a scavenger hunt-like game called the Desert Detective. This educational game evolved variations to cover various teaching points, as well as to take advantage of seasonal changes. The Garden is currently using three variations of the Desert Detective: the Case of Desert Plant Adaptations, the Case of the Plant and Animal Partnerships, and the Case of the Plant and People Connection. In each one, the user is asked to find and record sixteen discoveries, such as “Find a tree with green bark.” Every clue is followed by information explaining the importance of the characteristic discovered.

The game follows the principles of informal education adapted from Stephen Bitgood’s A Comparison of Formal and Informal Learning. It is a format that is ideal for use in science centers, botanical gardens, parks, and museums.

The following points illustrate how Desert Detective and similar games can connect principles of informal education to assist and enhance learning.

Informal learners are self-paced and self-directed. Games like the Desert Detective allow children to move through the Garden at their own speed, while they seek out sixteen points on each game sheet. There is no predetermined pace. Learning is self-directed and is not sequential. The Garden has four trails, each with a specific theme. Regardless of the route children take, they are able to complete the Desert Detective.

Children are stimulated to learn by the environment. This is a key characteristic of informal learning. The children are stimulated to learn by the intriguing nature of the plants and animals in the environment, while the game sheet focuses their attention. The game sheet also provides a way for them to record what they’ve seen, which aids in retention.

The focus of learning is the exhibits. Visitors investigate real plants and animals rather than follow abstract written materials or worksheets. One of the game’s major objectives is to create involvement directly with the exhibits.

Exposure to exhibits is rapid and of short duration. The Desert Detective is ideally suited for investigating while moving quickly through an institution. The game sheet contains “finds” that can occur throughout the Garden.

The visitors are at varying levels of academic achievement. The Desert Detective game’s clues are general enough to encourage all visitors to explore. Each clue box contains information discussing the importance of the characteristic being sought, allowing a chaperone or parent to explain the significance of “discoveries” to children.

Learning is social. As with all games, there is an element of competition. Children try to find as many examples of each item as possible, which encourages them to continue searching throughout their visit.

Children can work as a team, or a family may work together, encouraging discussion that reinforces learning.

Children are intrinsically motivated. The Desert Detective is ideally suited to build upon intrinsic motivation. The children’s natural curiosity is stimulated by the game sheet, heightening their drive to explore. This increases the possibility that characteristics of plants that may have gone unnoticed become an exciting challenge to find.

The quality of the experience is emphasized. Children come away with a memory of fun and excitement. This positive learning experience stays with them long into the future, possibly encouraging them to investigate the subject further on their own.

We have found that games like the Desert Detective are valuable tools for informal education. Their flexibility allows us to change the games to meet different teaching objectives, the time of year, or the age level of the visitors. Students using the Desert Detective move through the Garden pursuing information, learning enthusiastically, pointing to discoveries, and excitedly finding and gathering information about the desert environment.

Ruth Copeman is the Outdoor Education Coordinator, and Nancy Cutler is the Interpretive Coordinator, at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, AZ.

Desert plants often have small leaves. Small leaves lose less water than big leaves. This helps the plant to save water.

CLUE: Find a leaf smaller than the one shown above.

by Ruth Copeman & Nancy Cutler

The Docent Educator Autumn 1997
Kinesthetic Learning

While all of us experience the physical world through our bodies, people who have strong bodily-kinesthetic intelligence tend to use their bodies to express ideas and feelings. These individuals are often talented athletes, dancers, skilled technicians, and actors. Though children who possess this orientation may not be verbally expressive, they can express themselves through moving their bodies, which often frustrates teachers and docents.

Teaching children who learn bodily-kinesthetically can be challenging, especially for docents and staff educators who tend to be linguistic and spatial learners. At the J. B. Speed Art Museum, we came up with a few touring movement activities, such as having children stand in a contraposto position to emulate the pose found in classical sculptures. We also used props to help children understand the principles of design in a physical sense. For instance, docents use silk cords to explore lines in art, having students construct lines for themselves that are calm, excited, etc.

When the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was introduced in the early 1990’s, our school touring program shifted its teaching methods to include a variety of new instructional strategies, including many more kinesthetic ones. To assist us in our efforts, we worked with a local movement artist, Mary Ann Maier, who designed a set of kinesthetic activities that docents could use with visitors. Ms. Maier created a menu of nine kinesthetic activities that teach three basic visual art concepts:

* movement and gesture,
* composition and line, and
* stories in art (including plot and character development)

Preparation

To prepare the docents for this new initiative, Ms. Maier came to present a workshop on the nine activities in a large, open area of the Museum where the docents would have plenty of room to participate. Then, she took the docents through the activities step-by-step, having them experience each kinesthetic part of the program.

The docents were reluctant at first, but once they began to experience kinesthetic learning, they were very enthusiastic.

For tours, each docent works with groups of approximately 10 students, which is the Museum’s standard tour group size. The kinesthetic activities used are geared for children in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Warm-Ups

A group begins its kinesthetic experience with a warm-up exercise designed to “break the ice.” These quick activities (about two minutes each), based on basic theater warm-ups, are fun and funny, demonstrating to students that museum visits can be creative and enjoyable.

During the game “Tingles,” students stand in a circle and begin by wiggling their fingers like worms. The docent then asks them to add their wrists, then arms, then heads, then bodies, wiggling quickly. Following this, the docent slows down the activity — first the bodies stop wiggling, then the heads, etc. until they are just moving their fingers. When they stop completely, participants experience a vibrating sensation. At that point the docent asks, “Can you feel the tingle?”

Following the warm-up, docents conduct three activities, one from each of the basic art concepts, lasting about 7 minutes per activity.

Movement and Gesture

A favorite movement activity is recreating the spiraled snakes seen on Yoruba carved door panels. The spiral, a symbol found in many cultures, is often symbolic of the dynamism of life, and through movement this concept is easily
reinforced. Students begin by looking at the spirals on the doors and discussing where else they may have seen this symbol. Then, the docent asks the students to make spirals in the air with their fingers. This progresses to making spirals with their whole arms, and finally with their entire bodies. After the "dance" is completed, the docent discusses with the group why snakes, spirals, and other shapes and designs appear on these panels.

Prior to looking at Mademoiselle Pogany by Brancusi, docents discuss gesture as indicators of behavior and expression. She asks students to create gestures that demonstrate how they are feeling at the moment. The group mirrors the gesture of each participant. Then, when the students look at the art work, the docent asks, "How do you think Mademoiselle Pogany is feeling?"

Composition and Line

When teaching about composition, a particularly effective activity involves having children recreate a painting using their bodies. Using Monet's The Church on the Cliff, for instance, students are challenged to spend a few minutes inspecting the work, paying careful attention to elements of the composition, including light, shape, texture, sizes of elements and placement of objects, etc. The group is then asked to recreate the work using their bodies. Someone could be the tree, another person would be the church, and so forth.

Once everyone has taken his or her position, the docent might say, "The wind is blowing — how does this change your position? What does the composition look like when the wind blows?" Music can also be added to alter the mood of the piece, giving it another layer of meaning.

Stories in Art

Perhaps the most popular group activity involves storytelling and character development. With a Dutch portrait of a man and woman dressed like Penelope and Ulysses, children wear costume props, invent dialogue for the pair, and act out their reconciliation. Following the activity, the students feel as if they "own" the work as they have experienced being Penelope or Ulysses first hand.

When examining a Rembrandt portrait of a woman, students are engaged in another storytelling activity. They select odd objects from a box and use them to tell a story about the woman. For instance, a student might select a pince-nez and say, "These are my glasses. I have bad eyes because we didn’t have any electric lights in my day. Look at all the wrinkles around my eyes."

Kinesthetic Activities for All Museums

Kinesthetic activities can be used in all different types of museums. In historic homes and history museums, for instance, students can act out different tasks, such as spinning wool, sweeping floors, pumping water, and so forth. In science museums, movement activities might demonstrate how atoms are joined to molecules or teach students about different forms of animal locomotion.

Kinesthetic activities are useful in all settings. Educators have long been aware that students respond to teaching techniques that are most effective for the students’ individual learning styles. Certainly, we have found that many of our visitors respond well to kinesthetic learning experiences.

Nancy Renick is the Associate Curator of Education for Adult Programs at the J. B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY. She holds an M.A. in Art History from the University of Minnesota and was previously at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Martin Rollins is Associate Curator of Education for School and Family Programs at the J. B. Speed Art Museum. Mr. Rollins is also a visual artist who received his M.F.A. from the University of Cincinnati and his B.F.A. from the Louisville School of Art.
Where Do I Go from Here?

Orienteering at the Museum

by
Meg Garrett

This story is really about a love affair with maps. I was always interested in maps—road maps, blueprints, shopping mall maps, even fire escape diagrams. I lingered over those cartographic treasures delivered every month in the National Geographic magazine. Interest became passion the day I learned there was an entire sport devoted to reading maps.

What I learned on that day years ago was that something called “orienteering” involved navigating through the woods using a map and compass. Participants could run or walk as they chose, but they used a special type of map to find specifically placed markers and do it as quickly as possible—something like a road rally, or a treasure hunt. It wasn’t long before I got a look at an “orienteering” map. I was amazed at the level of detail and color that it showed—every rock, every clearing, every trail bend. Suddenly the orienteering map made me notice my immediate surroundings in a new way. I could see exactly where I was on the map. And even better, I could see exactly where I wanted to go and what I would find there. The map was the ground became one. “Geography” was suddenly an action adventure. I fell in love.

If you learned geography the way I did, the first maps you saw were of the globe, the hemisphere, the continents, the oceans, etc. Map studies never involved any area more personal than a state or county, never moved out of the chair, and never required one to actually demonstrate map reading competence by navigating successfully.

Now what has orienteering to do with the work of docents?

Orienteering is about map literacy. It is a game that exercises our ability to interpret and apply symbols to understand our immediate environment. Orienteering is about noticing things and observing details.

When orienteering is used in a classroom or campus activity, students are presented with a map of their immediate surroundings and sent off in search of specific locations—at which is a marker of some sort, or a piece of information that they need to answer questions or solve some problem. A version of this has been used in museums and nature and science centers. Students are given a map of the exhibit area with certain locations marked and a list of questions. In order to answer the questions, students must visit each of the locations shown on the map and study the exhibit information presented there. To minimize following and promote independent thinking, students are allowed to find the locations in any order they choose. This can be useful even in familiar environments because exhibits change. Students and visitors can be made aware of new displays.

An example of this is an orienteering activity that was designed several years ago by members of the Quantico (VA) Orienteering Club for the Enid A. Haupt Garden at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. This is a formal garden area in which no markers of any kind could be added to the site. However, the site was filled with information about plant material as well as historical figures and events. The activity was designed so that individuals received a detailed diagram/map of the Haupt Garden showing specific points circled in red and numbered. The numbered circles corresponded with a list of questions, such as “What is the latitude and longitude of this spot?” or “How did Andrew Jackson Downing die?” Participants could answer the questions by navigating to the specific locations shown on the map and studying the information located there.

A similar type of activity was designed for the Chattanooga Nature Center in Tennessee for a teacher’s workshop. This nature center uses indoor and outdoor exhibition areas, including a wetlands area with a boardwalk built through it. For this activity a simple map was adapted from the fire escape diagram on display in the building. Details were added so that many features in and around the building that normally would be ignored could become navigable features on the map.

One room contained an older wall-mounted pictorial display of how the geology of Lookout Mountain was formed. This display was above eye-level and several teachers commented that despite many prior visits, they had not noticed this display before the activity drew their attention to it.

One feature students enjoy about orienteering is the autonomy of the activity. With certain restrictions, the learning can be self-directed. In sensitive areas monitors (docents, staff, etc.) can be posted to offer suggestions or answer questions. In an activity that was conducted recently on a middle school campus in Nashville, the teacher could not stay in visual contact with all students all the time. Parents and other teachers on the team also participated in the activity and, while doing so, kept an eye out for possible problems. The students were so excited that they focused on the activity and took no time for troublemaking.
To accommodate older students, questions can be composed in such a way that a single answer provides a clue to solving a larger puzzle — as in one instance where a chemistry teacher decided to build upon the students' memorized basic knowledge of the periodic table of elements. Throughout the school, the educator placed small adhesive dots with symbols of various elements written on them. Students were then given chemical formulas (in one case the formula described photosynthesis) and had to use a map of the school to locate all the needed elements, and then show every location that made up their compounds. It was really quite ingenious because it suddenly made the abstract world of molecules more tangible.

These kinds of map and question navigation games can be especially powerful teaching tools when older students are afterward asked to create a simple version for younger students. The role of the docent and teacher in this case is to help students frame the questions in an age appropriate way for the younger ones and to generally help clarify details they want to include in the activity. Having finished a museum “map hike,” a group of eighth graders were given the task of creating a similar game for a fourth grade class coming in the following week. They suddenly had a new perspective on the information and exhibits they had just viewed. They became especially motivated by the idea that their efforts would be used by others. And we all know that the way to learn something is to teach it.

The only real expense is the time it takes to think about things differently and to make a reasonable map or diagram of the area. Sometimes a staff person or volunteer has drafting talents in this area. The objective is not cartographic perfection, merely a reasonably readable picture of the site. For younger visitors (up to about age 10), it would be best to make a pictorial or landscape perspective since they have a harder time understanding aerial perspective.

In addition to teaching visitors to become better observers, orienteering teaches people to think three-dimensionally. It also forces them to develop a problem-solving strategy and carry it out. And, when difficulties arise, it teaches them to adapt and keep trying. Because orienteering carries with it a certain “treasure hunt” excitement, it never feels quite like the usual teaching/ learning experience.

While these ideas may require some shift of perspective, they will prove extremely flexible and will reward visitors with excitement and motivation. If you are interested in implementing some of these ideas but are stumped by a unique feature of your facility or programming, I welcome the opportunity to help you solve some problems. Please feel free to contact me by email: mego@edge.net, or phone (800) 258-5995, or fax (615) 723-8788.

If, after reading this article, you go to your dictionary and find no reference for “orienteering,” fear not. Orienteering comes from Scandinavia, and most North Americans have never heard of it. The idea that map and compass navigation is enjoyed internationally as a sport is news to almost everyone. And, the idea that orienteering can be an educator’s best friend is equally unknown — until now.

Meg Garrett serves as an orienteering consultant to educators and recreation professionals. Having orienteered competitively for 25 years, she has written a book, Orienteering and Map Games for Teachers and has worked with the Geography Education Program of the National Geographic Society. Her company, Navigation Adventures, provides corporate team building outings. Ms. Garrett holds a B.S. in Social Sciences from Middle Tennessee State University.
Building Upon the Gallery Experience

The Plains Indian is one of a complex of four museums housed within the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. It is a popular attraction for school children who sometimes travel hundreds of miles to see the things they read about while studying Wyoming and U.S. history. Children of all ages love experiencing a piece of life the way it was. Some of our visitors are members of the Plains Indian tribes, whose personal stories enrich our tours.

Since most of our Plains Indian artifacts are behind glass and untouchable, we offer two hands-on workshops for children — one focuses on tipis, the other on parfleche. Both are geared primarily for K-4th graders. The tours begin in the museum’s galleries and progress to a classroom for the hands-on activity. The object of these two workshops is to engage children in close observation of Plains Indian artifacts to foster a greater understanding of the cultures that produced them. The hands-on activity reinforces what the students learn in the galleries and provides a tangible object to take back to school for follow-up activities and further review.

A large Blackfoot tipi in the Plains Museum is the focal point of the tipi workshop. Before the children enter the tipi, we discuss tipi etiquette. When the group is seated, the children participate in a discussion about life styles of Plains Indians. This discussion leads into the subject of tipis, why they were used, and how the tipis are constructed — then and now. We look at the materials used to construct the tipi as well as the design. After experiencing the weight of a buffalo hide, children often decide canvas would be much easier to work with than animal skins! The tipi is also a wonderful environment for storytelling, if time permits.

Surrounding the large tipi in the museum are several miniature tipi models that represent the various Plains tribes. The children describe the various designs and select their favorites. As we leave the tipi area and head for the classroom space for our hands-on activity, we try to remember the different animals that were painted on the tipis.

The tipi activity involves a simplified construction using three sticks, about 8” long and 1/4” to 1/2” in diameter. These are laced together about 1” from the top and then extended to form a tripod. (Canvas works well for the covering, but if not available, any heavy weight fabric that can stand free when folded will do.) We demonstrate a finished product so the children understand that the curved part of the canvas is the bottom of the tipi.

Children are free to create any design they wish on their canvas tipi. We review what we saw in the gallery in terms of designs and color and the fact that some tipi designs told a story. The children use crayon and/or markers for their designs. While the children are working, the docent circulates to help and to encourage the children to talk about their designs. Younger children tend to include objects important to their families while older children often make designs using Indian symbols they have seen in the museum. They all enjoy sharing the stories their tipis tell.

Extensions of this activity back at school may involve the children constructing a village using their tipis, a follow-up activity that requires them to consider what other items would be in a village, and which materials should be used to create them. Some classes have made villages and sent us the pictures. Another follow-up activity for the older children might be writing a story from the perspective of an
In our classroom area, each child makes a parfleche out of a 12" x 18" sheet of white drawing paper. We have the folded lines drawn on the paper for the younger children. Older children enjoy measuring and drawing their own lines. Crayons and markers are used for the designs. The parfleche are tied through punched holes on each end with a small leather thong. Although this activity is used primarily with K - 3 grade students who have fun with design, shapes, and colors, a 5th grade class recently participated in this activity with amazing enthusiasm. They also created some truly wonderful, symmetrical designs.

Teachers tell us that their lessons on American Indian history would not be complete without their visits to the museum. By providing these students with hands-on activities and exposure to original objects from Plains Indian cultures, their school studies are greatly enhanced.

Cynthia W. Connor is a docent at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. She is married and has four grown children. Ms. Connor graduated from Lesley College in Cambridge, MA with a B.S. in Education. She taught for 30 years in elementary from kindergarten through sixth grade. She was "Who's Who Among America's Teachers" in 1990 after a student nominated her. She retired in 1993 and with her husband moved to Cody where they both have been docents for about four years.
The Docent Challenge

by Jean Linsner

New docents, also known as docents-in-training, must maneuver around the docent policy manual as deftly as they do around an exhibit or touch cart. But how can you know this? A paper and pencil-type test might indicate which trainees studied the policy manual, but can’t really indicate how they will perform on the job. Besides, paper and pencil testing is often anxiety producing and boring. On the other hand, observing each trainee on the job as they respond to visitors’ questions would help provide a feel for their knowledge of the policy manual, but only for a few specific policies, not the entire manual, and what a terribly inefficient use of everyone’s time.

Such frustration. No testing model seemed ideal, so, I invented one — the Docent Challenge. The Docent Challenge tests docents’ knowledge of policies and related information, while building *esprit de corps* among the new recruits, and models information sharing between docents.

The Basic Idea

The object of the Docent Challenge is to have great fun testing, reviewing, and reinforcing essential information for new (and experienced) docents. Small teams of docents work together answering questions and earning points.

One experienced docent may join each of the novice teams. This ensures that teams will not be completely stumped. The trainees learn that experienced docents really do know their way around the regulations and experienced docents learn that new recruits, fresh from training class, have an amazing handle on content information.

In our case, plush animals from the zoo’s subscription classes served as team mascots. Teams signaled with their mascot to respond to questions. The Challenge consisted of two rounds with higher stakes in Round II. A leader asked questions and teams responded in turn. A round ended when all teams had attempted to answer an equal number of questions. A tie between teams or surplus playing time could necessitate a Bonus Round.

Scoring

In Round I, correctly answered questions earn one point and missed questions lose one point for the team. Once a team misses a question, the other teams can signal with their mascot and try to earn extra points on pick-up questions. The first team to signal gets to answer the pick-up questions. In Round I, correctly answered pick-up questions earn one point. In Round II, correct answers earn two points, incorrect responses lose one point, and pick-up questions earn one point. In the Bonus Round, correct responses earn three points, incorrect responses lose three and pick-up questions earn two points.

Questions

This is the fun part. Generating questions might seem daunting at first, so try dividing questions into categories. This strategy makes the task more manageable and ensures that questions touch all essential information areas. Shoot for at least 50 questions.

For instance, the category “Docent Operations” covers elements basic to docent life and responsibilities, such as uniforms, duty hours, discounts, parking privileges, office hours, training requirements, substitutions, and absence notifications. Another category, “Park Basics,” covers questions on building locations, bathroom locations, park security, visitor information, handling lost children and other emergencies, hours of operation, park history, park admission, special attractions, and rationale for specific policies. A third category called “Photos” asks trainees to view slides and then respond to questions. For example, a shot of several strollers might be followed by the question, “True or False — strollers are allowed in every exhibit.” Or a picture of a reindeer could be followed with “Where would you find this animal in our zoo?” Or a shot of a beautiful tulip garden might precede, “This is a view from which entry gate?”

Staffing

There will need to be at least two staff members on hand to manage this fast moving, sometimes chaotic, and often hilarious game. One will be the Leader. This person reads the questions and determines if an answer is correct. The second person is the Scorer/Spotter. This person keeps track of points won and lost, as well as determines which group thrust their mascot in the air first in their attempt to answer a pick-up question. If you have the luxury of a third staff person, consider splitting the Scorer/Spotter role.
**Bonus Round**

A Bonus Round occurs in the event of a tie score following two rounds of play, or may be included if you have extra time. Bonus Round questions are worth more points and therefore, are more challenging, may contain more than one part and may be decidedly picky. For example, “What is the sex of the new rhino born last week; who are its parents; and what species of rhino is it?”

**Winning**

The team with the most points is the winner. You might consider offering special congratulations to the winning team and giving every participant a pencil or other inexpensive item from the gift shop. Another approach might be to serve a special treat at the break. Each participant also should receive a copy of all the questions and the answers.

**Closing Thoughts**

Scheduling this activity early in docent training created strong bonds between the new recruits like no other I’ve seen. Even the most reticent trainees blossomed in the free-wheeling atmosphere of this Docent Challenge. Also, many folks who join docent programs have been out of school for a long time and are out of practice taking tests. This type of “test” accomplishes everything a paper and pencil test does without the anxiety. The Docent Challenge also serves as a model for working together, sharing information, and having fun learning in an informal setting.

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Jean Linsner, M.S. in Education, designs interactive science and math programming for children and adults. Before that, she managed the Docent and Guest Guide programs at the Brookfield Zoo. Ms. Linsner is a frequent contributor to The Docent Educator. Her most recent, previously published article, “Teenagers!!! One Tough Audience,” appeared in the Spring 1997 issue (Volume 6, Number 3).

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shy third grader teeters on shaking legs. She lowers her eyes and blushes as she pulls on the thick jacket that simulates whale blubber. Fins are placed on her hands, a tail is strapped on her body, and large eyes are stuck to the sides of her head as she is transformed into a whale. Her classmates laugh with approval; she looks up and gives a genuine wide mouthed smile, and the students applaud.

Welcome to learning Cabrillo Aquarium’s Ocean Outreach where we blend lectures with hands-on lessons and educational activities that make learning fun.

The Cabrillo Marine Aquarium is a moderately sized educational museum/aquarium located in San Pedro, California, that focuses on the marine life of southern California. Our facility educates school groups and the general public through educational displays, live animal exhibits, on-site laboratory/seashore programs, docent-led tours, lectures and slide shows, trips aboard ocean vessels, field trips to local habitats, and an off-site education division called Ocean Outreach.

The Outreach department is responsible for conducting off-site presentations to classes at schools and other facilities. Our goal is to educate students in marine biology and let them have a fun time while they learn. And it works, too! Using hands-on learning techniques has encouraged our department’s tremendous growth. In 1993, we saw over 11,000 children; in 1996, the numbers rose to over 27,000.

During a typical day, we spend an hour with up to four classrooms of 35 students. We offer ten different topics for students in grades pre-K through the eighth grade, everything from puppet shows to squid dissections. Currently, our program travels a 60-mile radius around the Cabrillo Aquarium in three Ocean Outreach vans that are decorated with colorful animal graphics and are fully outfitted with shelving, chillers, filters, and tanks. These vehicles enable us to safely carry props, specimens, and live animals. Even with our close proximity to the Pacific, we find that our visit is the first exposure to sea animals for many of the students who have never visited the ocean.

The Games
So, what kind of games do we take to our students? Interactive ones that make learning fun! I could stand from the front of a classroom and lecture on how waves affect animals, OR I could draw a tidepool with colored chalk and give students strange claws or suction cups and challenge them to figure out a way to hold on to a rock when a wave 40 times their size crashes over them. Which do you think children would find more interesting? And, more important, which one would children remember best?

For many of our classes, we use dress-ups to illustrate the problems or situations an animal (or humans) may encounter in their ocean environment. For example, when we talk about bluewater plankton collecting, we bring along full S.C.U.B.A. gear and dress a student volunteer with each piece as we explain the use of every item.

Role-play is another technique that helps students understand the job of a marine biologist. In our shark class, for example, we used to bring a tag stick and some tags to show the
children when we discussed ways to study sharks. While students found this interesting, we received a much better response when we built a three-dimensional model with a foam insert and invited students to help with the tagging. After the "shark" is tagged, we role play a common scenario. One student becomes a biologist, and another is a fisherman who catches a tagged shark. Role playing helps students understand the importance and the use of the tags.

Ask a student how big 20 feet is, and you will get answers ranging from the size of a Volkswagen Bug to a football field. Instead of simply telling students how big an animal is, we let student volunteers actually measure the size of the animal using a special measuring string, which has animal lengths pre-measured and marked with colored flags. As students walk out the distance of each flag, we tell them a few interesting facts about the animal. In this way, students associate the facts with the visual measurements.

The "Do-it! Do-its!"

Among our most effective teaching techniques are animal behavior activities we call "Do-it! Do-its!" The activity uses no props, it is easy to work with, and every student gets a chance to try it. During the "Do-it! Do-its!" students mimic an animal's behavior using their whole bodies. For instance, in a lesson on sea stars, we first talk about how the animal finds and consumes its prey. Then we use a puppet to demonstrate how it feeds (some sea stars extend their stomachs into their prey.) Then the "Do-it! Do-its!" take over! The entire class follows our lead as we mimic the sea star's behavior with our arms and body, step by step, including the part where the animal takes its stomach out. One hand and arm mimic the sea star while the other becomes food. Children are always delighted to pretend to be a hungry sea star, especially when they pretend to spit out their stomachs!

A Few Helpful Hints

While developing hands-on activities to make learning fun for our Ocean Outreach audiences, we have found the following tips to be useful:

1. Assess your audience. Even games and hands-on activities must meet the special needs of each class.
2. Be playful, but know the limits of acceptable classroom behavior. Our program thrives because we make learning fun, we joke with the children, play games and laugh with them, but we always remember to maintain class control.
3. Visual props, models, animal mimicry, and actual specimens engage students with as many senses as possible and work to keep a class's attention.
4. Don't be afraid to evaluate and make changes.

Chris Okamoto has taught in the Outreach division at the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in San Pedro for the past seven years. He currently serves as Outreach Coordinator for the Aquarium. His interest in marine biology first began in the fishing tackle industry where he worked for five years before receiving bachelors and masters degrees from the California State University Long Beach and the California University Dominguez Hills.
Birthday cakes with candles for wishes. A freshly baked loaf of bread to welcome a new neighbor. Thanksgiving feasts and celebratory spreads for bar mitzvahs, christenings, graduations, and weddings. Food is more than nutrition in most cultures, and it is another tool teachers use to motivate and educate their students. A classroom mainstay, food may be simply a candy treat for work well done or an international feast to culminate the study of a particular geographical region. Visitors to many museums, zoos, historic sites, and garden centers are also finding food a part of their educational programming.

Art

Art museums deal predominately with the visual, but the use of food allows docents to introduce other sensory stimulation to their tours. Find a still life painting in the collection that includes familiar foods such as oranges and apples. On a nearby table, reproduce the still life with real objects, including the food, to help visitors smell (and, perhaps, taste) such art as they explore the aesthetic challenges the artist faced in painting still life.

Another food that has an important role to play in art history is, of course, the egg. Egg tempera was the medium of choice of medieval panel painting. It produced a quick-drying coat of intense color and jewel-like brightness perfect for the religious panels of Gothic painting. Nevertheless, the colors of egg tempera cannot be easily blended to achieve three-dimensional effects, and the quick-drying nature of the medium also presented challenges to the artist. If your collection includes such panel paintings, let students experiment with mixing diluted egg yolk and pigment to produce tempera paint before viewing those paintings in your collection whose artists used this technique. It's a lot easier to understand the limitations of tempera when you've actually tried to use it.

History

Historic houses, sites, and history museums have long appreciated and interpreted the importance of food in the development of a particular community or culture. Year-round food production and preservation is an integral part of the interpretation of life at many historic farms, plantations, and large-scale sites such as Colonial Williamsburg. Visitors watch, or sometimes participate, in such activities as planting and cultivating, hearth cooking, and livestock care.

At the 1850 Homeplace at Land Between the Lakes in Kentucky, as well as other such reproduced historic farms, costumed interpreters cook and eat a daily meal under the scrutiny of students and other visitors. Special events, such as weddings, often allow visitors to become part of the action and to taste historically-accurate foods prepared for the celebration. Sites that interpret food history may be forced to make some compromises in historical accuracy in light of modern health and aesthetic concerns. Interpreting Food History, Technical Leaflet #197, can be ordered from the American Association of State and Local History ($6; 615-255-2971) and provides important suggestions and considerations for historic sites that include food as part of their historic interpretation.

On a smaller scale, history museums can also make food a part of their interpretation. For example, corn shelling and cooking with corn products has a place in many history museums as this grain was basic to both indigenous people and later groups. The preparation of sour-dough starter and sourdough bread, too, is a relatively simple activity.

At the 1850 Homeplace at Land Between the Lakes, costumed interpreters cook, eat, and clean-up under the scrutiny of students and other visitors. photo: Kristin Raitz
appropriate to many museums that deal with the westward movement in the United States. Sourdough, of course, also provides a good science museum activity for studies of fungi.

Food has made its way into museum publications as some natural history museum education departments extend an exhibit’s research into gallery guides, pamphlets, or full-sized books. The ethnobotany of indigenous people is such a project, a collaborative publication by the Royal British Columbia Museum and the University of British Columbia of Nancy Turner’s Plants of Coastal First People and its 1996 companion volume Food Plants of Interior First People.

Science

The Internet provides an outreach for many museums, and food is evident here, too. The Science Museum of Minnesota’s Web Page (http://www.sci.mus.mn.us/) includes “The Thinking Fountain,” described as “… a living card file of ideas and activities.” The Thinking Fountain cards each highlight a resource with information and activities and then refer the browser to three other links with additional information and activities. The card for Fondant, for example, explains that this is the sugar substance found in the center of some candy bars and provides a step-by-step pictorial recipe. After some “That Makes Me Think” questions, other links are offered. One Fondant link for “Another Way of Looking At It” leads, in turn, to “Cross Sections,” which leads to “Beneath a Big Bridge” among others.

At each step of the way, in cards about Bread, Chocolate, Eggs, and other foods, young scientists are encouraged to experiment at home or in school and send their ideas and/or drawings to The Thinking Fountain for inclusion in the museum’s collections.

“Feeding time” is a tradition at many zoos, but some institutions carry their food/visitor connection even further. Visitors examine beaks and claws and match them with possible food sources at outreach “tables” throughout the park. “Do Not Feed the Animals” signs are replaced with explanations about diet and nutrition that make the visitor a partner in the animals’ health. Children may be given sample seeds and encouraged to discover how an animal in the wild accesses the food inside. Older classes work with math problems that determine nutritional needs and daily consumption by various animals. The connection between human and animal nutrition becomes an interesting science lesson.

There are difficulties present when working with food in museum settings, and museum educators must be aware of the dangers of allergies, fire, knives, and contamination, as well as Health Department requirements and the expense and logistic challenges when food becomes part of an institution’s interpretation. However, when care is taken, food becomes a natural and powerful component of good teaching programs.

Yeast Leavened Bread

Our ancestors made yeast from hops, potatoes, malt, even peach leaves — anything that could be fermented and mixed with flour. Once made, a sourdough starter had to be “fed” and maintained as it was a time-consuming nuisance to make another. The value of sourdough starter on the western frontier is illustrated by the “tall tale” of the miner whose mule fell over a cliff. His friend tried to prevent him from climbing down after the mule, but he explained, “I know my mule is dead, but my starter’s in the saddlebags!”

Sourdough Starter

1 package dry yeast
3 cups warm water (105-115 degrees, divided)
2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
2 tablespoons sugar
Starter Food

Dissolve yeast in 1/2 cup warm water, stirring well; let stand 5 minutes or until bubbly.

Combine remaining water, flour, and sugar in a medium-size, nonmetal bowl; mix well. Add dissolved yeast, and stir well. Cover loosely with cheesecloth, and let stand in a warm place (80-85 degrees) for 72 hours, stirring 2 to 3 times daily. Place fermented mixture in refrigerator, and stir daily; use within 11 days.

To use, let sourdough starter stand at room temperature at least 1 hour. Stir well, and measure amount of starter needed for recipe. Replenish remaining starter with Starter Food and return to refrigerator; use within 2 to 11 days, stirring daily.

Repeat procedure for using and replenishing Sourdough Starter. Yield: about 2 cups.

Starter Food

2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
1/2 cup sugar
1 1/2 cups water

Stir all ingredients into remaining Sourdough Starter, and refrigerate.

From the Southern Heritage Breads Cookbook

Fondant

Fondant is the sugar substance that forms the core of many candy bars.

158 ml soft butter
158 ml light corn syrup
2.5 ml salt
907 g powdered sugar
5 ml extract, any flavor

Mix the butter, corn syrup, and salt. Slowly add powdered sugar, stirring to mix completely after each addition. Add extract and mix thoroughly. Knead and shape. Now your fondant is ready to dip in chocolate!
A Higher Price

In response to numerous requests, The Docent Educator has shifted to first-class postage, rather than continuing to mail its issues using bulk-rate. We have received complaints that bulk-mailed newsletters arrive too slowly, are mangled, or are not forwarded.

The change in mailing costs, accompanied by a rise in the cost of paper, forces us to raise our subscription price. As of September 1, 1997, yearly subscriptions to The Docent Educator increased to $30 for U.S. subscribers, $35 (USD) for Canadian subscribers, and $40 (USD) for subscribers elsewhere.

We realize that raising our price could jeopardize our relationship with some of you, and it is not something we have done easily. Please note, however, that The Docent Educator does not receive any governmental or foundation support, and that we are funded solely by our subscriptions. And, unlike many other professional magazines, such as Museum News, History News, and Teacher Magazine, we do not fill our pages with paid advertisements, nor do we sell our mailing lists (with your name, address, and phone number) to others.

We feel certain that, when you compare our subscription price to other, highly-targeted, professional journals, you will find that The Docent Educator continues to be priced fairly, and substantially lower than most.

Give Me Memphis, Tennessee

Going to Memphis, Tennessee? Be sure to check out their many and varied museums, in addition to eating great barbeque and listening to the blues. Among the cultural attractions you might wish to visit are:

- Center for Southern Folklore 209 Beale Street. Documents the lives and traditions of the people of the South with entertaining films and exhibits.
- The Dixon Gallery and Gardens 4339 Park Avenue. French impressionist paintings and 18th-century porcelain housed in a Georgian-style mansion, plus 17 acres of open vistas and formal gardens.
- Downtown Precinct Museum 159 Beale Street. Combination working police station and museum with displays of confiscated weapons, mug shots, and a jail cell.
- Graceland 3764 Elvis Presley Boulevard. The lavishly furnished mansion and automobile collection of Elvis Aaron Presley.
- Hunt-Phelan Home 533 Beale Street. An historic home built in the 1800s, contains period antiques, elaborate gardens, and dozens of relics from the Civil War.
- Memphis Botanic Garden 750 Cherry Road. Ninety-six acres of gardens in Audubon Park.
- Memphis Pink Palace Museum and Planetarium 3050 Central Avenue. Regional museum of cultural and natural history.
- National Civil Rights Museum 450 Mulberry Street. Located at the historic Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Exhibits chronicle the American civil rights movement.

Tasteful Collections

Italians revere the art of the table, so it follows that in Italy there would be museums devoted to such matters. The Docent Educator has learned of the Museum of the Civilization of Olive Oil in Trevi, Umbria. The museum's collection traces the ancient route of the olive tree from Asia Minor to Italy. Also in Umbria is the Lungarotti Wine Museum in Torgiano. Housed in a villa on the Lungarotti estate, the collection features Etruscan wine vessels, Bacchus-themed paintings from Mantegna to Picasso, and more. And, fans of tableware will enjoy the Ceramics Museum in Vietri sul Mare, Campania, which displays four centuries' worth of local plates and pottery.
Connecting Words and Art

The words on the cards offer another dimension to learning how to look at works of art. "The glory of everything," “Rest from care, my one and only." “Deep in the dung and the dark.” “They’re fattening you up because they’re going to kill you.” “The night seemed long.”

Taking the saying on the card, a museum-goer looks at the works of art in a designated gallery to find an appropriate match between the mood and thought of the words and a painting, sculpture, or assemblage. This looking activity can take as much, or as little, time as the docent wishes to allot.

What is important is that each person gets to talk about their match:
- How did s/he make the match?
- Why did s/he pick that work?
- What do the words mean, and in what ways do they relate to the art?

The activity is written on cards. Each card has one saying, and there should be more cards than participants. A participant picks a card (or draws one from a stack), and then looks around to find a work of art in the gallery that the participant thinks matches the saying.

The sayings quoted above come from the classic children's book Charlotte's Web by E. B. White. While this book is a treasure trove of marvelous sayings, and is wonderful for adults as well as children, there are many other sources to draw upon. Poetry lends itself well to sayings that can bring meaning — and art — to life.

Wouldn't you like finding a painting that reflects William Butler Yeat's thoughts: "I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly because you tread on my dreams." Searching a gallery for connections between words and art gives the mind and the eye something specific to look for. Different aspects of art works present themselves when the mind is focused. And, it works for all ages! (Since this activity is not a test of reading and comprehension abilities, it may be necessary to "help" read the saying, even to interpret it a little bit, but that can also be part of the learning process.)

Looking at art should be fun. The experience of being in the museum should match this last saying, again from Charlotte's Web, "Woven neatly in block letters was the word TERRIFIC."

Sheila James, currently a children's docent at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has also been a docent at the Honolulu Academy of Arts and at The Art Institute of Chicago. Ms. James was also a teacher of English as a Second Language in Honolulu.

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