Groups of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers exploring a museum can be intimidating and overwhelming. Hannah Pickard of the New England Aquarium in Boston wisely noted that we all seek to “give an authentic experience while managing the safety of our collection”. But bringing little learners and their caregivers into the museum answers a growing need for both museums and families.

Museums need to engage young families not only to foster future audiences, but also to encourage families to attend programs now. Families who repeatedly visit over years and grow and change with your institution are essential. They are invaluable for gauging interest, collecting surveys, eliciting feedback, fundraising, and importantly, becoming your advocates in the community.

Successful programs enrich and educate parents by giving them tools to help craft their child’s exhibit experience while stimulating curiosity and exploration in the child. Programs can meet the needs of stay-at-home mothers, mothers on maternity leave, and other caregivers, who seek intellectual stimulation and adult connections as well as programming for their children.

The purpose of this session is to provide museum educators at cultural organizations with ideas to simultaneously engage the intellect of the caregivers and natural curiosities of the children that attend programs. Discussion topics will include the who, what, where, and when but more importantly the “why” of including this demographic in your programming. To empower parents to step, fearless of preschool mayhem, into local museums and to empower museums to provide meaningful programs, built on their strengths, in response to community needs.
Sample Topic: Cloud

Welcome:
Teacher will greet each child personally and welcome them and their parent or caregiver. Outdoor play is encouraged. Once all children have arrived and a daily attendance is recorded the teacher will gather the group and provide an introduction describing the day’s activities.

Teacher presents Theme:
Teacher starts the lesson of the day by revealing the animal of the day: Cloud. Describe the work of the MSPCA. Describe Cloud’s surrender and how he arrived undernourished. He is still on a weight-gain program and children will help with his feeding.

Questions to Involve:
Does Cloud look like the other sheep? Do all of the sheep have horns? Does Cloud have the same type of a jacket or coat as the other sheep? Answer the questions. No, because Cloud is NOT a sheep. Cloud is an angora goat! Teacher then describes what Cloud likes to eat- goats are discriminating eaters, but they are incredibly curious, and will nibble on anything in their reach- shoelaces, buttons, hats and mittens are no exception! Question and answer period for children.

Preparation for Chores:
Teacher then brings all children and parents into the barn to prepare the animal feed for the day. It is ok for teacher to help children, try to keep parents out of grain room to allow the child to participate. Teacher will ask for help pushing the cart around the farm roads, or assign children for the day- rotating through the roster.

Allow approximately ½ hour for chores; more if weather is an obstacle. Fun fact: Sheep and Goats have only ONE row of teeth. They cannot scissor bite and therefore make the perfect critter for interaction with young children.

Craft Time:
Craft supplies are pre-set on the table, with all materials provided. Parents and children are instructed how to complete the craft and given ample time to create! Parents and children usually hang around after completing the craft, some have snack outside.

Today’s Craft: Colorful Cloud
Teacher will ask children and parents to feel a sample of Cloud’s wool, ask for a volunteer to describe the wool. What does it feel like? What does it smell like? What is the texture? Is it soft, sticky? Does this wool, or fleece, look like our friend Cloud? Show the children the colored synthetic wool. Does this look like it came from Cloud?

Story Time:
Teacher will guide all participants to the 1775 Great Barn for a story chosen to align with the theme or curriculum of the day. Today’s story: “There’s a Billy Goat in the Garden” by Lauren Dee Gugler and Clare Beuton.
Program Description:
10:15 am – 11:15 am
On the first and third Mondays of
each month, bring your toddler to
enjoy story time and looking
activities in the galleries, followed
by art making. Each month focuses
on a specific theme. Recommended for children ages 4
and younger with adults.

“A to Z!” Lesson Objective:
Kids will explore letters and
identify ‘beginning of word
sounds’ of animals and other
recognizable objects in the
artwork.

Gallery Activity:
Children receive letter masks to
wear while acting out animals and
objects that begin with their letter.
They will be encouraged to wear
the letter, talk about their letter,
and look around the gallery with
their caregiver for other objects or
images that begin with their letter.

Letter Mask Movement
Suggestions:
Group 1 - D: Dog, Duck, Drum
Group 2 - B: Boat, Butterfly, Ball
Group 3 - T: Trees, Teapot, Turtle

Art Work on Tour:
Group 1 - Arlo by Horatio
Greenough: “D” for Dog
Group 2 - Egyptian Boat Models:
“B” for Boats
Group 3 – Mountain Landscape
from Clavadel by Ernst Ludwig
Kirchner: “T” for Trees

Instructor’s Gallery Bags:
Group 1: Dog ears, dog puppets,
and dog masks
Group 2: Paper waves and plastic
fish
Group 3: Leaves

Song Suggestions:
Museum Rules Song
The Alphabet Song

September Books:
“The Sleepy Little Alphabet” by
Judy Sierra
“Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and
Vegetables from A to Z” by Lois
Ehler
“The Sailor’s Alphabet” by
Michael McCurdy

Studio Art Activity
Kids will get a large paper letter to
collage and embellish with a
variety of materials. Letters will be
picked at random. Upon
completion, letters will be
stapled to paper belts so they can
be worn.

Activities and Enrichment with Picture Books

“Not A Stick” by Antoinette Portis
Little pig gets yelled at for playing
with a stick, uses his imagination to
make it into something else. Use for
introducing surrealism like “This
is not a pipe” by Rene Magritte.

“Mouse Paint” by Ellen Stoll Walsh
Little mice step in different colors to
hid from a cat and end up making
new colors. Use for color recognition.

“My Dog is As Smelly As Dirty Socks”
by Hanoch Piven
Shows portraits of family members
created out of different materials. Use
for introducing portraits, collages, or
mixed media similar to the work of
Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

“Lines that Wiggle” by Candance Whit-
man and Steve Wilson
Follow a line through the book to
create different pictures. Use with
identifying shapes.

“Art” by Patrick McDonnell
Little boy named Art creates art and
has fun doing it! Use for defining art.
Program Description:
For children ages 12 to 24 months

Specially designed for our youngest learners, Sea Squirts Preview introduces you and your child to the wonders of the Aquarium and the ocean world. Activities focus on developing motor skills, independence and socialization, as well as introduce your young one to new materials. Over the course of four weeks, your child will become more comfortable in the Aquarium classroom setting and you will become more confident exploring the Aquarium with your children outside of class time. Classes will incorporate a live animal encounter when appropriate to the topic.

Week Two: Jellies
Welcome: Free play
Circle Time:
Say Hello to all kids
· Parachute w/ sea stars & fish cut outs up and down for kids while making announcements
· Sing Sea Squirts Song
Activity One:
We will make Jelly Hand print with googly eye stickers. Have kids put their hands in paint then down on white card stock. Attach googly eyes to the picture to make a jelly. Have hand wipes available to clean hands ASAP. Allow to dry through rest of the program, pick up at the end.

Animal Visitors: Moon Jellies

Activity Two:
Make your own Jelly
· Before class hole punch the rim of paper bowl
· Set out crayons and dot markers to decorate bowl
· Stand up with jellies and wiggles to music
Story Time: “I’m the Biggest Thing in the Ocean!” by Kevin Sherry
Visit an aquarium tank:
Jellies in the West Wing
· Can you move your jelly puppet like the real jellies? Can you move your body like the jellies?
· Identify body parts both similar and different

Make sure your program is not just for the little ones! Enrich and educate parents by giving them tools to help enrich their child’s exhibit experience.
Story & Crafts at the Museum Colors and Exploration

Age Level: Toddlers (5 and under)

Program Length: 1 hour

Learning Objectives:
- To increase color and animal recognition for toddler-aged children
- To increase comfort level as museum visitors for toddlers and their caregivers
- To provide an interactive, social setting for toddlers and their caregivers
- To provide a model of museum learning for caregivers of young children

Materials:
- Activity mat
- Crayons
- Self-adhesive foam stickers
- Pre-made toilet paper roll binoculars
- Pre-made “I see these colors at the museum” booklets

Lesson Plan:

Introduction: Have children and their caregivers sit on the activity mat, which is set up on the floor of the Veeder Living Room. Additional chairs can be set for caregivers who may not want to sit on the floor.

Welcome visitors to the Connecticut Historical Society and introduce museum staff and program participants. Explain that today we will be using the different areas of the museum to learn about colors – does anyone have a favorite color? Mine is ________. To help us learn about colors, we are going to read a short story and then make a craft to use while you explore, or look around, the rest of the museum.


Discuss the colors that show up in the book, as well as the animals. Children can use their bodies or their voices to act like the animals in the story (i.e. a bear, a sheep, a cat, a dog, etc.). Point out the gold, painted animal images along the ceiling of the Veeder Living Room. Ask children what animals they can see – are any of these animals the same as those that were in the story we just listened to?

Activity: Explain that the children will be decorating their own set of binoculars to use as they explore the different exhibits, or rooms, of the museum. While they are exploring, the children and their caregivers should be looking for objects or images that are the same colors as those that appeared in “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do you See?” To help them remember the colors, pass out a pre-made “I see these colors at the museum” booklet (this is also a take-home).

Allow children to come and select a pre-made set of binoculars. Set crayons and foam stickers on the activity mat to use for decorating. As the children finish the activity, they should be encouraged to begin their exploration of the museum.

Follow-up: The museum educator should periodically walk around the exhibit spaces and engage with the children – what have you seen so far? What colors do you still need to find? What has been your favorite place to explore? Have you seen....?
‘P’ is for Portrait: Pilot

Program Description:
The Barnum Museum is piloting two programs for pre-schools that can be done onsite or as outreach.

Objectives:
- To introduce preschoolers to the term ‘portrait’
- To provide kinesthetic learning
- To model museum manners
- To model museum learning and leading for parents/caregivers
- To increase parents comfort in bringing kids to museums
- To increase preschoolers understanding of museum vocabulary

Anticipatory Set:
Read “The Terrible Captain Jack Visits the Museum, or A Guide to Museum Manners for Incorrigible Pirates and the Like”.

Activity One:
Teach the children hand motions for “P is for portrait a painting of people” –
- “P” use arms to make body into a P
- “Portrait” frame your face with your hands
- “Painting” wave your hands in front of your body like you are painting
- “People” throw both arms in the air like you are yelling victory!

Lesson:
Bring children into the Museum saying, “We are looking for the letter P. It is hidden in the Museum. Try to find a red P, a blue P, and a yellow P.”

Red P – “Portrait of Tom Thumb” – Remind children that in Museum’s we ask questions. Is it a portrait? Practice the hand motions.

Blue P – “Portrait of Jenny Lind” – When we look with our eyes, what do we see? Practice hand motions.

Yellow P – “Portrait of Barnum’s Daughters” – Is there one person? No, there are three. How many portraits did we see today? Three. Practice hand motions.

Activity Two:
Gather the children at the activity table. Allow them to draw their portrait. Give them a paper frame to put around their portrait.

For Further Reading:


Young at Art: Teaching Toddlers Self-Expression, Problem-Solving Skills, and an Appreciation for Art by Susan Striker, 2011.

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