

DOCENT TEACHING TOOLBOX

Pam Reister and Ruth Slavin (in absentia), 2019

PLANNING

In the planning process you consider the following.

The Students

- Consider the **developmental level (Appendix 1)** of your patrons.
- Try to incorporate strategies that will engage and activate **multiple intelligences (Appendix 2)**.

The Tour Theme/Topic

- With the teacher, select theme/topic. Introduce **the theme** when you meet the students and use it as connective tissue to tie stops together. Remind students of the theme as you summarize at the end.
- Once you have a topic, consider what **goals you might have** for this tour. In addition to learning something about the theme, are there other outcomes you hope for? For example, in the 826MI tours, one of our goals has been to introduce the students to this museum and the idea of museums in order to develop cultural competence. The goal for another group could be exploring emotions/developing emotional intelligence. You may be planning for the weather tour in each of these cases but you would use different goal-relevant activities in each case, possibly fewer stops and time for more questions in the first case and connecting depictions of weather to mood in the second.

The Art

- When you know your theme/topic, you will pick the art works. Once you have a list of objects you should pick an **entry point** for the art in question or, possibly, for the theme of the tour. An entry point is a particular feature of the work of art/or theme that will draw viewers in. It should be something that you like, that you think will be exciting for the students, and is appropriate to their developmental level. For example, for Esther, many docents use the fabulous textures in the painting as an entry point for young students. (**Appendix 3, Eric Boothisms for Docents** and/or “The Entry Point Question, Where to Begin” on the Exchange)

Engagement Strategies

- Eric Booth believes that we should “engage before we inform” so take that entry point and decide how to use it to engage your audience, hook them into this tour, capture their imagination before you start sharing information. Different entry points will suggest particular engagement strategies. In the Esther example above, where the entry point is the textures portrayed in the painting, the engagement strategy is using the feely bag full of interesting and similar textures. Once you have engaged your audience you can move on to sharing information.
- You use all sorts of engagement strategies while you tour including...

- **Thinking:** We hope our visitors are engaged in thinking while they are in the museum, of course. Using thinking routines inspired by the research at Harvard's Project Zero not only encourage students to think but, if repeated in the classroom and the museum, train students to guide themselves to good thinking practice and create evidence of specific thoughts by the students (in the writing produced with these routines) for docents and teacher to reference. From the Project Zero website (<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/projects/cultures-of-thinking>) :
- We define "Cultures of Thinking" (CoT) as places where a group's collective as well as individual thinking is valued, visible, and actively promoted as part of the regular, day-to-day experience of all group members. ... As teachers strive to create cultures of thinking in their classrooms, they can use a variety of methods, including **making time** for thinking, developing and using a **language of thinking**, and.... ... Our research to date has shown that students recognize CoT classrooms as being more focused on thinking, learning, and understanding, and more likely to be collaborative in nature. And... (<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/making-thinking-visible-how-to-promote-engagement-understanding-and-independence>) thinking can be made visible at any grade level and across all subject areas through the use of effective questioning, listening, documentation, and **facilitative structures called "thinking routines"**. These routines... scaffold and support one's thinking. By applying these processes, thinking becomes visible as learners' ideas are expressed, discussed, and reflected upon.
- For outlines of core thinking routines visit: http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_CoreRoutines.html
- **Questioning:** Planning the questions you will ask based on the goals of your tour, scaffolding the order you will ask them in, and understanding what questions not to ask, are critical elements of tour planning. Because they are part of the conversation on the tour and can be used to direct the conversation, I have included them in **Touring**, below.
- **Something Unexpected:** Surprise makes people alert and speculative partners rather than passive listeners. Introduce a mystery at the beginning of the tour which visitors can look forward to solving as you go. For example, for the Weather Tour, some of you ask students what the weather report would be for today then suggest that you can create a weather report for the works you are going to see on your tour. Students are wondering how you can match a weather report with a painting before they get to the first stop and primed to recreate this activity for the following works. They will be looking carefully at each work in order to solve the weather report mystery as you progress. History Mysteries and the Scientific Method, are all about the mystery of how we can know what a very old and injured work of art looked like when it was new or how to make and test hypotheses to understand a scientific principle.
- **Concrete, sensorial details:** Abstract concepts, although fascinating to many people, are hard to discuss on the fly and not so easy to remember. Concrete details, on the other

hand, are quite memorable and engaging. Invoking sensorial details will draw your visitors in. Docents touring Nydia ask children to touch the floor to see how marble feels; to look at a picture of an ash cloud to see how dark the eruption of Vesuvius made Pompeii; ask the children to imagine the noises of Vesuvius and buildings falling down. These sensorial details are concrete and memorable.

- **Emotional:** Connect your tour to something your audience cares about, tap into their emotional being. Think about the identity of your audience—individual identity and that of the group. When touring adults it is always a good idea to chat before you start and find out where they are from, what they do for work or recreation, why they came to the museum. Remember these details and use them to make connections as you walk and talk.
 - Ruth Slavin’s **Token Response Activity** and **Personal Response Prompts (Appendix 4)** employ empathy and our emotional intelligence brilliantly.
- **Storytelling (Appendix 5):** Stories are very effective teaching tools. Brain research tells us that they stimulate the same modules in the brain that are evoked in real experience or physical activity. Hearing a story (as well as listening to a moving piece of music or looking at a great painting) can make us feel the same way we do when we *experience* something in our lives. Telling a good, moving story can engage the audience as if they themselves were having the experience in the story. **Stories are almost always concrete and most have emotional and unexpected elements.** Your patrons will remember good stories, and their museum experience, into the future.
- (if you are interested in the idea of creating memorable engagement strategies based on advertising/business research, check out *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Chip and Dan Heath)

TOURING

Successful docents direct the tour experience and conversation in many ways.

Questioning (Appendix 6)

There are many reasons to use questions and you should think about them before you get to the gallery.

- They can be used for focus, engagement, understanding, thinking, group formation/conversation and more.
- Review the types of questions and use them appropriately. For example, yes-no questions are good for quickly assessing opinions while an open-ended/divergent question will result in any number of answers and, if used carefully, lead to critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving.
- In the course of one stop or a tour, you may scaffold your questions from more basic to more thoughtful to build understanding.

- Also, be sure to include ample wait time to allow more thoughtful answers and more participation.

Expanding the conversation

- Introduce yourself and ask visitors to introduce themselves. Use the information about them, their expertise or interests, in the tour to engage them in the tour. If your guests talk early, they will keep talking/participating with you. If you have the opportunity, zoom out to topics suggested by your audience's interests.
- While looking at a work of art, start with details then move on to what they might mean when they are all together in one work of art, i.e., move on to interpretation.
- If a student makes a good comment and you want to amplify it, expand on it by asking what makes you say that?

Guiding the Conversation

- Use meta-instructions such as 'now we are going to do some thinking,' or 'now we are going to be talking' to keep students on track.
- Paraphrase comments by individuals back to the group so the speaker knows she is understood and you make sure others hear what was said.
- Use "Think-Pair-Share" to provide students time and structure for thinking on a given topic. This strategy enables individuals to formulate ideas and provides an opportunity for all students to share their thinking with at least one other student which, in turn, increases their sense of involvement in learning.
- Remind students of earlier stops as you walk through the museum and ask about their favorite stops at the end to help them solidify their understanding of the museum visit.

Adapting to the environment and the children

- Hot spots in the gallery: make accommodations for noise, inconvenient lighting in a gallery, passing interesting people enroute (such as their best friends in another group).
- Up or down: voices and bodies. If you are in a noisy gallery, you may need to speak loudly for all to hear. If you have a somewhat fidgety group, you may want to speak very quietly so they get closer to you and listen more carefully. If your students are very small, you may need them to stand up or stand back to see a work of art. If they are tall and/or very energetic, you may want to have them sit on the floor to get them to focus, to keep them from touching the art or distracting each other.
- Difficult Children: Sometimes children are high energy and can be difficult to manage. Please activate your **teacher or chaperone** to help as much as possible. In the worst case scenario, see **Appendix 7** for suggestions on how to handle the energetic visitor while being very intentional about not touching children, as is our mandate.

Other Challenging Behavior

The UMMA Education staff, guided by and in consultation with the Docent Board, has made a concerted effort in the last few years, to expand our audience to targeted, under resourced schools in Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. Docents who have worked with these students have encountered new, challenging

behaviors from SOME of these children. The book “A Framework for Understanding Poverty” by Ruby K Payne, was suggested to us by Chris Samida as a resource for understanding some of these behaviors and strategizing ways of handling them. From the Amazon blurb:

The reality of being poor brings out a survival mentality, and turns attention away from opportunities taken for granted by everyone else. If you work with people from poverty, some understanding of how different their world is from yours will be invaluable. ... this breakthrough book gives you practical, real-world support and guidance to improve your effectiveness in working with people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

I have pulled a few suggestions from this book and also put a scan of chapter 7, “Discipline” on the Exchange.

Suggestions:

- Use the Adult Voice. “An... adult voice allows for negotiation. This voice provides the language of negotiation and allows issues to be examined in a non-threatening way. ...It is non-judgmental, ...factual, often in question format, has a win-win attitude.” Examples of Adult Voice questions/address:
 - In what ways could this be resolved?
 - I would like to recommend____
 - I am comfortable/uncomfortable with____
 - Options that could be considered are____
 - For me to be comfortable, I need the following things to occur____
 - These are the consequences of that choice/action_____

- Here are some behaviors you may encounter, their possible explanation, and suggested interventions
 - A student laughs when disciplined | a way to save face | Propose other behaviors that would be more appropriate
 - Argues loudly | the culture of poverty has a distrust of authority, see the system as unfair | don’t argue; model respect
 - Angry response | anger is based on fear | respond in adult voice; when they cool down, discuss other possible responses
 - Hands always on someone else | poverty has a heavy reliance on non-verbal data and touch | allow them to draw or doodle; hold hands behind back; give them as much to do with their hands as possible in a constructive way
 - Cannot follow directions | there is little procedural memory used in poverty; sequence not used or valued | recite and repeat steps needed to complete task; perhaps have them in writing at beginning of tour. Check off as you go.
 - Disrespectful | lack of respect for authority | tell students that disrespect (also aggression) is not a choice. Identify for students the acceptable tone and word choice. This allows students to practice.
 - Talk incessantly | poverty is very participatory | have students write questions/comments and you reply at end of tour

DOCENT TEACHING TOOLBOX APPENDICES

Pam Reister and Ruth Slavin (in absentia), 2019

Appendix 1

Developmental Level

This was covered in training but if you would like to review or explore further, here are two resources:

Chip Wood. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom, Ages 4-14*. Northeast Foundation for Children, 2007.

Françoise Barbe-Gall. *How to Talk to Children About Art*. Chicago Review Press. 2005.
(in docent office library)

Appendix 2

Multiple Intelligences

Challenging the standard view of intelligence.

The standard psychological view of intellect states that there is a single intelligence, adequately measured by IQ or other short answer tests. Multiple intelligences (MI) theory, on the other hand, claims on the basis of evidence from multiple sources that human beings have a number of relatively discrete intellectual capacities. Components of multiple intelligences theory include:

- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Logical-Mathematical
- Naturalist
- Spatial
- Bodily-Kinesthetic
- Linguistic
- Musical

In comparing MI to traditional psychological view of intelligence, one might find it useful to think of them analogously as if they were computers. Belief in a single intelligence implies that humans possess a single general purpose computer, which can perform well (high IQ), average (normal IQ), or poorly (low IQ). Belief in MI theory implies that human beings possess several relatively independent computers where strength in one computer does not predict strength (or weakness) in the other computers. Put concretely, one might have high (or low) spatial intelligence, but that does not predict whether one will have high (or low) musical or interpersonal intelligence. This theory was originally put forth in Howard Gardner's landmark 1983 book *Frames of Mind* and has been put to use in the ensuing years in classrooms all over the world.

For more information visit: <http://multipleintelligencesoasis.org/about/>

Appendix 3

Eric Boothisms for UMMA Docents

You are the agents of artistic experience.

The ultimate goal in arts education is engagement

Entry Point

An entry point is a particular aesthetic feature of the art that will draw the viewer into it. It is something about a work of art that you like or you think will be “hot” for the audience. Ask yourself, what moves me about this work of art? What is a really juicy feature or story about it? Try to pick something that is both personally relevant and appropriate for the audience.

How do you pick an entry point?

- Pick an entry point you love. The relevance for you will enliven the whole experience for the audience, including the information about the piece or yourself you may choose to share along the way.
- Pick one that you believe is going to be genuinely exciting and personally relevant to your audience. The whole point is to support the likelihood that they will be able to make deeper personal connections inside the art, not that they will be able to identify more aesthetic elements, do better formal analysis, tell you more facts about the artist, etc.
- Pick an entry point that has the dual character of being specific enough to allow audience members a satisfying grasp through your experiential invitations, and has a clear connection to a rich and rewarding underlying concept, and an idea that will support their making fresh connections throughout the piece.
- Pick an entry point that is entertaining and even a little surprising.

Engagement before information

Eric Booth says “I place engaging students, getting them to participate actively in art, as a higher priority than the actual information you exchange. This prioritization respects students as people, reminding us that they have to be involved in the work you present rather than merely acquiescent recipients of your information. And after they are engaged, your information will have a far greater impact and relevance, will be desired, retained and used. Bring people in experientially not didactically. Get them excited about the art and they will participate more fully.”

Appendix 4 (see more, including Personal Response, on the Exchange)

Token Response

Who Created Token Response?

The Token Response activity was originally developed and published, including as a packaged game, by two leading art educators: Dr. Mary Erickson and Dr. Eldon Katter.

What is the value of this and related activities in a museum setting?

Since the time of its invention, Toke Response has been used extensively in classrooms and museums. In particular, museum educators have realized the value of its key strategies and underlying ideas. To unpack a few of these:

Visitor choice: Study after study in museum education has shown that visitors value “choice and control”--while this may seem entirely obvious, incorporating these elements into the standard tour experience is not always easy.

Personal response: There is really no getting away from personal response! And really--why would we want to? This activity builds upon the natural inclination to form impressions and to make judgments.

Deepening the conversation: In encouraging visitors to have a more sustained encounter, this activity can model and structure more extended conversations about art. Whatever their level of knowledge and life experience, visitors can bring associations and facts they have to their conversation. One benefit of this is that art is perceived as connected to the rest of life in a complex, yet natural way.

Allowing for differences: conversations about art often examine in a natural and relatively uncontroversial way the fact that we have different opinions about and reactions to works of art, validating individuals as diverse in their choices and experiences. While many social situations have characteristics which reinforce conforming to the majority, this activity thrives on different opinions and reactions, and has the potential to reinforce curiosity and openness about difference. In this regard, the relative remove of the museum (which can be an obstacle to participation), becomes an asset as a space set aside for aesthetic experience and discussion.

Aesthetic distance: Erickson, has written about the idea of aesthetic distance--the ability to step back from initial reactions or even indifference and reflect (after, or while also experiencing personal choices). As visitors explore in conversation why there are diverse reactions to works of art, they are invited to notice qualities and aspects of the work of art in more depth. Conversation building upon visitor social norms of turn-taking and listening creates a space for consideration of new information. For younger children, the activity of Toke Response can strengthen their acquisition of these skills in a fun, stimulating environment.

Appendix 5

Storytelling

There are several benefits of telling a story. As with many of our choices in touring, it motivates the audience to look closer at the art. It also demonstrates that artists make choices before they complete a work of art such as what part of the story to highlight and what details to include. You may also activate the students' sense that they are already able to "read" a painting. It lets them discover/understand that the artist and storyteller/author create hierarchies of importance (the most important detail). It can invite them to evaluate the story for themselves and perhaps pick a different point to capture in art than the artist did.

There are different reasons for telling a story.

- Storytelling is a familiar mode... it is comfortable to visitors and provides a relatively coherent context (a narrative) for understanding unfamiliar ideas, objects, practices.
- Some works of art come with a story such as Esther, Nydia, Ganesh.
- Some stories help students understand cultural traditions that may be unfamiliar to them, such as religious stories outside of their practice.
- Stories can illuminate the process of creation, artist stories.

Selection of the right object is a key element of successful storytelling in a museum setting. Clarification of purpose is also important. Telling a story should mesh with the goals for your tour and should be the better choice for this stop than another technique.

- Find a story: With the internet, it is easy to find stories but you should be discriminating. Look at reliable websites, compare different versions to find the one that is best for your purposes. The story you select should be appropriate for your object (for example, if you are looking for a story about Buddha, you should find one that includes elements that correspond to the image of Buddha in the gallery). It should also connect with the entry point you have selected for your object.
- Does the story contain a moral, life lesson, or BIG IDEA, you want to convey? If yes, make sure it parallels or supports the goals and theme of your tour. Also, make sure it is appropriate for the age group of your tour.
- Preparing the content: Visualize key settings, characters, objects. Create a storyboard to identify key moments of action, and check out the pacing, flow, level of details. Think about character. If you are so inclined, use voice and gesture to convey idiosyncrasies of the character. Ruth says “If and when you do decide to tell stories, I encourage you to make the commitment to telling your story as a story--even in the 3-5 minute version you may have in the average tour. Pay attention to character and to the compelling details that make your story memorable--painting a picture with your words”
- In the end, your story has to fit into the schedule of the tour. Most tour stops are about 10 minutes long so you need to have time to arrive, settle, introduce th piece, tell the story, and draw it all together, in that 10 minutes.
 - Introducing the story: Say to the group “you can probably tell me who the most important character is in this work of art. How can you tell? What choices did the artist make to make sure you know who the important figure is?” [central location, dramatic pose/gesture, color,] Would you like to hear a story about this character? While I tell this story, look at the work of art and notice other choices the artist made to tell the story.
 - After the story you might want to ask the students if they would pick a different moment in the story to illustrate.

Appendix 6

Questioning

Why Ask Questions?

Focus

- To **focus** an audience
- To **guide looking**
- To **broaden discussion**
- To **redirect discussion**

Engagement

- To actively **involve or engage** visitors
- To **connect** with the group
- To **increase motivation** or interest

Understanding

- To **assess** the level of knowledge/sophistication of the group
- To **check for understanding**
- To **review**
- To address **different learning styles**

Thinking

- To develop **critical thinking** skills
- To **nurture insights**
- To stimulate **independent learning**
- To encourage **reflection**
- To **model** a way of thinking
- To **challenge** what has already been said
- To get a **range of responses**

Group formation/conversation

- To create a **group dynamic**
- To get visitors to **share ideas**
- To encourage **ownership/responsibility** on part of group
- To **generate ideas** for more discussion
- To generate content that can be take away for teacher

Types of questions

Close-ended or yes-no

If you want to quickly assess opinions, a yes/no question or a quick vote can be a useful technique.

Convergent

Technically a close-ended questions, these questions are used when you want to focus or are looking for a certain type of information. The answer is more thoughtful, however, than a yes-no question. For example, if you ask the close-ended question “Is this person wealthy?” the answer would be yes or no. But the question/direction “Describe all the ways the artist has shown you that this woman **is** wealthy” directs your audience to the work of art, asks them to look for many details that support the statement, lets you gauge the observational skills and knowledge base of your group, keeps the conversation going and involves more people in the conversation. It is also fairly concrete and requires no special prior knowledge.

Open-ended/Divergent

Use divergent questions when you are looking for indirect answers (How can we use this battery?). They are generally used to encourage a number of answers and lead to critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. They are good to use when you hope for more complex types of thought. Be sure to leave time for participants to think and time to listen to answers.

Show and tell/Tell and Show

Giving some guiding information is better than “guessing information.” Avoid asking questions that cannot be answered without specialized knowledge/research. Don’t assume your students

know what you do. For example, some of our visitors don't immediately recognize Abe Lincoln so asking "who is this?" may result in silence. Young people don't know what common objects from our youth are, such as clothes pins. Better to start with some info and build on that.

Show and tell

Ask a question that encourages guided looking/observation (show) then build on the group's observations by giving related information (tell).

"What details in this painting by Guercino show us that these people are royalty?"

Then you could follow up with remarks such as: "Many of you mentioned the clothing. What other elements point to royalty?" Then move to telling... "In this story the king, Ahasuerus, and queen, Esther..."

Tell and show

Give information and then ask a question that encourages the students to explore and apply that information.

"This statue shows Vishnu in the avatar of a boar who has just finished a very heroic task. What details tell us that he is important, maybe more important than the other figures?"

Scaffolded Questions

There is a lot of research on the kind of questions you should ask to elicit specific kinds of thought or understanding, much of it based on the research of Benjamin Bloom. If you are interested, here is a chart that may help you understand his basic ideas: <http://www.mandela.ac.za/Cyberhunts/bloom.htm> For our purposes in the galleries, you might consider See Think Wonder. Start with questions that direct the students to see what is in the painting and notice details, then ask what they think about it or introduce elements that contribute to the meaning of the art, then ask what they wonder and move into interpretation.

Wait time

Waiting serves many purposes. It lets the whole group think before the answer is given for them

- it makes the person who always wants to answer first, think that little bit more to refine their thoughts before offering to the group;
- it lets you gauge the groups' attentiveness to the question;
- and finally, it encourages more participation as more deliberate students have time consider an answer and they will recognize that you are not in a hurry to call on the first person to raise their hand.
- Before you respond, you might also take several answers before commenting to expand the participation.

Appendix 7

Difficult Children

Things to consider with difficult children

- Do they have special needs? If yes, there may be an aid or the teacher may designate a chaperone to work with this child.
- How old are they? Young children can still be redirected by a touch on the shoulders or arms. High School students may be too big for such redirection.

What can I do if...

- If the child is high energy and wants to touch the art and or compromise his/her or other's safety, you may redirect with a touch on the shoulder or arm.
- If the child needs a bit more constant attention, you may ask if you can walk hand in hand and if they say yes, you may hold hands while you tour.
- If the child is high energy and will not redirect, ask a chaperone to be in charge of this child.
- If the child is turbo charged and the chaperone cannot keep them focused, ask the chaperone to take the child to find the teacher and have the teacher manage the situation.
- If a child wants to touch a work of art and a security officer is nearby, ask them to step over to remind the child that this is not allowed. The uniform may deter some children.
- If the child is rushing toward a work of art try to position yourself in front of it to deflect the child.
- If the child is rushing toward a work of art and you cannot get between the child and the art, you may gently hold their arm until they are calmer.
- If the child is rushing toward a work of art and would make contact and possibly put the art in danger, **as a last resort**, you may hold the child in a bear hug until a chaperone, a teacher, or a security officer arrives to help you out.

If you are concerned about a situation and would like backup and a security officer is nearby, you may ask them to accompany your group while you are in their zone.

Please avoid

- If a child is pointing at a work of art and getting too close, remind them to back up, do not slap or bat their hands. Sitting on the floor is a good way to keep children at a safe distance from the art.

Sometimes Chaperones can Interfere. If a chaperone is talking to another parent, using a phone, or interrupting your presentation, remind them **How To Be A Great Chaperone** (from our website).

- Your role as a chaperone is to facilitate the best possible visit for students. This includes looking after the safety of objects and students.
- UMMA tours are interactive and we don't mind waiting for students to think and respond. We encourage chaperones to refrain from having side conversations or interrupting before the students have a chance to respond.
- Please support the students by staying with your group and turning off cell phones.