

MISSOULA ART MUSEUM
Art Guide Manual

Mission Statement

The Missoula Art Museum educates, challenges and inspires through contemporary art. The Museum preserves our emerging cultural heritage through development and conservation of its art collection.

Education Vision Statement:

MAM offers the community exhibitions and education programs that create stimulating, art-filled environments that engage the mind, spirit and heart. MAM's education programs, be they art classes, artist talks, lectures, discussions, or exhibition tours aim to nurture creativity, encourage innovation and broaden artistic and intellectual horizons. MAM programs are accessible to all. In its efforts to support local artists and in the belief that artists have a unique insight into the creative process, MAM, whenever possible, includes artists in its education programs

History of the Missoula Art Museum

The Missoula Art Museum, now in its 31st year, recently re-opened in a newly renovated and expanded facility. The site for the renovation and expansion is the 1903 Carnegie library building, the home of the museum since 1975. The building had previously been the Missoula Free Public Library, a one story building built with a grant from the Carnegie Foundation, designed by Missoula architect, AJ Gibson. In 1913 a second story was added, designed by architect Ole Bakke, with another Carnegie grant. In 1975 the Missoula Public Library moved to its present location on Front Street and through the concerted efforts of a number of artists and art lovers in the area, the Missoula Museum of the Art was founded, making its home in the Carnegie library building.

From its humble beginnings, the Missoula Art Museum has been a public educational institution celebrating contemporary art from both within and outside of the region. In 1994, the Museum became a private nonprofit institution and changed its name to the Art Museum of Missoula.

In 2004, MAM embarked on capital campaign to preserve and renovate the Carnegie building as well as adding a contemporary addition with a much needed elevator, making the entire facility accessible to all. At this time also the AMM became MAM when it chose to take on its popular vernacular title, the Missoula Art Museum With 60% more gallery space, a state of the art collection vault, a resource library and two spacious classrooms, the new facility truly advocates art for al

Missoula Art Museum Art Guides

With its additional facilities MAM is hosting larger exhibitions, along with a steady offering of education programs and cultural events to serve visitors and members. MAM Art Guides are a part of this growth, serving school and community groups who wish to tour MAM and acting within the galleries as a ready and valuable resource for museum and exhibition information. Art Guides play an integral role in the museum experience providing a trained eye to guide the visitor to a deeper understanding and engagement of the exhibitions and sharing their enthusiasm and knowledge for contemporary art with others.

The term Art Guide was chosen over the traditional word “docent” to put the position in a new more stimulated context. An Art Guide is not expected to lecture on and on about art objects but to act as a conductor leading the viewer to engage with the art object. The art guide becomes an intermediary between the art object and viewer, encouraging the viewer to look closely and to examine the associations and ideas that arise with the viewing experience. A useful tool that Art Guides are encouraged to employ are the Visual Thinking Strategies.

As part of their initial training, Art Guides are introduced to the Missoula Art Museum, the vocabulary and concepts of the current exhibitions and the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VTS is a method of looking at art developed by museum educator Philip Yenawine, former director of education at MoMA.. VTS uses focused questions that encourage an active looking and engagement with specific art works, and gives the Art Guide a solid base from which to lead visitors. Art Guides learn by role-playing, practicing with each other until they are familiarized with the sequence of questions.

In addition to the initial training, Art Guides attend monthly meetings. At these meetings Art Guides continue to learn more about the exciting and diverse exhibitions at MAM, the world of contemporary art and touring strategies. Meetings will include visiting speakers and artists and a chance to mingle and share stories with other art lovers.

A special concentration of Art Guide energy is needed during our Annual Fifth Grade Art Experience, a program co-sponsored by Art Associates of Missoula, which invites every fifth grade class in the county to MAM for a guided tour and hands-on art project. The Fifth Grade Art Experience spans three months during the school year. It is a great time to perfect your skills as an art guide with the younger age group.

Art Guide Benefits:

1. Art enrichment activities including ongoing training in contemporary art.
2. Artist’s talks, presentations by local art educators and professors, art films, tours of other art institutions and artist’s studios.
3. Individualized assistance in preparing tours.
4. Art Guide Annual Appreciation luncheon.
5. MAM member benefits.

Art Guide Expectations:

1. Complete the initial Art Guide training, consisting of 2-3 sessions
2. “Shadow” an experienced Art Guide if you are new to this experience.
3. Attend monthly Art Guide meetings.
4. Lead a tour or act as an “ask-me” gallery attendant at least once every two months.
5. Assist with Art Guide fundraising activities
6. Become a MAM member

WHY USE VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES?

Visual thinking uses the power of original objects to teach and teaches from the objects while learning about them. Looking deeply at art objects is one of the best ways to teach critical thinking skills: examining, describing, searching for meaning, and making a distinction between what is seen and what is perceived. All demand the skill to go beyond the surface and ponder creatively.

Tools of Visual Thinking:

1. Patience to spend time with a work of art and explore all of its possibilities creatively.
2. A basic art vocabulary (elements and principles of art, abstract, horizontal vertical, middle ground, back ground, foreground.
3. The organized inquiry approach as outlined below.

Visual Thinking is a method of teaching the ability to look carefully at a work of art and unlock its meaning and content. Visual Thinking draws out viewer response and explores information about an art work meaningful to the viewer. Most museum visitors, especially children, search for ways in which an art object relates directly to them and their life experience. This is where Visual Thinking begins.

SEQUENCE OF QUESTIONING:

Spend a few minutes examining the art object --- ask: ***What is going on in this picture (or object)?***

If students respond with an interpretation rather than an actual observation --- ask: ***What do you see that makes you say that?***

In order to keep student engaged and looking ---- ask: ***What else can you find?***

Listen carefully to students making sure that you hear all of what they say and that you understand it accurately.

Point to what they mention in the art work. Be precise. **Use encouraging body language** and facial expressions to nurture participation.

Paraphrase each comment. Change the wording but not the meaning. Demonstrate proper sentence construction and varied rich vocabulary.

Accept each comment neutrally. This process models a useful pattern of thinking not right answers. Students are learning to make detailed observations by sorting out and applying what they know. Articulating their thought leads to growth even when they make mistakes.

Link answers that relate even when there are disagreements. Show how the students' thinking evolves. Thank all for their participation. Encourage them to think of art as an ongoing, open – ended process. Avoid summaries

GUIDING A TOUR

Being an art guide is an art in itself and like all the arts it takes practice to be confident and enjoy the process. Be patient with yourself, observe experience guides and keep notes of what does and doesn't work in a tour. Each group and each exhibit will be different. Learn from your successes as well as your failures. Remember, you will become more confident as you gain experience.

1. Get excited! Your enthusiasm is contagious and will encourage excitement in your viewers.
2. Be yourself and bring you best skills, strengths and interests to the tour.
3. Be flexible. Be prepared for the unexpected and to make instant adjustments. Keep an open mind and avoid "formula tours".

PREPARATION

1. Attending the Art Guide training is step one but nothing replaces careful viewing on your own. Enjoy the experience of examining the art objects critically, intellectually and purposefully. Take notes about your experience.
2. Do your own research. If an artwork or exhibition especially interests you follow up on your interest. Go to the library and use the internet to explore the artists, influences and connections.
3. Share the information with other Art Guides. The more you know about an exhibition and the more you speak about it, the more confident you will be guiding a tour.
4. Look at the exhibition from an analytical perspective. How does it fit into the rest of the art world? What style of art does the show represent? Is it thematic, one artist's work, juried, traveling, borrowed from elsewhere or from the permanent collection? Does the exhibition fulfill its intended purpose?

ELEMENTS OF A TOUR FOR YOUNG STUDENTS

As students enter coats, backpacks and lunches will go into bins.

INTRODUCTION:

Begin every tour by introducing yourself and the art museum if a museum staff member has not already done so. Talk about the importance of art in our individual lives and in our culture. Divide students into groups if necessary

MUSEUM RULES:

Remind students that the same rules of behavior in the classroom apply in the museum: i.e., raise hands to talk, keep voices at regular speaking tone, listen to others when they talk.

- Touch with your eyes not with your hands. Art work can be fragile and break; oils that naturally exist on our hands mark and damage art work.
- Running in the museum is both dangerous to art objects and to other people.
- Encourage children to stay with their group and not wander off.
- Encourage students to talk, respond and ask questions.

VIEWING THE ART WORK:

- Don't try to cover all works in the gallery. Select just a few allowing 10 minutes or more at each art work. Begin with the Visual Thinking method of inquiry. Let the students respond to what they are seeing and what interests them.
- If necessary include other methods of inquiry, such as asking about formal, technical or interpretive properties of the art work. The Visual Thinking approach should also lead into responses about these qualities.
- Play at least one gallery game.
- Try to call on a variety of students. Typically, the same few students will want to answer all your questions. Be sure to include the shy students and the ones who never raise their hands.
- Observe, listen, be helpful and above all, enjoy what you are doing and chances are students will enjoy it too.
- Avoid judgment and maintain an attitude of respect for the student, artist and artwork. Encourage curiosity.

Some basic traits of fifth graders:

- interested in realism
- moving from the egocentric stage to the social (want to feel part of the group)
- can grasp complex issues.

TYPES OF VIEWERS:

(from Tamara Moats, Curator of Education at the Henry Art Gallery)

The storyteller: A lot of kids and new art viewers are at this stage: they look randomly, are drawn to realism, use personal associations to make meaning. Notices the concrete and obvious.

The builder: Drawn to realism, has awareness of artist's intent, are aware of masterful use of technique and sees a work as measured by it's worth: ie.fame of artist, money, how much time went into it, etc. The viewer has little art experience and tries to build a framework for looking at the work of art looking especially at the work of art may function.

The classifier: likes to classify works of art, studies artist's intention, historical influences, aware of art vocabulary: Level of average art history student. This viewer can confront he work directly and objectively.

The interpreter: Looks for nuances in an artwork, searches for deeper meaning or message, likes to decode symbolism. Individualized and immediate. Fully able to analyze and classify works of art. Searches for a meaningful message. Aware of the role memory plays in viewing.

The recreator: interacts freely with a work of art, explores universal rather than personal meaning, is imaginative and contemplative, makes use of all faculties: perceptual, analytical and emotional. Work is looked at from multiple perspectives.

BASIC VOCABULARY

Abstract: In painting and sculpture, emphasizing the form and color in work independent of subject matter or having little visual reference to objects in nature.

Assemblage: Refers to a work of art made of materials originally intended for other purposes.

Avant-garde: French for vanguard; artists who develop new or experimental concepts.

Contemporary: Art produced during one's own era.

Background: The visual plane in a painting or drawing that is most distant from the viewer.

Broken color: the technique of applying paint in brief, heavy strokes on top of a background color.

Chiaroscuro: The arrangement of light and dark areas in a work of art

Conceptual art: Art works which emphasize the idea or process than the final product

Complementary colors: Colors opposite each other on the color wheel: green /red, blue/ orange, yellow/ purple

Composition: The structural design of a work of art.

Cool colors: Blues, greens and violets

Foreground: The visual plane in a painting or drawing that is closest to the viewer

Hue: The name of a color, i.e., red, blue, yellow, etc.

Medium: (plural: media) The material and techniques used by an artist, i.e., oil on canvas, ceramic

Mood: The emotional properties of a work of art or the feeling that a work of art may produce.

Oeuvre: The whole of an artists output; literally, his or her work.

Primary colors: The three colors not produced by mixing :red , yellow ,blue

Secondary colors: Colors made by mixing two primary colors.

Shade: A color to which black has been added.

Tertiary colors: Colors made by mixing a primary and secondary color.

Tone: A color to which gray has been added.

Value: the lightness of darkness of a color.

Warm Colors: Reds, yellows and oranges.

Elements & Principles of Design

A design is an arrangement, a way of organizing something. In arts and crafts, even though we use many different materials, the visual appearance (that is what our eye sees and our brain decodes) can be reduced to six **elements of design**. They are line, shape, form, space, color, and texture. They are what we organize. They are the tools. **The principles of design** are how we organize or use the tools. The principles of design are balance, emphasis, movement, pattern, proportion, repetition, rhythm, variety, and unity.

Elements of Design



Line is a mark with greater length than width. Lines can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin.



Shape is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, like squares and circles; or organic, like free formed shapes or natural shapes. Shapes are flat and can express length and width.



Forms are three-dimensional shapes, expressing length, width, and depth. Balls, cylinders, boxes and triangles are forms.



Space is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual art when we can create the feeling or illusion of depth we call it space.



Color is light reflected off objects. Color has three main characteristics: hue or its name (red, green, blue, etc.), value (how light or dark it is), and intensity (how bright or dull it is).



Texture is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft or hard. Textures do not always feel the way they look; for example, a drawing of a porcupine may look prickly, but if you touch the drawing, the paper is still smooth.

Principles of Design



Balance is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space. If the design was a scale these elements should be balanced to make a design feel stable. In symmetrical

balance, the elements used on one side of the design are similar to those on the other side; in asymmetrical balance, the sides are different but still look balanced. In radial balance, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar.



Emphasis is the part of the design that catches the viewer's attention. Usually the artist will make one area stand out by contrasting it with other areas. The area will be different in size, color, texture, shape, etc.



Movement is the path the viewer's eye takes through the artwork, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines, edges, shape and color within the artwork.



Pattern is the repeating of an object or symbol all over the artwork.



Repetition works with pattern to make the artwork seem active. The repetition of elements of design creates unity within the artwork.



Proportion is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate well with each other. When drawing the human figure, proportion can refer to the size of the head compared to the rest of the body.



Rhythm is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Variety is essential to keep rhythm exciting and active, and moving the viewer around the artwork. Rhythm creates a mood like music or dancing.



Variety is the use of several elements of design to hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through the artwork.



Unity is the feeling of harmony between all parts of the artwork creating a sense of completeness.

Adapted from *A Palette of Fun with Arts and Crafts*, a [4-H CCS](#) publication.

The following information is borrowed from the Holter Museum of Art. It includes more tips and ways of touring visitors throughout the gallery.

THE AESTHETIC SCANNING PROCESS

Aesthetic scanning is an approach to the study of a work of art regardless of its form – painting, sculpture, ceramics, prints, fibers, etc. The purpose of scanning is to provide a common-sense approach to looking at art. It is designed to involve the viewer in actually seeing what is in a work of art by analyzing and talking about the **(1) technical, (2) sensory, (3) formal, (4) expressive properties**. Following is a brief description of each of these four properties and some sample questions to illustrate the focus of each.

1. Technical Properties: Knowing what medium the artist used (oil paint, watercolor, charcoal, paper), his/her tools and equipment (brushes, drawing pencils, pens, printing press), and ways of working to produce the work (sketching, carving, painting, writing). How did the painter use thicker paint in areas to emphasize the form? How do sculptors use carving tools to create the texture of hair?

2. Sensory Properties: Viewing works of art and identifying specific characteristics in line, shape, color, texture, dark and light (art elements). Can you point out and describe some of the lines in the painting? What are the largest shapes in the painting, and are they the same as the smaller ones?

3. Formal Properties: Analyzing the work to determine how the artist organizes and unifies the work, so that all parts of the composition work together to express an idea and/or feeling. Where did the artist place the important idea in this painting? Are colors or shapes being repeated? Look at the painting in terms of balance. What kind of balance did the artist use, symmetrical or asymmetrical?

4. Expressive Properties: Responding to the expressive character of the work, that is, the meaning or feeling of the work. How does the organization of colors and shapes contribute to the overall mood of the painting? What does the painting tell us about ideas such as courage, freedom, war?

ART CRITICISM *An approach to discussing an artwork with students and encouraging objective looking.*

To the art guide or teacher – Outlined below is a four-step process for critiquing any artwork that places the viewer's judgment last rather than first. When followed closely this process of art criticism will set up an objective and open structure for viewing an artwork. It encourages describing and analyzing an artwork prior to interpreting an artist's intentions, and placing a personal judgment on the artwork. Questions will need to be adapted to suit specific artwork..

DESCRIBE only what you see:

What are the colors and shapes within the artwork?

What objects can you name? What else do you recognize?

Describe a part of the artwork without pointing to it.

What do you think is the subject?

What media did the artist use?

ANALYZE the artwork, or notice the relationships between things by asking these questions:

What types of tools or techniques did the artist use?

How would you describe the light? Where are there contrasts of light and dark? Are they subtle or sharp?

How is this composition organized? What is the center of interest? How does the artist draw your attention to the center of interest?

Are there contrasting colors placed next to each other? If so, how does that affect the viewing experience? Are there complementary colors next to each other?

How has the artist suggested texture? Is it actual or an illusion?

Is this artwork realistic or abstract?

If you were inside this artwork, what senses would be affected? What would you hear? Smell? Feel?

INTERPRET what the art object means. Use what you have learned through careful observations and then ask yourself these questions:

What does the artist communicate to you?

Was the artist trying to tell us something or were they emphasizing a point of view?

Does this scene remind you of something?

What effect do the colors have on the subject?

What effect does the light have on the center of interest?

After you leave this artwork, what will you remember most about it? Does it serve any purpose to you? What would you title this artwork?

JUDGE the value of the object. It is not important whether or not you like the artwork, only if the artist has communicated what they intended. Lastly, ask yourself these questions as you judge the artwork:

How did the artist involve you in the artwork?

What changes would you make to the artwork? Why?

What decisions did the artist make that you agree with?

Does this artwork come together as a whole?

Do you feel that the artist was successful? Why or why not?

Does the artwork communicate to you any major ideas or feelings?

GALLERY GAMES

One of the first interactions a visitor has with an art object is looking at it. But looking at an object does not ensure seeing it. Consider the amount of visual information that passes in front of your eyes each day. How much do you really see?

The following activities can be used to help visitors focus on what they are looking at and make them more willing to share their feelings, reactions, or value judgments with a group.

Remember that smaller children are more active and highly excitable by game playing and have shorter attention spans. Be sure that you have some special way to bring them under control (playing Statue is always a good one). Always expect them to return to their “Magic Circle” on the floor between activities.

ART AUCTION

Select one student to be an auctioneer or a New York art dealer. His or her task is to convince a group of potential buyers (the other students) to purchase a designated object. To make it more difficult, pretend that the buyers have never seen the object, and they want a description over the phone. Encourage the buyers to ask questions.

IMAGINE

Ask children to imagine that they are small enough to hide in a painting (realistic or abstract). Where would they hide? Why? What would they see from their hiding place?

WORD MATCH

Before entering a gallery, think of one word that could describe an artwork, for instance, “funny,” “quiet,” or “exciting” (it is good to use non-visual words in this game). Then instruct visitors to find the work that best fits this word. You may find it more useful to ask visitors to apply this word to just one element in the artworks (for example, find a work with a funny COLOR or quiet LINES or exciting SHAPES). Discuss their choices. Where there several possibilities for each word? Were different words appropriate for the same artwork?

FIND A LINE

After exploring the use of line in a few art works, send students into the gallery with pipe cleaners. Their task is to find three different lines and to recreate them with pipe cleaners. Later you can discuss their findings as a group and/or have them exchange pipe cleaners and find classmates’ lines.

SIMILARITIES/DIFFERENCES

Choose any two works of art. Have students list the things that make them similar and the things that make them different.

ART SOUNDS Sit in front of a work of art. What sounds would it make?

SUPER SLEUTH

Find one unique thing about an art object. It could be an object in a painting or a particular color, etc. Have the students silently look for that thing and come back to the circle when they have found it.

IMITATE GESTURES

When applicable, have the children imitate the people or animals or paint strokes in an art object. How do they feel when they assume certain poses?

BLIND DESCRIPTIONS

Choose one object in the room. Give the students about 30 seconds to look at the object. Have them turn away from the object and describe it.

ART JUROR

Give the children a variety of tokens to place face down in front of objects in a gallery. Tokens can include:

- A heart: for the object they like best
- A house: for the object they would like in their home
- A dollar sign: for the object they think is most expensive
- A blue ribbon: for the “best” object (that is, most artistic or the best made)
- A clock: for the object they think took the longest time to make

When the students are done, compare and discuss their answers. Did they all agree? Why or why not?

A variation for older students or adults is to ask them which object they think is the most significant and which one they like the best. You may even ask which object is the most confusing or the most aggravating. Again, compare and discuss their responses.

EYEWITNESS

Show students an artwork for one minute. Ask children to describe the piece from memory and record their answers on a tape recorder. Play the tape back while children look at the object again.

A variation is to show the artwork for a minute to half the students, and then have those students give directions on how to draw the artwork to the other half of the students.

TURN AROUND Have the students study the work for one minute. Then have them turn around and answer a series of questions you devise for them like: what is the strongest color? How many people are in the artwork? What is the mood? The purpose of this game is not to agree, for instance, on the “correct” number of people, but rather to illustrate that different people see and remember works of art differently. Try not to give the answer or point out who got it “right”; instead, encourage all responses with comments like “You were very accurate in your observation of people; that must be very important to you.”

STORIES Have the students make up different stories about why the artist represented a specific subject.

TIPS AND GAMES FOR KINDERGARTENERS

Especially in the fall, when these children have just started school, they are not really ready for group discussion: a little is okay, but they do much better with GAMES.

All the games below can be played by letting the children walk around the museum (if the group seems to understand and adhere to gallery manners) OR while sitting and looking at the works around the group. In any case, most games work best in a small, somewhat enclosed area where you can see each other: use the notion of an invisible wall if needed to keep the class together.

CHOOSE YOUR FAVORITE: Look at all the works in a particular area of the museum and when the leader says “choose your favorite” WALK (don’t run) to your favorite work. *Point to make: we all like different things.*

CHOOSE YOUR FAVORITE _____: Played just like the first game, only more specific. Examples: choose your favorite animal, choose your favorite sky, etc. *Point to make: we all like different things.*

SOUNDS: Bring a drum or bell or some other sound-making instrument. Ask the students to choose a work that seems to look like the sound you are making. *Point to make: artists can help us hear things through what we see.*

SUPER SLEUTH: Find as many works with a _____ (bear, sky, bird, truck) in them as you can. Count them. *Point to make: you are an explorer of the museum; always be very observant and see what you can find.*

FREEZE FRAME: Ask the student to look for an artwork with a person or animal in it. When the leader says “freeze frame” each child should take on the gestures, position, or attitude of their subject. *Point to make: sometimes it helps to use our bodies or facial expression to understand what is going on in an artwork.*

WORD MATCH: Ask the students to find an artwork that seems “quiet” or “busy” or “exciting.” *Point to make: artists often try to communicate a feeling to us. How do they do this? We do not all feel the same thing.*

IDEAS TO CONSIDER

- DO** stimulate interest; be objective and enthusiastic
- DO** be prepared, but be flexible to the response of the group.
- DO** question children so they will express feelings and use imagination.
- DO** accept a child's right to like or dislike something.
- DO** talk on children's level.
- DO** enlarge their vocabulary without being stuffy.
- DO** have the teacher listen with the class.
- DO NOT** lecture or expound with a "fixed" presentation.
- DO NOT** express personal feelings or prejudices if they are negative.
- DO NOT** become too literal.
- DO NOT** overdo history, especially at the primary level.
- DO NOT** force adult aesthetic vision on children.
- DO NOT** be afraid to say "I don't know."

MORE TOURING TIPS FROM “THE DOCENT HANDBOOK”

(National Docent Symposium Council)

Establish Your Goals and Objectives A well-organized tour has clear goals and objectives. Think about what you want your visitors to learn and remember. If your goal is that at the end of the tour your visitors will be able to describe elements of a painting, prepare your questions accordingly. Know what you want to accomplish.

Plan Your Tour Plan your tour by writing an outline for your theme, goals and objectives, as well as the introduction, content, and conclusion. Prepare a list that highlights the paintings or objects you plan to cover and the activities, questions and transitions that reinforce your theme. Develop a pattern. Avoid reading or memorizing the tour script, or presenting it verbatim.

Does the information you have about the group allow you to anticipate what the group might want to see or how they might react to your questions? What learning styles and skills might your visitors prefer?

Be Flexible Sometimes visitors become interested in an object in the gallery that might not be included in your tour plans. Therefore, be familiar with all objects and their locations in the gallery that you plan to visit.

Check the route for your tour, making sure that the objects you want to highlight are on display. Practice a variety of presentation styles, use different vocabulary, and plan different starting points and various time allotments.

On the Tour Think about your position in relation to your group and the object. Make sure that they can see what you are describing and that you do not block the visitors' view. Before encouraging someone else to look at an object, see it yourself. Sit on the floor and notice what is easy or difficult to see. Be aware of how the light hits the painting or artifact from various positions. Take into consideration that viewing a three-dimensional object is more complex in terms of visitors' movements than viewing a two-dimensional object.

Use appropriate and objective vocabulary. Be careful not to impart a particular point of view by your choice of words. Use your voice effectively; vary the tone and pace of delivery.

Maintaining eye contact is one of the most important factors in establishing a good rapport with all your tour participants. Use gestures in a restrained, natural manner when speaking and watch your non-verbal cues to ensure that you are holding the group's attention.

Remember, there is no single right way to look at art. Allow visitors to respond to your explanations and to express their own observations.

Enjoy Yourself! Thoughtfulness and politeness are important qualities of a docent. Smiles, humor, shared laughter, and steady eye contact are essential. Enthusiasm is contagious. If you enjoy what you are doing and if you are excited about your subject, your museum and your group, your visitors will know it and you will be off to a successful tour!

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Museums increasingly look for new ways to attract larger and more diverse crowds to enjoy and learn from ever-changing exhibits. In addition to learning to satisfy the public's thirst for more knowledge and more exploration, you are challenged to handle a number of issues and questions with utmost subtlety and diplomacy.

Not all art and artifacts in museums are beautiful. Some exhibits focus on exploring the very essence of human creation, lay bare the human body, graphically show the ruthless destruction and extermination of peoples, or offend religious groups. What is your obligation to the public when presenting controversial exhibits?

Ask yourself:

- How do I feel about such exhibits?
- How can I objectively describe and discuss such an exhibit?
- What impact might my tour have on visitors?

Nudity in Art

The issues of nudity and nakedness confront us constantly. It is impossible to ignore paintings and sculptures representing the bare human body. Therefore, prepare to deal with the subject of nudity in a professional and comfortable manner. If certain objects seem unsuitable for young museum visitors, or for you, avoid them on your tour.

Ask yourself:

- Which approach is most comfortable for me?
- Which approach is most suitable for my audience?

Very often you hear the question: "Why are there so many paintings and sculptures of naked people in the museum?" Adults might feel embarrassed or outraged. Young visitors will inevitably giggle and make remarks. The following suggestions will provide some ideas for a comfortable solution.

- For very young visitors, cover your hand with a mitten and asked the youngsters to describe your hand. What are they able to learn about your hand once you remove the mitten?
- Throughout time, artists, sculptors, and craftsmen have depicted the human body in celebration of beliefs, philosophies, life and death. Artists are concerned with exploring truth and therefore show the body in its natural appearance.
- Examples:
 - In African art, the female body is a symbol of agrarian fertility.
 - Sculptures from Melanesia depict nude males in celebration of fertility rites.

-In ancient Greece, a fascination with physical beauty and fitness evolved that has continued to influence artists throughout the history of Western civilization.

Present the total picture:

- Where did the artist stand in relation to the model when he carved this sculpture or painted this picture?
- How would clothing change our perception?
- How and why did the artist respect or exaggerate the rules of proportion?
- What do you think about the distribution of body weight?
- If you were the model, how long do you think you could hold that position?

Diversity

During the second half of the 20th century, awareness, interest, and pride have emerged in regard to our multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society. Museums have become sources for sharing knowledge about the heritage and the many different peoples who once lived and who now live on the North American continent.

Diversity topics and cross-cultural exhibits call for an interdisciplinary approach. Often such exhibits contain emotionally charged themes and issues. What you teach must take place within a broader vision. Careful planning is necessary, because during a timed tour you are able to present only a piece of the entire picture. Be prepared to accept a variety of responses and to deal dispassionately and objectively with difficult or controversial questions. The best way to avoid alienating visitors with traditional points of view is to involve them in the exploration of culturally diverse objects. Various focal points could be:

- The comparing and contrasting of American lifestyles, traditions, and celebrations with those in other cultures
- A discussion of environmental or ecological problems
- A discussion of the roles and lifestyles of men and women of various colors, creeds, and economic groups as you examine the art and artifacts.

As an example, assume that you plan to explore a variety of objects from Africa such as masks and figures, jewelry, textiles, and furniture and the roles they have traditionally played in people's lives. Choose to discuss:

- Oral histories
- Colonization and modernization
- Changes or loss of traditions
- Independence from colonial rule
- The value of new ideas and different viewpoints and how change is brought about

Lead into a discussion of how a shared heritage can shape the artistic development of African-American (or American Indian) artists, writers and poets. Diversity deals not only with differences among varied cultures and peoples, but also with issues of racism, poverty, history and religion. By sharing broad information about the past, you provide contrast to the present. Give enough information to allow for some connections to be made. Put information in a wide context to make it relevant to other groups and avoid introducing stereotypes related to ethnicity, race, sex or religion.

The more you know about others, the easier it will be for you to convey appreciation and sensitivity in concrete ways. Questions lead to discover, investigation and a variety of responses. Be accepting of varied comments and responses and be prepared to overcome cultural barriers so that by your leadership you will be able to broaden your audiences' perceptions in a meaningful way

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS AND ATTITUDES

“We want to see everything”

Tour coordinators in your museum will hopefully point out that a tour can only cover selected areas or highlights of the collections. Teachers should be reminded that she should select objects in support of a certain curriculum topic or a discovery tour of a limited number of objects. When the group arrives, let them know what you plan for the tour is and reassure visitors that you have selected a representative number of objects or those objects that support their special interests.

If adults want to see more, invite them to explore the museum on their own and provide gallery information and floor plans.

Contemporary art – “I could do THAT!”

Today's museums are places of experiences and happenings where the mind is as much engaged as the eye. Contemporary art may provoke reactions, discussions, and even disbelief from visitors. Often visitors of all ages view contemporary art with a good portion of apprehension and feel that they have to share their points of view with the entire group. Use the excitement to your advantage and approach the problems with a spirit of adventure:

- Instead of looking for any specific meaning in modern and contemporary art, focus on the energy that created those artworks.
- Pose challenging ideas: just because the object looks easy to make, was it really easy to produce? How would you create an action painting?
- Focus visitors' attention on the techniques, materials and tools used to create the object and discuss characteristic elements of style.
- Allow visitors to voice their likes and dislikes and guide them towards a discussion of contemporary art and artists' lives.
- Elaborate on certain historical and political events that made artists explore new directions.

“This is boring”

As soon as you notice that your group’s attention is lacking, e.g., rustling, whispering, or glazed eyes, change the pace and focus of your tour:\

Involve visitors in question and answer exercises.

- Switch to a more interactive touring technique or tell a story.
- Change galleries or focus on the history of acquisitions in a particular gallery.
- Share the technique of taxidermy and display.

If visitors imply that they have already seen this specific exhibit, you can either change galleries or invite visitors to share their observations from their first visit and whether they now view objects from a different perspective.

Troublemakers

Young visitors often display a very short attention span and become restless and talkative or engage in interruptive and disruptive behavior. Prepare to be fully in charge throughout the tour:

- Understand the various developmental stages of children and adolescents.
- Assess whether a certain behavior is part of the developmental stage or is unacceptable.
- Remember that inquiry touring techniques ask for involvement and that involvement creates excitement.
- Be aware of the fine line between excitement and unacceptable behavior.

At the beginning of your tour, review appropriate behavior in the galleries and exhibits. Point out how close one can come to an object (preferably at arm’s length). In some museums, one of the guards is designated to demonstrate and explain rules and proper behavior. Putting this responsibility in the hands of a guard frees the docent of authoritarian or disciplinary comments and sets a more relaxed tone for the tour.

It is unavoidable that problems arise with a restless group; therefore, consider the following ideas:

- Spend less time in front of objects.
- Face the group.
- Call children’s names frequently, but refrain from touching them.
- Acknowledge their participation.
- Alternate standing and sitting down in front of an object.

- Reinforce rules by complimenting good behavior.
- Introduce independent looking activities.

You may also try to ignore bad behavior. If that approach doesn't help, ask children to sit down in front of the object, take a deep breath, and freeze for a moment. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine what it must feel like, smell like, or taste like.

Looking Back on Your Tour

With each tour you conduct you'll gain new insights and different perspectives. It is beneficial that you reflect on the experience and consider the following questions:

- What did I try to accomplish?
- Did I succeed in meeting my objectives?
- Did I use appropriate vocabulary?
- How did my tour participants react?
- Why did a particular activity work well?
- Was the timing right?
- What could have worked better?

SPEAKING WITH AWARENESS: “PEOPLE FIRST” LANGUAGE (FROM VSA ARTS)

Language shapes the way those around us speak and act toward one another and conveys the respect we have for others. The use of appropriate language about people with disabilities can be an important tool in building a community that accepts all people.

Appropriate language is both sensitive and accurate. VSA (Arts) promotes the use of “people first” language – language that puts to focus on the individual, rather than on a disability. “People first” language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are.

List of Affirmative and Negative Phrases

Affirmative Phrase

Person with a disability

Person who is blind; person with a visual impairment

Person who is deaf; person with a hearing impairment

Person with mental illness

Person with mental retardation

Person who uses a wheelchair

Person with a physical disability; person with a mobility impairment

Negative Phrase

The disabled; handicapped; crippled; suffers from a disability

The blind

The deaf; deaf and dumb; suffers a hearing loss

Crazy; psycho; lunatic

Retarded; mentally defective

Confined or restricted to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound

Cripple; lame; handicapped; deform

Suggestions to Improve Access and Positive Interactions

- Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “special needs,” “differently abled,” and “handicapable.” Many disability groups object to these phrases because they are considered condescending and reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be spoken of in an upfront and direct manner.
- Do not sensationalize disability by using terms such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” or “crippled with.” These expressions are considered offensive and inaccurate to people with disabilities.
- When referring to people who use wheelchairs, avoid terms such as “wheelchair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.” Wheelchairs do not confine people with disabilities. They provide freedom of movement to assist individuals in traveling throughout the community.
- When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize abilities rather than limitations, focusing on a person’s accomplishments, creative talents or skills. This guideline does not mean avoiding mention of a person’s disability, but doing so in a respectful manner and only when relevant to the situation.

