



Maximizing Museum Visits Part 2

Rebecca Arkenberg

This month we continue with tips to make a class museum visit as meaningful as possible. Part 1 appeared in the January 2006 issue of SchoolArts.

Electronic accessories, games, cameras, and cell phones have become ubiquitous in public places, and most museums prohibit, discourage, or regulate their use. The iPods, CD players with headsets, cell phones, and handheld

games that entertained your students during the bus trip are distractions on a t Check to see if the museum

has a secure space where they can be stored, or leave them on the bus. Then you won't have to worry about students text-messaging each other across the museum or answering ringing cell phones. Make sure that parents who call their children to check in at a pre-set time know that cell phones will be turned off during the museum visit, so they can make other arrangements.

Your guide should engage the group with questions about what they see, and provide information based on discovery and questions.

Think of Everything

Arrange for chaperones (one adult for every ten to fifteen students is average). If a student gets ill (bus trips can lead to motion sickness and the excitement of the trip to headaches) or disruptive, one adult

can stay with the group while the other one tends to the student. Make sure the chaperones know that their job is to stay with the tour; I've seen adults wander off to look in an adjoining gallery or decide to visit the gift shop. Plan in advance for students with special needs (i.e., a child with diabetes may need to eat before the visit).

Don't Overprepare

Remember the joy of discovery! Your guide (or you) should engage the group with questions about

what they see, and then provide information based on discovery and questions. Students should be conversant with the elements and principles, aware of materials and techniques, notice the scale of the artwork, and be able to discuss symbolism.

Many teachers guide student visits with worksheets or treasure hunts, and if you decide to use this strategy, questions should be as open-ended as possible. I've seen students running through the museum, never glancing at the artwork, intent on finishing their treasure hunt with information gleaned from the labels. The whole exercise becomes a competition to see who can finish their worksheet first. I've also seen students standing rapt for twenty minutes in front of a single painting, really looking, eager to record their discoveries through sketching and writing.

Less Is More

A museum visit can be an intense experience. Basically, your goal should be for your students to enjoy the field trip and want to come back. Don't try to take in too much or stay too long.

Follow Up

Encourage your students to discuss and write about their museum visit. Use posters, slides, and Web sites to revisit images from the tour, if possible. Design a project based on the visit that will inspire students to create their own art. 🎨

Plan the Next Trip!

Rebecca Arkenberg is a museum consultant who lives in Statler, Connecticut. rjna@aol.com

WEB LINKS

How to Be a Great Chaperone for a School Visit from the Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC, www.ackland.org/education/k12/self_chaperone.html

Guide to Museum Visits by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine, Visual Understanding in Education, www.vue.org/download/guide_to_museum_visits.pdf