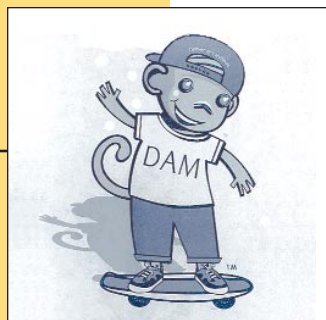


Introduction

This is one in a series of nine reports describing the Denver Art Museum's four-year commitment to making the museum an imaginative and playful family destination. Thanks to an invaluable grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the museum has been able to develop and refine its programs for children ages six to twelve and their adult companions. Funds were used to create permanent family services that can be maintained at minimal costs, both in terms of dollars and staff time. From the outset, these offerings were built to last. Although adults remain the museum's primary audience, families are now a strong second.



What is a Family-Friendly Art Museum Like?

Families' needs are anticipated from the moment visitors walk through the doors. For example, they can pick up a welcoming brochure, *Free Things for Kids to Do Today*, from the ticket counter. The two-sided foldout, featuring Seymour, the family programs mascot, spells out what is available daily, on weekends and during school breaks. The Try This section encourages kids to go on a hunt through the museum to find images of Seymour, who is always posted near fun stuff for families.

Rather than offering only ephemeral live programs or classes for families, the museum has created permanent fixtures on every floor that make the Denver Art Museum a good option for families

whenever they may visit. There are now more than twenty-five places in the museum where visitors can find over fifty family activities. These offerings range from quick riddle games to more in-depth backpack activities. Some are available

only on weekends or holidays, but most are out all the time.

While some activities are led by staff or volunteers, the vast majority are do-it-yourself. For many families, freedom of choice is critical to enjoying visits and

3 tips to make your visit easier

1. You don't have to try everything today. Relax and enjoy yourself. It's better to have a great thirty-minute trip than to struggle through every floor. Remember, the museum is FREE every Saturday, and we hope you'll come back again and again.
2. "Don't Touch" doesn't have to be a drag. One way to help kids remember not to touch the art is to have them pick a "safe place" for their hands whenever they feel the urge to touch. Be creative—have them try fun places like their noses or the tops of their heads.
3. Try a change of pace. Kids don't have the same attention span as adults. Don't wait until their eyes glaze over—take a break in the café, visit our Just for Fun Center, read a story in one of our reading/video areas, or try on costumes in our Discovery Libraries.



Where to go for:

Restrooms: 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 1, C
 Family restroom (a private room with changing table, chair for nursing, and ample stroller space): 1
 Wheelchair accessible restrooms: 5, 4, 1, C
 Changing tables: 1, C
 Water fountains: all floors
 Strollers: free checkout at information desk
 Telephones: 1
 Lockers: 1, C
 Food: Polettes Café on the 1st floor has a special kids' menu
 For more information or to join our family mailing list, call 720-913-KIDS (5432). Or, e-mail your name and address to familyprogram@denverartmuseum.org
Denver Art Museum
 13th Ave. & Acoma, downtown

Funky and kits programs are supported by the Nancy Benson Education Endowment Fund, Security Life, Great Primitives Endowment, Target Store, William Randolph Hearst Endowment for Education Program, Denver Post, and the citizens who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District.



Free Things for Kids to Do Today



DENVER ART MUSEUM

Weekends

Just for Fun Center
Hands-on Activities for Families
 Open every weekend
 Push @ button on elevator
 We've got everything from a giant 3-D Maya puzzle to whimsical chairs you can color and put together in our especially-for-families space.

Family Backpacks
 Saturdays 10:30 am-4 pm
 Sundays noon-4 pm
 Free checkout on the 1st floor near the elevators
 Take a museum journey with our free Family Backpacks, full of gallery games and activities. Ten different adventures to choose from.

Art Stops
 Saturdays 10:30 am-4 pm
 Look for the stop sign next to the 1st-floor elevators
 Follow the stop signs to discover how a samurai warrior used his sword, how Navajo people weave their blankets, and much more. Each station has objects to touch and helpful people to talk to. Different Art Stops are available every weekend.



Anytime

Kids Corner
 1st floor, near the elevators
 Sit down and relax while your child creates a mini-masterpiece.

Gallery Games
Eye Spy
 Floors 2 through 6
 Kids of all ages can play detective with this great museum game.
Puzzle Search
 3rd floor
 • near the tipi
 • behind the big Navajo rug
 Put together a puzzle, then find the real thing.
Peruvian Puzzle Pot
 4th floor, near the videos
 See a two-foot-tall Peruvian pot, then piece together its puzzle twin.

Discovery Libraries
 6th floor
 Dress up like one of the people in our paintings, flip through a book, or explore a castle on CD-ROM.
 7th floor
 Mosey on over to our Western Discovery Library, where you can dress up like a vaquero (Spanish cowboy), peek through the lens of an antique camera, and rummage through the desk of an Old West painter.



Try this!

Alphabet Search
 Pick a floor or collection (like Japanese art). Beginning with the letter A, look for things in the artwork that start with each letter of the alphabet. How many can you find?

Be an Art Critic
 Have your kids explain their answers to these questions:
 • Which piece of art in this room do you like best?
 • Which do you think is the funniest?
 • Which would you like to take home?
 • Which is the scariest?
 • Which would be the most fun to make a story about?

Fun things to do during school breaks!
Rhymes & Riddler Week
 December 21 through 29
Great Games Week
 March 22 through 30
 Featuring . . .
 Riddles and games, Family Backpacks, Just for Fun Center, and more!



Many families visiting for the first time often are unaware of the treasures that await them. To familiarize families with current programs and entice them to return for future visits, the museum created this free flyer packed with fun activities to do today.



wanting to return.

Using the many educational programs and activities as a guide, families can decide what parts of the museum they want to focus on.

“We try to make it easier for families to get to activities,” said Janet Meredith, director of marketing at the museum. “Parents don’t have a lot of time to sit with kids and research where they are going. Brochures, signs, and directions have to make it clear and easy. With kids you have to move, or you lose their interest.”

Seymour plays a valuable, visible role in the overall navigational scheme. Based on a pre-Columbian ceramic vessel in the permanent collection, he was discovered during an all-museum staff hunt for a mascot. With cameras in hand, museum staff searched the galleries for an animal that could be developed into a symbol for families. In the end, they narrowed their initial fifty selections to two—a monkey and a crocodile. The simian character won hands-down, after a weekend survey of kids visiting the museum, said family programs coordinator, Maria Garcia.

“We were asking kids to put adjectives with these two animals,” Garcia said. “The thing we found out about crocodiles is that they eat kids! So we ended up with Seymour. Kids really saw a monkey as a more animated, playful type of character. I remember them saying, ‘I can totally see

this monkey talking. This monkey climbs trees. This monkey gets into trouble.”

In museum brochures and signs Seymour sometimes wears sunglasses, rides a skateboard, skis, and even swims in Hawaiian print shorts. He is a source of endless creativity and entertainment to the museum’s graphic designers.

Why Families as an Art Museum Audience?

Reaching a larger and more diverse family audience is an effective way to gradually increase attendance at the Denver Art Museum, which in the past has been perceived as a place more for adults than for kids. By enticing families with young children, who make up about 40 percent of the Denver metropolitan community, the museum can tap into a reservoir of potential visitors. On Saturdays, which are free for Colorado residents and tailored toward families, nineteen percent of the visitors come with children.

Twenty-six percent of non-Anglo visitors on that day bring their kids.

In the fall of 2000, the museum added another incentive to encourage



family visits. It restructured its pricing so that kids twelve and under are always free. Like free admission for Colorado residents on Saturdays, this provides a big incentive for families to come and explore without digging into their pocketbooks.

This economic change enables the Denver Art Museum to be on more equal footing with other institutions in the Denver metropolitan community that traditionally draw families, such as children's and natural history museums, the aquarium, and the zoo. These cultural and scientific institutions have a strong natural appeal for families while art museums traditionally do not. By removing the cost, one barrier is eliminated instantly. Financially, first-timers as well as repeat visitors don't have anything to lose.

"We have to communicate that this is great for kids," said Meredith. "We want families to understand that this is worth trying. Once they are in the museum, we deliver on our promise of being family-friendly."

Creating future adult audiences is another benefit of family programs. "You are more likely to become an adult visitor if you come as a child with your family," Melora McDermott-Lewis, director of family programs and master teacher for European and American art, said. "Families model great visitor dynamics. You wander around looking at things with people you know well and value. You guide yourself and learn to experience the museum in your own way, learning skills that can carry over into your adult life."

Children want to explore with their

parents or other adults who are special in their lives. Sharing experiences together adds value to visits. Family time is special in part because it is spent in the presence of loved ones. In the intimacy of small, caring groups, lifelong passions can take shape. Families are brilliantly positioned for nurturing such potential.

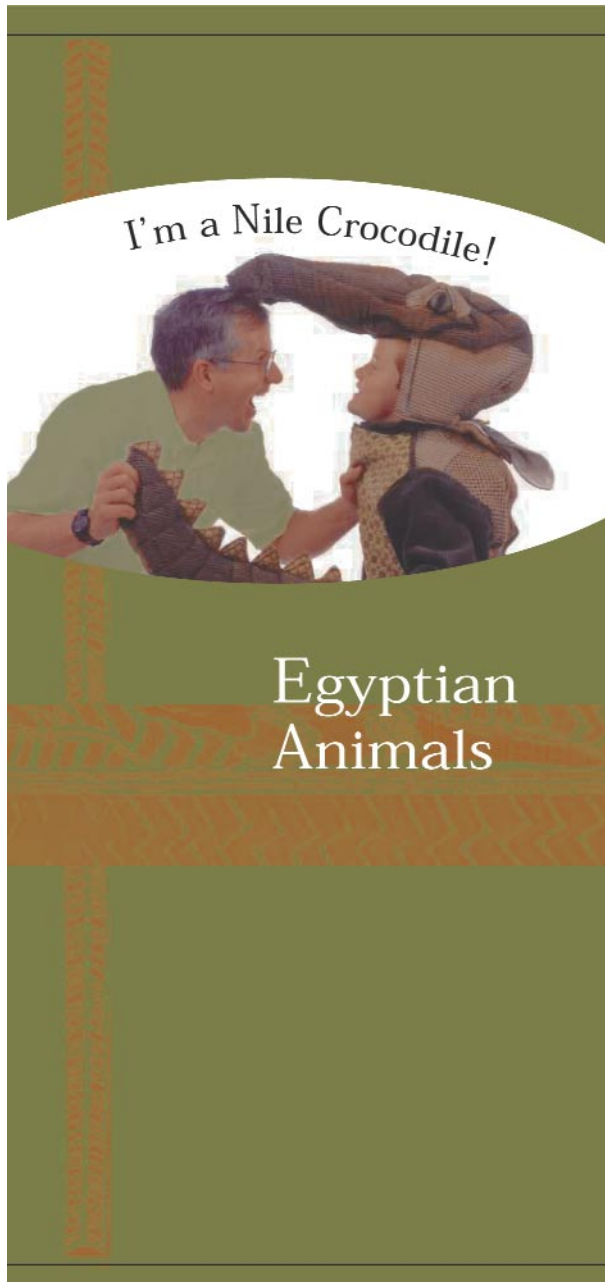
"The education department has hit on all the notes," says DAM director Lewis Sharp. "If you can attract children, they can develop lifelong interests in museums."

Using Play as a Model for Family Learning

Each family that comes to the museum is enjoying time off. They want to have fun. Knowing this, the education department began to seek out and explore other places kids and families go, such as toy stores, children's museums, and favorite websites. They also read stacks of magazines recommended by librarians at the Denver Public Library.

"We wanted to see where families were going and what was capturing their attention," Garcia said. "We were trying to pick up on these things and bring them into the art museum setting, because obviously they were working."

Despite their casual agendas, a lot of learning goes on within families. In her article, "Museums as Resources for Families," D.D. Hilke noted, "Families coming into your museum may or may not remind us of a herd of horses, but in the hustle and bustle of coat shedding, shoe tying, bathroom stops, and parental



Knowing that families come to the museum not only to learn, but to have fun, banners like this one use minimal information to encourage visitors to take part in activities. In this case, the message is clear: Dress up like Egyptian animals.

attempts at corralling youngsters in the foyer, the analogy is often apt ... How can we lead this herd of individuals into our exhibitions and make them learn? Deal with their primary agenda first. Families

do not come to the museum to learn. They come, first and foremost, to have a good family outing. All else is secondary.”

The Role of Master Teachers

Critical to achieving these goals are the education department’s master teachers, who for the past decade have worked in collaboration with curators. Master teachers are assigned to individual collections, as are curators. They bring knowledge and sensitivity to the particular collection for which they are responsible and to all aspects of the activities and gallery installations they develop. These educators are not only conversant with the context, philosophies, and techniques of art, but also with the psychology of responses by viewers with varied backgrounds. They must know the art, and they must be gifted teachers. Master teachers work with designers, publications and audio-visual staff, and curators to design galleries that often include interactive and didactic elements. They also develop games, puzzles, or other family activities. Master teachers work in close collaboration with other education staff who coordinate family programs on a day-to-day basis.

Master teachers talk with, interview, and observe parents and children to build upon their understanding of museum visitors. One of the most frequently used methods for gathering this information is the visitor panel. A cross between a focus group and a community advisory group, visitor panels allow staff to find out what visitors thought of their museum experi-

ences and what they would recommend for improving those experiences. Educators then apply what they learn to the ongoing family program, led for more than a decade by Melora McDermott-Lewis, with help from many staff members, including Maria Garcia, coordinator of family programs, and Patterson Williams, dean of the education department. These three educators envisioned a bigger, more integrated picture for family audiences. To help bring their vision to life, they called on the entire education department and many other museum departments such as marketing and security. Making the DAM a family destination was truly a museum wide effort.

Are We Finished with Family Programs Now?

As the Denver Art Museum expands and grows in the coming decade, it plans to nurture the family programs created and refined during four years of invaluable support from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Like a gardener laying out and planting a carefully conceived and patterned landscape, the museum has put in place a vibrant array of activities and offerings. But this is only the beginning. To keep children and the adults who accompany them coming back, programs need to be fed, watered and weeded on an ongoing basis. By continuing to listen to family visitors and to adjust programs as childhood itself changes, the museum can use the next decade to create a broad family audience for the museum. And it

will take a decade and longer.

The family programs are now well established. Their basic structure is in place and can be supported at moderate annual cost. The challenge for the next decade is to weave family programs into the capital expansion of the museum and to gradually build the size and diversity of the family audience. For traditional museum goers, family attendance is likely to grow naturally by word of mouth as current audiences realize that there are good things for families at the museum. For other audiences, with less trust and confidence that art museums will be family friendly, the museum will need to make concerted efforts to encourage their attendance.

Because families will find such a range of programs and activities when they visit, as well as a caring environment intended to make trips easy and fun, the hope is that they will return for at least three or four solid visits a year, for several years in a row. If this happens, both the kids and their adult companions might just become devoted and habitual museum goers for life, as has happened for the second generation in a row in Maria Garcia's family.

As a teenager in the 1970s Garcia, family programs coordinator, first followed her older sister, Margot, into the museum. The girls, who lived in a Denver neighborhood within walking distance of the museum, would roam on their own or with friends wherever they wanted. Going into the galleries was second nature—in fact, the rooms felt like an extended part of their front yard.



Some art works make a lasting impression on young visitors. Arcimboldo's portrait is one of them. Composed entirely of fruit, it remains one of the museum's most memorable family attractions. (Giuseppe Arcimboldo *Allegorical Portrait: Summer*, 1572)

Year after year, Margot Garcia would visit “her” art, which included quilts and Arcimboldo's oil painting of a face composed entirely of fruit. As a new mother, she revisited “her” painting with her baby, Chelsea.

Now, that same compilation of fruit is a favorite of Chelsea's, while Margot's ten-year-old son, Eli, takes great ownership in Deborah Butterfield's three bronze horses in an outside sculpture garden. He has been coming to classes and exploring the museum with his mom since he was three. These days, he often is with his Aunt Maria. He talks as naturally and enthusiastically about art as he does about soccer or anything else he's been exposed to and developed an interest in.

Passing on personal commitment and appreciation of art to family audiences will be a challenge. As staff change and the museum grows, seeing that family programs are as important to the museum as exhibitions and school programs can make the museum a more integral part of its community. When will staff know that the museum has permanently changed to accommodate families and that the programs put in place for families are making the difference they hope for? For Maria Garcia one sign of that change is when families are automatically included in any discussions of museum plans. For other museum staff, that moment will occur when you are able to ask an average adult in Denver about his or her youthful experiences with the art museum and he or she is able to remember pleasant frequent visits with family members in their leisure time.



When artist Deborah Butterfield sculpted the three bronze horses that grace the Kemper Courtyard, she imagined children playing on them. Today Willy, Argus, and Lucky are a welcoming reminder of the museum's commitment to families. (Deborah Butterfield, *Willy, Argus, and Lucky*, 1996)



Summer Camps

At the Denver Art Museum, protected by their fish amulets, a small group of six to eight year olds crosses the treacherous Nile to a dimly lit embalming tomb where they begin to prepare the body of Djed-Hor, priest and nobleman, for the afterlife. At the dark end of a museum hallway, the children can't hear the rush of water anymore. The Nile's surging rapids are muffled in this enclosed space that has been transformed from an ordinary hallway to a twilight world some 2,700 years in the past.

This isn't the only way the curving hallway has been altered for summer camps. For Adventures of White Heron Castle, it becomes a rocky mountain-side that children, ringing copper bells on sticks, travel to reach Mount Fuji. During the final afternoon of Much More Than Four Legs, the airy space resembles an art gallery where kids exhibit a week's worth of their chair designs for doting patrons—family and friends who sip sparkling cider from plastic champagne glasses.



Outside in the sculpture garden, the People of the Jaguar sit in costumes they've worked on for four days. To the steady beat of a drum, the kids lift their arms up to the sky and turn to the four corners of the Earth. While slowly dancing in a circle, they conjure up the opening ceremony to an ancient ballgame.

Museum summer camps end in celebrations where children can share what they've learned and created with their families and friends. The camps give children a sense of ownership and pride in the museum. Galleries become familiar and comfortable, and adventures often are shared well into the future. One boy was so taken with Adventures of White Heron Castle that he wanted to eat only Japanese food and wear Japanese clothes.

"These children are here in their leisure time—what they think of as vacation," says Patterson Williams, dean of education and master teacher for Asian art. "We would not be able to get the kids to sign up for the camps on the basis of what they learn alone. Our challenge as a museum is to find ways to engage audiences in their leisure time. In this sense, we're very different from schools."

Since 1998, the museum's master

teachers have created several four-day summer art camps for children. Each focuses on a particular culture and collection with which the master teacher works.

"The master teachers' summer camp assignment was to take the way they related passionately to art in our collection and turn it into something that's magical for kids," says Williams. There was minimal interest in using similar teaching methods in each camp and maximum interest in master teachers using their preferred ways of teaching and integrating collections into each of the camps.

Each educator spends eight hours a day, four days a week with kids, working on art projects, telling stories, time traveling, and exploring objects in the permanent collection as a means to learn about a particular culture and its art. The summer camps are "idea factories" as well as the corner-

stone upon which master teachers build and refine other education projects throughout the museum. "Nobody created a family backpack or any other program until they had at least one year of these concentrated labs under their belts," says Melora McDermott-Lewis, director of family programs and master teacher for European and American art.

All the full-day camps include amenities such as



Adorned in the Maya clothing, jewelry, and feathered headdresses they have created, campers dance with musical instruments before beginning an ancient ball game. Colorful banners they have made line the courtyard.

supervised lunch and snack breaks, early drop-off, and late pick-up. Each camp has fifteen students (including three scholarship students) and usually three summer teaching interns. These paid interns work several camps during the summer, assisting with preparations and teaching under the supervision of various master teachers.

Their assistance was critical in the development stages of the camps, the first four years they were taught; but as the camps took shape assistance was reduced and now camps use 2 unpaid interns as assistants.

Although the camps' overall format remains the same, master teachers bring their individual interests and passions. Carla Hartman, master teacher for architecture, design and graphics, for example, wants her kids to be fascinated by making chairs from their imaginations. Her camp is largely about process; she wants to turn over her power as a teacher as much as possible, so that by the end of the week, there is a collaborative sense much like that in a design studio. Williams, on the other hand, brings cultural history to life through imaginative storytelling. Kids travel through the galleries on journeys that parallel those of four imaginary Japanese children who lived in a castle two hundred years ago.



Campers participating the museum's People of the Jaguar program add a few modern touches to an ancient Maya ball game on the final day of class.

People of the Jaguar Camp

(for nine to twelve year olds)

Taught by Gretchen DeScoise, master teacher for pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial art

When kids sign up for People of the Jaguar, they do more than join an art class. They travel back in time with a sportive sense of purpose. At the end of the week, they will dress in full regalia that they have created, and march to the outdoor sculpture garden to compete in an ancient Maya ballgame.

The event is great fun, but DeScoise infuses it with artistic and cultural meaning. In making their own outfits, children learn about Maya animals, dance, ritual, myth, and ceremony. Campers become traders, bartering for feathers with chocolate beans. They also meet a live macaw, solve riddles about gallery objects, and listen to spooky tales that pit ancient good guys against evil lords of death. They handle jade and create their own incense

burners. Woven into everything they do is the art and history of the Maya people, who lived centuries ago in the rainforests of what is now Guatemala.

For camp participants, the unexpected begins on the first morning of the first day. As children approach the classroom, they come face to face with a life-sized jaguar who guards the doors. The stuffed creature beckons them into the room. Within a few hours, tables are strewn with jadelike green fun foam, glue, scissors, beads, green straws, gold and silver glitter. The children are working on collars and wristlets that they will wear for the ballgame's opening ceremony.

Michael, ten, cuts tiny strips of fun foam and glues them onto his neckpiece to make a raised linear face. He adds painted gold and silver embellishments in careful patterns accented with beads. At another table, Paul, also ten, hangs green straws from the fun foam. "I can imagine the jade, when it dangles and hits your chest, would make a nice sound," he says.

That morning, the kids looked at jade adornments in the museum's pre-Columbian gallery. They sat in a semicircle around a huge stone stela incised with a linear image of a ruler. DeSciore pointed out his elaborate headdress, adorned with hundreds of feathers and his heavy jade collar, wristlets, and ballgame belt. From her basket, she passed around jade ear spools just like the ones in the ruler's ears.

"When you were walking in the stream



Jaguar Burial Urn, AD 650-800, Late Classic Maya

bed, you might find a stone like this," DeSciore says. "If you broke it open, it looked like jade inside. Put it up to your cheek and feel how cool it is."

The stela is a springboard to the past. The children learn that sculptors carved the monument to honor their city's ruler. The stone would have been painted red like his blood, which he shed during a ceremony of prayer and fasting to help guide decisions, ward off famine and to keep the rains coming and the corn growing—or even in anticipation of a ballgame.

"The rainforest takes over these large carvings," DeSciore says. "Perhaps a

huge tropical storm blew over this stela. It fell down flat on the face you see. Although his nose and chin are broken off, you can see he is facing to the right in profile. The Maya wanted people to see their beautiful profiles. They loved sloping foreheads. Babies destined to be rulers wore boards that pressed their heads into a point to make them look like ears of corn.”

DeSciouse weaves in just enough history to connect directly to objects at hand. The children naturally begin to decipher the symbolic meaning of what they’re looking at. They see that Maya art reflects Maya beliefs. As the kids move back and forth all week between the pre-Columbian gallery and their classroom, they begin to feel at home in the museum. They are able to use objects to direct their own learning.

“I use objects and art making as doors to discovery,” DeSciouse says. “I remember as a child that there was something so magical about making something terrific—you felt so good about yourself. Those are the things you will never forget. The children will remember that they felt good about learning and experiencing the Maya and their art.”

DeSciouse also uses storytelling to animate objects. Each day after lunch, the kids settle down on cushions to hear the next installment of a great Maya myth that transports them to another time and place. In front of the squirmy bunch, DeSciouse sits calmly next to a strange lumpy object covered in black cloth. The

children keep rustling around as she tells them they are about to hear a story from the Popol Vuh, a famous Maya book filled with tales once passed down orally from one generation to the next. This will be scary, she assures them, and they might not want the lights turned off.

Suddenly riveted by the possibility of hearing a creepy tale, they quiet down and energetically reassure her that spookier is better! Except for a spotlight illuminating her and the shadowy form, the room is dark. “Imagine long, long ago, there were two brothers, the Hero Twins, who were living on the face of the earth,” DeSciouse begins. “These kids were different from ordinary people—they were mythic characters who fought against evil.”

Standing up, she lifts the black shroud and reveals an elaborate diorama populated with creatures from the Maya underworld. No one is fidgeting now. Cardboard stalactites and stalagmites enclose a stunted world of twisted barren trees, strange owls, an albino rat, miniature huts made of sticks and jaguar fur, and black steps ascending through a hole in a roof to the barren top—the earth at the beginning of Maya time.

“This diorama is my idea of what the underworld was like,” DeSciouse says. “It is Xibalba, which means ‘The Place of Fear and Trembling.’ In Xibalba, it was freezing cold. Nothing grew. It was mostly dark. You could only get to this underworld through holes. Where could those holes in the earth be?”

The kids shout out possible places,

such as the Khumbu Ice Falls in the Himalayas, volcanoes, an ocean, or even a fire.

“The Maya tell us that not only was the underworld really cold, gloomy, and dark, but it also was so smelly that all the people there had to smoke cigars.”

Throughout the story, DeSciose weaves humor with adventure. She picks up two cardboard diorama characters, One Hunter and Seven Hunter, based on images in the museum’s pre-Columbian art collection. On top of the diorama, the pair races back and forth in endless ball-games. Their noise irritates underworld gods—lords of death such as Scab Master, Bone Scepter, Blood Gatherer, and Trash Master. These laminated cardboard characters are also based on actual

images on Maya objects. In this way, DeSciose integrates the museum collection by dramatizing it in ways that spark imagination and create visual memories.

The characters tell the kids about the Maya’s three-part world—heaven, earth, and the underworld. DeSciose has tailored the myth for nine to twelve year olds, populating it with scary things, wonderful heroes, power, mystery, and discovery. The mythic beings have to solve problems and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They use their magic and their wits to confront the evil lords of death.

When DeSciose first started thinking about developing a summer camp for children, she knew she wanted to incorporate a theatrical storytelling component while

capitalizing on things of natural interest, such as animal companions. The adventures of the Hero Twins involved such a complex interweaving of characters and adventures that she decided to create a diorama.

“I thought, ‘How could I make the Popol Vuh myths more memorable to kids?’” DeSciose recalls.



Exploring a diorama of the Maya underworld makes it easy to remember stories from the Popol Vuh, the Maya book of creation.

“It has so much resonance in terms of imagery used on Mayan pots.”

Interns and assistants helped DeSciouse create a portable, two-by-three-foot diorama that was light enough to carry into the gallery but substantial enough to convey a theaterlike drama of a fantasy world.

“I had no idea it was going to be such a hit,” DeSciouse says. “I was stunned by the power of that diorama. I’ve never had kids sit there open-mouthed for forty-five minutes!”

The diorama is successful in part because it looks homemade. Kids feel like they can make something like it themselves. During the camp, children start their own dioramas but are encouraged to extend their interests beyond the classroom by finishing them at home with packets that include outlined characters to color and glue onto cardboard.

“Storytelling is an important part of life,” DeSciouse says. “It’s the basis for why people read for pleasure, why they go to the movies. My grandfather was a fabulous storyteller. He told stories to us growing up. Those are some of my happiest memories.”

Recounting the myths gives kids a visual sense for the Maya world and helps them connect imaginatively and emotionally to their art projects, games, and adventures in the galleries. Before hearing a traditional macaw story, the children spend a morning with a brilliantly colored visitor—Maya, a blue and gold macaw. After the children spend a few moments

admiring Maya’s iridescent mix of feathers and bright eyes, her owner, James Bunnell, launches her into flight. She lands on nine-year-old Rachel’s shoulder.

At the end of the visit, Bunnell passes around a vase of Maya’s shed tail feathers. Each child picks one to adorn head-dresses they will make.

After Maya and Bunnell leave, the classroom turns into a rainforest trading market. Each camper gets a bag supplied with thirty chocolate beans, one piece of jade worth five chocolate beans, and one Lincoln penny that they learn is a mysterious and apparently worthless piece of unrecognizable material to the Maya. They also get a recipe for Maya hot chocolate to make at home.

Interns become traders who preside over brightly painted baskets brimming with feathers of all sizes and colors. A card explains what various feathers are worth. The children are encouraged to look carefully through their valuables and count them to get a sense for the barter value system.

“I’m not sure the Maya feather traders are going to be interested in American money,” DeSciouse says. “You’re going to have to come up with a way to get them interested. You also need to purchase at least one big green quetzal feather.”

At the word go, the children almost instantly transform into tenacious Maya barterers. At teaching assistant Carmen Ruyle’s station, Austin starts haggling over a quetzal feather, finally trading twelve precious chocolate beans and the

Lincoln penny for it. “I’ve learned that Carmen is kind of a pushover. I told her my penny was like a priceless bronze token. When she saw that it was minted in 1997, she said, ‘Oh, maybe it’s worth 1,997 chocolate beans.’ She gave me this—the best feather you can get.”

A bunch of kids rush over when intern Ben Irwin announces that he is slashing his prices. “I got a red and a yellow feather from Ben for one penny,” Carolyn says. “Ben said, ‘It’s like I’m robbing you by taking the penny.’ I convinced him that Abe is a very good man. He does good deeds.”

The Maya barterers get so involved in their pursuit of valuables that some of them run out of trading goods. DeSciose opens a bank and loans chocolate beans in return for later clean-up duty in the classroom.

“Kids are fascinated with feathers,” DeSciose says. “But it took me a number of years to refine the trading activity. Younger kids just give everything away to get feathers; they don’t see the fun in bargaining. This activity works best with children nine and up because they get such a kick out of trading. And it slows them down so they make better decisions.”

DeSciose took the penny idea from a pre-Columbian school tour in which participants compared a known cultural artifact, the Lincoln penny, with an unknown pre-Columbian artifact. “I want the kids to realize that to the Maya the penny wouldn’t be valuable. It helps convey what we unconsciously know about our

culture and what we are dealing with when we look at artifacts from a culture we don’t know.”

This third day is all about macaws. Maya the macaw visits in the morning, followed by a flurry of feather trading. Then the children return to the stela in the pre-Columbian gallery to listen to another Popol Vuh story. This one is about Seven Macaw, a gilded and arrogant mythic bird.

Back in their classroom, they begin to adorn their feathered headdresses with their own, individual symbols, images, and animal companions.

Candide adds a dolphin to her headband. “I like dolphins,” she says. “I’ve been collecting dolphin things forever, since I was six.”

Ten-year-old Andrew works on a demon face to symbolize the balance of good and evil in the world. He is thinking back to Xibalba and the stories he has heard this week.

“There has to be a lot of violence and brutality in the underworld,” he says. “The underworld has to balance out the peacefulness with violence. Think about it. The underworld is mostly a punishment for living a bad life. If there was no violence in Xibalba you wouldn’t really have a punishment, and the human race wouldn’t exist. If the underworld weren’t so violent, the Maya would not have survived.”

Phillip and Carly launch into a long talk about crops, hunting, and the Maya. They are debating the things they are making on their headdresses. This sort of

social interaction is another key component of the camp. Children start to develop their own looking, thinking, and feeling skills, and to discuss what they are doing.

Immersed in a creative environment for several days, the children begin to blend their symbols with those of the Maya. They realize instinctively that all things can be alive and filled with power, a concept central to Maya belief.

Throughout the week, the kids also play discovery games in the galleries. On the last day, DeSciose takes them to a part of the gallery they haven't explored. She stops in front of some stone objects carved in shapes of people and animals, each of which has a hole at the top.

"Think like archaeologists," she says. "What could these strange objects, hachas, have been used for?" Weaving in excitement about the day's upcoming ceremony, she says, "Here's another clue. These were all buried with ballgame belts."

By now the kids know enough to make sophisticated suppositions about what is inside the case. "I think these represent teams," Erin says. "If the team lost, they could bury these."

The rest of the day is devoted to preparing for the ballgame. Just before guests arrive, the children dress up. In their own costumes, they become Maya contestants on the Macaw or Jaguar teams. Splendid in their feathered head-dresses, ear spools, jade collars, ballgame belts, and printed Maya tunics, they line up. Holding banners high, they walk to

the sculpture garden.

On one side of the lawn, long tables display party food. To either side of their playing field are two hoops. If one team scores with the large ball, that team automatically wins—something that has happened only once during the camp's four years.

Inside the garden, incense burns from a pot presided over by dancer Patricia Sigala who leads the children in a traditional opening ceremony for the ballgame. Sigala works for the Museum of International Folk Art in Sante Fe and traces her own heritage back to central Mexico.

Dressed traditionally, in brightly colored, elaborately embroidered and appliquéd clothing, she gives the children a sense of the sacredness of the Maya ballgame and an appreciation of ritual and ceremony.

"You are wearing all your finest regalia," she says. "I was invited to help you dedicate this sacred space."

She passes around a smoking incense burner so the children can breathe in the aroma and purify themselves to be focused ball players. Turning in four directions, they honor the earth's north, south, east, and west, and the center of their circle—the path the sun takes each day in the ancient Maya world and theirs, as well. Holding water, conch shells, rattles, and chocolate beans, they turn upward to the sky and bend down to the ground. Slowly, they sing a song as a drum beats in the background.

Finishing their dance, the children clump into teams for the long-anticipated

ballgame. In the center, Erin keeps score using specially marked scorecards with Maya numbers.

The game begins. “Hands!” “Out of bounds!” “Goal!” The teams race back and forth. In the end, it’s a tie. The Macaws and Jaguars head off to greet their friends and family and have a snack.

“It’s taken me a number of years to get the class to where it is today,” DeSciore says. “Every year the composition of the class is a little different, but one of the things that always appeals to the kids is the art making and the stories. I always start with the assumption that all kids are capable, and that they all want to learn.”

Much More Than Four Legs Camp

(for nine to twelve year olds)

Taught by Carla Hartman, master teacher for architecture, design and graphics

During their four days in Much More Than Four Legs, each child will make ten or more chairs of every shape, variety, texture, color, and material. They will glue on tissue paper, pasta curls, ceramic mosaic pieces, beads, and pompoms; pound flower colors into fabric; and bend wire and pipe cleaners into feet, backs, and tiny numbers on the face of a clock-shaped chair. They will make fishbowl chairs, seats for lounging, and couches for kings, queens, and tiny people. Some of this furniture will rock. One will walk on leaves. By the time they emerge from this intense world of design creativity, the

kids probably will never look at chairs the same way again.

On the first morning, however, most of the newcomers usually still think of a chair as just a chair. Their classroom begins as a sparse, orderly workshop like that of a nineteenth century craftsman. It is supplied with balsa wood, Popsicle sticks, sandpaper, and cutting tools. A day later, the classroom begins to feel more and more like a contemporary designer’s studio overflowing with controlled chaos—colorful tissue paper, fabric, gold leaf, feathers, and sparkling stars on little wires.

“The first day is more structured, and then, as their perceptions are validated



It doesn’t take long for Much More Than Four Legs campers to discover that a chair is more than just a chair. A seemingly ordinary object becomes extraordinary when campers apply their imaginations to create different designs.

and encouraged, they start to determine more and more of their own artistic process,” says Hartman. “I give up my power in a sense, and they become the teachers, so that eventually we are all in a collaboration together.”

Sharing ideas starts in the first few minutes, as Hartman asks the children how many chairs they have sat in on that particular day.

“This morning, I sat in my television chair in my bedroom,” says eight-year-old Morgan. “I sat on my breakfast chair and the car seat. I don’t think about them much. I sit in them every day.”

Hartman talks about function, comfort, and other basic concepts to encourage broader thinking. The children then visit the pre-1900 design gallery, where they decide on their favorite chairs. They decide what would be most comfortable, their favorite fabric, leg, arm, seat, knee, foot, and back. As they wander through the gallery mulling over their choices, they begin to slow down and start trusting their own judgment.

“What they need to do at the beginning is learn about the basic chair and explore all the wonderful qualities in pre-1900 furniture,” Hartman says. “This is a great chance to think about wood, marquetry, gilding, ormolu, and all those things that would be forgotten if we had started in the contemporary design gallery.”

The kids hunt for fifteen examples of gilding and two of ormolu. They handle thirty blocks of wood, including walnut,

hard maple, red alder, teak, Douglas fir, and rosewood, noting differences in color and grain. They also pass around photographed details of microscopic graining.

“I want them to start thinking about the object, to see that this is a gallery of wooden chairs, and to consider designers’ constraints back then,” Hartman says. “I don’t want to lecture. I want to tell stories and give hints that might be exciting.”

After children get a taste for chair anatomy and materials, they return to the classroom. Today there are boxes and bags loaded with balsa wood and Popsicle sticks, as well as a “messy and dangerous” station with xacto5 knives and hot-glue guns manned by interns who help throughout the week. The kids work in close-knit units to foster the sharing of ideas.

“I decided that we would only discuss historical materials on the first day,” Hartman says. “We’d concentrate on a limited amount of ornamentation. The “constraint chair” project is a great way to start. In this project children begin to see multiple ways to design from a limited set of wooden materials. With this firm basis, it’s easier the next day to go to the contemporary design galleries and begin to explore the mind-boggling variety of materials, forms, and artistic expressions.”

Following a brief introduction to the wood, children begin their own projects.

“I saw some designs upstairs that I like,” Jasmine says. “It was all wood, cushy, and it had pointy stuff on its rungs.”

Sarah adds a ladder to her chair, which has tall skinny legs. “A ladder would make it easier to get up there,” she says. “Probably I would just sit up there and read a book or watch television. Mine is a ladder to a bench in the sky.”

Her twin brother, Joseph, looks over and starts making his own ladder, which he says can turn over and become a sliding board. “This looks like a giant doll chair. Some of my Beanie babies might try to sit on it, but they aren’t quite tall enough to climb up. They couldn’t jump up there, so they would have to go up the ladder.”

Just before lunch, the children line their first creations along the sill of tall bay windows in a high traffic area of the art studio lobby. Then they gather along curving benches below the windows to talk about their chairs. They focus on their own chairs until Hartman asks them to pick out one thing that they like in someone else’s work, and what would they do differently if they did the project again.

By the camp’s third day, the bay windows are full of an astonishing array of chairs. Each child claims a sill below his or her own window in the busy lobby. Hartman deliberately encourages public display of the chairs as well as some interaction with museum visitors.

“The kids are so reinforced by visitors who come upon this mini-exhibition and talk about how wonderful the chairs are,” she says.

Hana’s collection, like all the rest, is

growing. Along with her delicate double-seated “constraint chair,” she’s added a whimsical bumblebee chair. “We went up to the modern gallery,” Hana says to an onlooker. “I saw one inspired by a Chinese bellflower. I started thinking about flowers and bees.”

Morgan’s chairs are in a neighboring sill. The day before, she used a smorgasbord of materials to make at least ten designs, including bed chairs, tent chairs, chairs made of buttons, and even a stool with incised wear marks on the bottom of its tiny feet. She shows off her toothpick chair. “It’s for a king,” Morgan says. “It has tables and a footrest.”

On the third day, as both a break and a gentle segue back into the world of design, they take a field trip to the Light Spot modern design shop three blocks down the street.

Inside, the children break into small groups. Each group is joined by one of the camp’s interns. The space is filled with leather couches, body-molding recliners, soft beds, and sophisticated tables. The children are to choose only three chairs to sit on, using their eyes and minds rather than their bodies to find the best, the most comfortable, and the most startling of all the chairs.

Eventually, three or four kids end up perching on metal bar stools shaped like flower petals. Joseph calls his a “comfy” stool, and his sister Sarah names hers “Twist”.

“When you see these stools, they look like plain old spinning around ones,”

Januki says. “You think it’s not going to be comfortable, but it’s comfy. I feel like I’m floating on a cloud.”

“At Light Spot, the kids can hone their looking skills further,” Hartman says. “And it cements the idea that design is available for purchase—to be brought into the home. Suddenly they are looking at the toothpaste container and saying, ‘I want this in my bathroom.’”

Leaving the store, the children take rubbings of anything and everything on the short walk back to the museum. Armed with blank paper and thick waxy crayons, they find patterns on the parking lot pavement, streetlights, fences, construction signs, sandbags, discarded bicycle wheels, and window screens. Someone discovers colorful marbles embedded in cement blocks on an office building. A group of three rubs their names from letters on a manhole cover. Gabe finds a raised diamond motif at the very base of a street post. Hana creates a collage with different textures and color patterns. Other children follow her lead. Hartman deliberately did not tell the children to do this. “If I had said, ‘Why don’t you combine them,’ then it would have been forced. It wouldn’t have been as enthusiastically embraced as it was when they discovered it on their own,” she says.

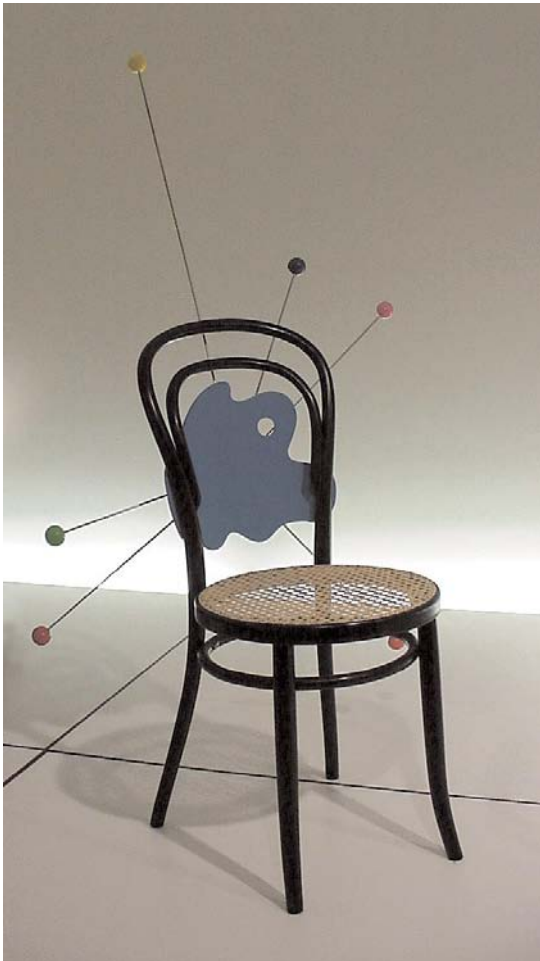
That afternoon, Hartman introduces the children to her own chair collection. In four mini-van loads, she has hauled in a sampling to make various points about design, construction, and connoisseurship. At least half of the fifteen chairs

are originals created by Ray and Charles Eames, the husband-and-wife designers who also happen to be Hartman’s grandparents. Pointing to a tall, swiveling chair, Hartman asks the children to speculate about its use. Rather than giving out answers, she gets them to think about form, function, and design. After talking and using their eyes to feel, the children take turns sitting in the chairs.

“The class is constantly changing pace and using different instructional tools,” Hartman says. “We use the galleries as one tool. The kids and all their collections are another, and the Eames examples are another. I have a world of ideas that I want to convey to them within the week, but I don’t know the order. I make sure the ideas get interjected but in a seemingly unstructured way. This way they are almost discovering it themselves, but then I hone it for them.”

Providing the Eames chairs and materials is like inviting world-class designers into the class. Their creations are yet another springboard to talking about everything from collecting, to attention to detail, to design and the manufacturing process. The children have already talked about their own collections, which helps them connect personally to those of others.

“Yes, Ray and Charles Eames are very important twentieth century designers, but I make them seem real by talking about the importance of every little thing that went onto their breakfast table. Each object was a thoughtfully placed item unto itself and in relation to others,” Hartman says.



Drawing from sources from books, collections, and their own personal experience, campers form a connection to and appreciation for the creations of other designers. Campers study multiple chairs in the museum's collection, including Alessandro Mendini's "Michael Thonet" side chair.

After lounging on the life-sized versions, the children return to their classroom to find miniatures of Eames chairs. They look like toys, but they are not. They are scale models produced by Vitra, a European manufacturing firm.

Throughout the years, Hartman has collected delicate renditions of the Eames chairs and those of other designers. As

she holds each one up, the group discusses whether or not they are an Eames design. They mark their guesses on paper and then talk about their ideas. Hartman holds up a DCW (Dining Chair Wood) example and asks for opinions. One or two vote it down, but it's thumbs up for the rest. It's an Eames chair.

"It's an Eames because of the legs," says Sarah. "The color of the wood, the little bitty ridges like the splints that Carla talked about yesterday make it an Eames."

The children end their exploration of the intimate world of designers with a film by Hartman's brother, Eames Demetrios, about the Eames Office.

By the final day, the classroom has been fully transformed into a contemporary design studio. Children concentrate on their own large chairs—cardboard forms that they design—but they also roam around to collect more supplies and to observe the scene unfolding around them. Their whole environment has blossomed, from the chair examples hanging on the ceiling to bins and baskets overflowing with materials and ideas. Where there was just balsa wood and a handful of tools the first day, there are now ornamentation stations crammed with supplies for painting, stenciling, stamping, gilding, aluminum foil piercing, flower pounding, and more.

Interns preside over the stations. Outside, teaching assistant Julia Tomasini is helping Emily and Januki pound flowers to create floral colors and shapes on

unbleached muslin. Emily has created a pattern where glass blades surround a yellow cosmos.

“We created this technique as a way to capture the look of flowers on chair upholstery,” Tomasini says. “Geraniums work really well. Cosmos and petunias are good. Fuchsias are too juicy.”

At another station, intern Ben Irwin demonstrates patina techniques. Other helpers guide the gilding process. The studio is full of energy. The kids are so engrossed that almost everyone votes to cut their lunch hour in half.

Michael Allen can’t wait any longer to finish his chair, which has a papier-mâché mask of his face glued to the back. The mask’s mouth is a little door into his mind, he says. When people go through, they can find out what he’s thinking about.

“You jump in, and you are in my mind,” he says. “It’s playful and funny.

This side, opposite the mask, is like the little room in my head. It has everything real that I think of.”

There are rolling plastic eyeballs and metallic stars for the meteor shower he watched with his family the other night. He added stamps representing animals. Pipe cleaner coils are like the leathery green snake he stroked at the zoo. The symbols and meanings go on and on.

On a nearby table, Eli is finishing his “Fresh Feet” chair in neon orange and black. The chair was inspired by a foot stamp that reminds him of his shoes at home. On the cushion, he has made a clear window through which orange feathers show, inspired by a stuffed plastic pillow he saw in New York City.

Many of the children are tucking away fabric samples into the compartments underneath the seats of their chairs. Earlier, they bartered with ceramic



During the final gallery activity, each camper receives a little flip book with line drawings of classic chairs. They then add alterations, making the designs their own.

mosaic pieces as money for these materials at a fabric bazaar, where they haggled over prices with the interns.

“I got a ton of leather,” says Joseph, pulling samples from the pockets of his apron. “I got this one from Amber Brown for a quarter. She said I was ripping her off, but I wasn’t because look how bad it is!”

“With the fabric bazaar, we limit their choices,” Hartman says. “It forces them to be more thoughtful. As soon as they start looking and feeling, it’s exciting. They start noticing things about texture and pattern and color, and it makes upholstery more meaningful.”

Throughout the day, excitement builds about the upcoming chair exhibit. One by one, Hartman draws each child aside to claim a table on which to display his or her work.

“The set-up process is really critical and very interesting,” Hartman says. “You see certain things coming out that are from tidbits I’ve given them during the week.”

As anticipation for the final party builds, Hartman takes the children to the modern furniture gallery for one last visit. This time, it’s less of a looking experience and more of an intense creative process. Each child gets a little flip-book with line drawings of classic chairs (such as one by Gio Ponti, who also designed the Denver Art Museum building). Hartman has them look at the line drawings and add their own embellishments. Their alterations become increasingly individual and complicated.

“We start seeing a lot of variations,”

Hartman says. “It becomes far more diverse. They begin to understand that there are multiple possibilities.”

When the children come downstairs, the concourse already is filling with guests. Hartman’s own full-scale chairs are lined up along the bay windows. An Eames table holds black-and-white portraits of Ray and Charles. The children toast with sparkling cider, but they are most interested in getting out to talk with onlookers about their artwork.

Eli has arranged about ten chairs designed with ModgePodge glue into what he calls his “white collection.” Next to him, Gabe has set his pasta mosaic chair in front of everything else he has made. This is the third year in a row that Gabe and his sister Hannah have participated in the chair camp. Gabe considers pasta one of his camp trademarks. Last year, he made an elaborate spaghetti chair embedded with metallic embossed diamonds and rectangles and adorned with a cobalt tile gilded with insect motifs. Before taking the camps, he had never seen an Eames chair. Now he can spot originals and counterfeits. He has even started “putting a little design” into the wooden furniture he makes in his grandfather’s garage in Wyoming.

“They love the class,” his mother, Barbara, says. “You are crossing cultural boundaries, time periods, and looking at visual elements, structure, tactile qualities. They love to look over catalogues, and they love contemporary architecture. It’s all because of this class. I love it!”

Adventures of White Heron Castle Camp

(for six to eight year olds)

Taught by Patterson Williams, master teacher for Asian art

Before the museum doors officially open, a flock of six to eight year old summer campers bursts out of the elevator onto the fifth floor in search of some hint of a Japanese castle and the town that surrounds it. They don't realize that they will find their goal in a folding screen. So for this first chance to imaginatively walk into art works and merge the worlds of history, art, and imagination, they need some clues.

Turning into the Japan gallery, the kids spy a three-dimensional paper heron. Then they see a second heron and follow it to a scene at the other end of the room. Their search is over. On a pair of gold screens is a bustling Japanese port town. The kids settle down around Williams, who takes them on a journey back to White Heron Castle in 1800.

As Williams begins her story, the summer campers become young lords and ladies of Japan. With their imaginations, they will join four fictional Japanese children on adventures throughout the week. Williams assures them from the beginning that some of what they hear is real and some just pretend. The folding screen depicting the harbor scene is not actually related to the real White Heron Castle, but Williams uses it to illustrate her story. She has combined historical fact

and fiction to make the world of White Heron Castle compelling for the campers. Drawing from classic children's literature, Williams weaves a story with moments of suspense, surprise, humor, and some improvisations stimulated by the campers' responses. At times the behavior of the four children in the story mirrors that of real children. They squabble, get bored, and upset their parents. This element increases the sense of identity the campers develop with the characters in the story.

In the early morning quiet of the gallery, the campers meet their fictional counterparts. Taro, a six-year-old boy, is fascinated by war. Takashi, a seven-year-old boy, likes nature. Yoko is an eight-year-old girl who loves art. And Meiko, nine, another girl, is extremely drawn to history. The interests of the characters in Williams' story parallel some of the important cultural values that underlie artworks in the museum collection.

These children, each from a different family, all live in apartments of White Heron Castle and its surrounding town, Williams begins. "Many other families live there, as well. They aren't all related, but they are all loyal to the lord of the castle."

One day, the children are left alone by their parents, so they head inside the castle. After overhearing two servants talking about a secret passageway, the kids discover it. Behind a folding screen depicting a tiger and a dragon (an actual screen in the museum gallery) they find a



White Heron Castle campers open traditional folded paper letters from the wooden sculpture of a Shinto deity. The message will help them make a safe journey to Mt. Fuji.

hidden door and creep inside. It is completely dark. Stumbling along blindly, they eventually bump into something. Stairs. Up and up and up they climb. The steps end in a wall. A bit of daylight squeezes through a crack.

Using her hands, Williams feels the solid stone and pulls an imaginary sliver of metal that opens the door into a room at the top of the castle. They find themselves in a square loft with windows on all sides. It's like a secret clubhouse. Outside, stretching to the horizon in every direction, are the places the children in Williams's class will explore with Taro, Yoko, Meiko, and Takashi.

In one adventure, the children will journey to the ocean, dipping their feet in rolling waves as they search for seashells.

In another, they will travel to a distant pine forest at the base of Mount Fuji. Other adventures will take them to a rice field, where farmers harvest their crops, and a port town, where merchants trade for goods from afar. All the places they will visit in their imaginations were selected by Williams to convey a sense of the major geographical features of Japan and to relate to specific art works in the Japan gallery.

"This is a class about cultural learning," Williams says. "I know the kids will find the art projects enjoyable, and they help them cement and synthesize what they learn in the galleries and stories. The art making is secondary to imagining living in Japan in the year 1800 and to imagine using, owning and handling the things in the Japan collection from that time."

Williams' goal is to get children to think about the visual qualities of Japanese objects. "I want them to understand the importance of fine craftsmanship and that many Japanese art objects are expressions of metaphorical or poetic thinking."

The class revolves around the art objects, their history, and the people who made them, but Williams' imaginary tales help the kids connect intellectually and emotionally. Children tend to remember when they are fed information through stories.

"History gives you the facts but not the life," Williams says. "The art in our gallery comes out of people's lives—the things they wore, used, treasured—and it

reflects their lives. I want that world to come alive for the kids.”

On the first morning in the gallery, the kids lean forward to hear Williams’s tale. Taro, Meiko, Yoko, and Takashi have discovered something ghostly in front of the shadowy tokonoma in the magic castle room. A tokonoma is an alcove used to display a flower arrangement or a work of art. At many points in the camp, the “spirit of the castle” (a character loosely based on the sixteenth-seventeenth century shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu) creates surprises, and this is one. As the children in the story peer into the dusky alcove, smoke seems to swirl, and gradually they see a long low object covered in a black cloth. The object has been placed there by the spirit of the castle.

Williams leans forward and asks, “They had to decide whether to look under the black cloth or not. Would you?”

“Yes!” the kids shout.

“Go find it! Look around the gallery for a long low object under a black cloth, but don’t touch it!” Williams tells them.

The campers jump up and fan out through the gallery. They find the object resting in front of the samurai armor and sword case, where nothing had been a few minutes earlier. (Teaching assistant Julia Tomasini has stealthily placed it there.) They sit as closely as possible around the mystery object. Barely containing their excitement, they watch as Williams asks one of the campers to lift the cloth to reveal a long sword resting on a stand. In the story, Taro also pulls off the fabric to



During the week, campers make their own swords. This five-step activity introduces them to the intricate sword-making process. Once they are done, campers practice “dancing with the sword” using elements of martial arts exercises.

reveal a sword. “Such a sword must have been made by a fine craftsman and artist,” says Yoko. Takashi says it might be made of natural materials like iron and sharkskin. And Meiko thinks it might belong to a famous samurai warrior.

Standing in front of the case, Rachel, six, gets to hold the reproduction sword blade-edge away from Williams, a sign of respect. The kids learn a bit about sword manners and then look more closely at the sword in the museum case. On this sword they notice the hamon, the temper-

ing line found near the edge of the blade. The hamon is one of the characteristics used to determine the quality of Japanese sword blades. The wavy pattern fused into the gleaming blade reminds the kids of many things—mountains, waves, curly hair, even dancing. Just as real sword connoisseurs name hamon for the associations they bring to mind, so the campers develop their own associations about the sword in the museum collection.

During the week, they will make five components for their own swords—getting the handle last of all. The drawn-out activity gives the kids an idea of the arduous swordsmithing process. In the classroom, on tables arranged in a giant U shape, are sword blades made of gatorboard, a durable, lightweight synthetic board that is easy to cut. Before drawing their own hamon patterns with silver oil pastels, the kids try out their ideas on paper printed with three separate blade outlines. These practice sheets encourage thoughtful choices and deliberate creations. Some campers call Williams “Miss Patty Practice Paper” for the constant use of practice sheets. Many of the art projects are partially pre-made so that the campers can focus on one aspect, get a quick result and spend more time in imagination activities involving art works in the collection.

After lunch, the campers once again find themselves in the gallery listening to a story, this time about the tokonomas in the homes of the children in the story. Every day, each family would put some-

thing valuable in the alcoves. Yoko, who loves art, was sometimes allowed to place these objects for her family. When she did, she used three prized possessions—a clay incense box shaped like a small rabbit, a moon-shaped hanging flower vase, and a painting made with a single swipe of black ink. The painting formed a circle (a Zen meditation symbol) that reminded Yoko of both nothing and everything. It also made her think of a full moon.

Once again in the Japan gallery, the campers go searching for “Yoko’s toko.” What they have imagined appears magically in the museum’s tokonoma. All the more intrigued by thoughts of Yoko and her treasures, the campers sit down and examine everything set out on the tatami mat in the museum display.

Returning to their classroom, they discover their own black cardboard tokos. Each has an open upper compartment above two sliding doors that reveal an inner storage nook. The children will decorate their tokonoma with wispy sheets of gold leaf and silvery moons.

Thinking about Yoko and her toko, the kids watch as Williams demonstrates how to adhere the shimmering tissue onto their dark boxes and create a night sky with clouds and a moon. No two campers do this the same way, and the materials ensure that some accidental effects will happen. To help with the challenges that may arise, campers are grouped into teams headed by interns.

Interns guide their young lords and ladies through everything from art



Images of the moon, a popular theme in Japanese art, decorate the alcoves, or tokonomas, that campers make and take home. Inside they display respected objects.

projects to gallery adventures. When a child needs special directions, his or her team leader is there to advise or demonstrate. Given the variations in manual dexterity and frustration levels in this age group, the team system makes a big difference in the satisfaction each child experiences in this camp.

After they learn how to apply gold leaf, some kids put it down in bold or random patterns. Gavin, who has swords on his mind, scratches a blade and handle into the metallic surface. Another child creates a crescent moon. At the end of the day, the boxes are lined side by side

along the wall. For the rest of the week, they will hold whatever their owners decide is most important.

“I know kids will be much more interested in learning about art objects if they hear about them in stories,” Williams says. “It’s critical to build up this imaginative, emotional interest in what we are looking at.”

Later in the day, the gallery is quiet as Williams takes the campers on another imaginative adventure in the gallery. Together with the children in the story, they watch a massive procession of peacetime warriors approaching their castle. They carry muskets, pikes, and longbows. Leading the soldiers is a great daimyo, a lord from a castle, but he is almost swallowed up by hundreds of his followers winding their way circuitously through the countryside. All the details of this scene are depicted in another folding screen in the gallery.

Among the travelers are four sixteen year old boys who are guests for the night of Taro, Yoko, Meiko, and Takashi. Even though the youths are not particularly nice, the four children politely escort them as honored guests to an evening celebration. As fireworks explode, the flashes of light illuminate each of the young men’s shinning inros or hanging lacquer boxes. Taro’s guest wears one with hunting hawks; Takashi’s guest wears one decorated with tiny scenes of the seasons of the year. Yoko spies a dancer on her guest’s inro, and Meiko sees a colorful image of foreigners from Europe. The next

morning, the four children discover that their guests have gone, but each has left his inro as a thank-you gift.

Now the campers break into teams. Each team is assigned one inro in the museum collection—the same inro featured in the story. The campers watch as their intern team leaders open envelopes and pull out color photos that show in detail the delicate boxes given to Toko, Takashi, Yoko, and Meiko. They then learn that the same inros are actually in the gallery, where they can be explored for real. Stools and flashlights are provided as children gather around museum cases to look for details in “their” inro.

But there is also a challenge to be met.

Williams asks each team to examine its inro and come up with some good reasons why it is the best. The campers prepare their arguments with help from their interns, who have already read about a dozen fascinating facts from Williams’s research about each inro.

After observing the inros, each team makes a presentation to the entire group. “They often naturally grasp what was originally meaningful to patrons and craftsmen in Japan, but one of the things I like the most is that the children say very heartfelt things about their inro,” Williams says.



Small Japanese lacquer boxes worn at the waist inspire campers to make their own “inro” and add them to a cache of cultural treasures. (Objects from left: Inro with Hawk, 18th century; Inro with Foreigner, 19th century)

Six-year-old William shyly moves to the front of the group and stands close to Williams. He says that his intro is the best because it has a netsuke, or toggle, that looks like a pod about to burst with what appear to be tiny seeds that remind him of “future generations.” A nine-year-old girl claims the intro that depicts foreigners was best because “everyone is a foreigner sometime.”

This attention to detail and metaphorical thinking is reinforced each morning when the campers arrive at the museum. On the first day, Williams hands them laminated nametags shaped like Mount Fuji in the clouds. That afternoon, the campers select new names by picking from among hundreds of stylized family crests or mons. After selecting a crest, they make up a name related to the crest image. Rachel becomes Young Lady of

the Daisies. Gavin is Young Lord of the Dragon. When the kids get their nametags the next morning, they discover that the tags now include their new names and have been translated into Japanese. This reinforces their identities as young lords and ladies living at White Heron Castle.

Before the second day begins, Williams asks one child to tap the side of a little bronze bell. They must sit in silence until the ringing subsides. For a moment, the classroom is quiet. When the bell is silent, Williams talks with the children about the flower arrangement for that day. It is a Chinese bellflower. Blooming for the first time, the plant reminds her of all the new things she’s learned from them. “This grass here that is kind of dried up and a bit dead at the end but still has a lot of life left—that’s me,” Williams tells them. Other greener grass



After studying sword guards in the collection, campers participate in a swap meet where they encounter interns acting as sword guard dealers. Using a collection of pictures as a guide, campers then design their own guards to add to their swords. (Objects from left: Sword Guard with Flowers and Water, 19th century; Sword Guard with Grasses, 18th century)

blades are the class interns. A cluster of unopened buds are for the things they all have yet to learn about Japan today and in the future, long after the camp is over.

To help campers understand esthetic values of some Japanese art like “less is more,” Williams uses another story. In this story members of an ancient Japanese court gather to select the most beautiful branch of cherry blossoms. Some courtiers choose branches with loads of blossoms, but ultimately a branch that has only a few blossoms is chosen by the empress as the most beautiful. “I feel less is more, because with so few blossoms one can pay much great attention to each one,” the empress says.

Some children don’t bring up the concept again; others return to the idea as they make their own art projects. Holding up a fan he is decorating, Austin, Young Lord of the Eager Energy, says, “I’m making more is more—a forest.” Of her fan, Chloe, Young Lady of the Nana, says, “I’m making a ‘less is more’ forest. So I just put on a little, tiny, bitty flower.”

Their classroom is a special place for art making, but it also transports the children back to Japan, and the lives of Taro, Takashi, Yoko, and Meiko. Each day the table at the front of the room grows more crowded with mementos of earlier camp experiences. The flower arrangement of the day moves to the table as it is replaced by a new arrangement. On the walls are Japanese words they’ve learned to say and use.

By the third day of camp, the kids are

so used to adventures that they can barely contain their excitement as they sit around Williams in the classroom. Today, something is bulging from the sleeves of her kimono. They hold their bodies still until they can no longer hear the silvery sound of the bronze bell. Then several kids shout, “Take it out! Take it out!” They know that the spirit of the castle likes to hide surprises in her clothing.

This time, it’s a pink envelope. Ava reads, “It’s from Meiko and Takashi.” Williams helps her read the note cards inside, each of which is a detail from ink paintings in the gallery: “Dotting like pepper, dotting like fern leaves, dotting like mouse tracks, dotting like pine needles, dotting like fur needles, dotting like blobs, dotting like plum blossoms, dotting like waves.”

After a game of looking for painting details in the gallery, they travel back in time to White Heron Castle and prepare for a long journey to Mount Fuji.

“Mukashi, mukashi—once upon a time,” Williams begins, “Meiko’s mom and dad were angry with her. Yoko’s mom and dad were angry with her, and Takashi’s parents and grandparents were angry with him. All these kids did was squabble, squabble, squabble. So the parents had a meeting to talk about the fighting. Taro’s dad said, ‘What if all four children have to take a trip by themselves, and on the trip they would have to get along. I think the trip should be at least ten days.’ ”

“The grownups asked the kids where

they would want to go, and there was more fighting. Taro wanted to go to somewhere dangerous. Takashi wanted to go to a great pine forest. Finally, Taro's dad found the castle's old gardener, who went into a room with the kids and shut the door. When they came out, the kids were beaming. The gardener had a knowing smile on his face. He said, 'We are going to a dangerous, beautiful, natural place, which has been painted by lots of artists and has been loved in the history of Japan, and it's called ...' "

"Mount Fuji!" the kids shout.

Before beginning their journey, the campers spread out into the galleries to seek out three statues of deities. They will ask these deities how to make their journey safe. Robbers or bad spirits could cause harm along the way.

Melissa and her team find Jizo, protector of travelers and children. The sculpture shows Jizo holding a sistrum, a tall staff with metal rings. The jingling of these rings would punctuate each step as he walks. All the children gather around as Melissa opens a letter folded into a traditional Japanese knot. Jizo cautions the young adventurers: "As you travel to Mount Fuji, you will feel better if you walk with a staff with bells. The sound of the bells will warn people you are coming and make sure that even the bugs beneath your feet get out of the way so you will not step on any living thing. Enjoy your journey to the mountain. Be as kind to each other as you are to the bugs in your path."

After consulting a Shinto deity and the

Eleven-headed Kannon, everyone begins the long journey to Mt. Fuji, down museum stairs, through a dark auditorium to a freight elevator lobby where they discover tall bamboo staffs adorned with little copper bells. The children clamor for their sticks. The sound of bells fills the air, and wayside inhabitants of the museum watch them pass by.

By the final day of class, the children move seamlessly back and forth between the world of White Heron Castle and the museum. An hour or so before the final camp event begins, each team sets out one last time with their interns to display the props and review artworks they've visited during the week—Yoko's tokonoma, the four inros, the sword, several ceramics, folding screens, and sculptures. The idea is for each child to take family and friends on a tour and retell the adventures of White Heron Castle. One measure of success is how little time they spend in the classroom with their art projects and how much time they spend in the galleries with the artworks.

As their guests gather outside the classroom, the kids emerge in their Japanese jackets, bow together, and invite their honored guests on a last journey to the land of White Heron Castle. The tour begins in the classroom, where everyone looks over art projects and nibbles on delicate Japanese crackers.

Spontaneously, the children retell components of stories as they look over their own handmade inros and lightweight, intricately decorated swords.

These props are like switches that turn on their imaginations. Soon they tug their guests to the Japanese galleries to show off Yoko's toko, the sword with its hamon, and the folding screens.

"I can tell myself that I am teaching children to enjoy and notice every detail of artworks in the Japanese collection," Williams says. "But I don't always know how much the kids are absorbing. My behaviorist goal for the camp is that, when friends and family come, the children will actually take their parents on a tour in the galleries—not with me, and not by my teaching them how to do it. They would just do it."

Quest for the Mummy

(for six to eight year olds)

Taught by Melanie Groendyke-Freeman, master teacher for Egyptian Art

During the first hour of their first day at Quest for the Mummy, the children sit with their teacher, Melanie Groendyke-Freeman, in the rushes beside the Nile. The campers have vowed to keep their eyes shut and use their imaginations.

"It's sunny and hot—a hot, hot day," Groendyke-Freeman says. "It's May. The Nile is flooded. There are a lot of birds around me, sitting on the shore. I can hear reeds rustling, and it's very peaceful. I am sitting at the edge of the water. I can hear it slapping up against the sand. It's really hot. I can feel beads of sweat running down my face. I feel a warm mist

coming off the water."

Mist drifts down on the campers' faces, but they stay focused. "There are lotus flowers," she says, fanning them with lotus-scented oil. After another silence, Groendyke-Freeman asks one child, and then another, and another, to talk about where they are in ancient Egypt. One child can hear camels chewing grass by the pyramids. Another is putting on makeup and perfumes for a party. A third is sitting by a sphinx.

Given the signal, they return to the present and open their eyes. They are ready for the first of a week's adventures. Their tools, in addition to the dozen Egyptian artworks displayed in the museum, are largely their minds. They have already signed their names to a gold oath book, vowing to use their imaginations, work as a team, listen and learn, and prepare carefully.

By the end of the camp this will be their mantra, reinforced with the adventures of their mission. Someone has destroyed Djed-Hor's mummy and stolen all his treasures. During the week they will repeatedly examine the museum's mummy case, belonging to the real Djed-Hor. This nobleman and priest has asked the campers to save him by learning to be scribes, wig makers, jewelers, cosmeticians, fan makers, death mask creators, and most importantly—embalmers with the skills to re-mummify and return his body to the afterlife.

From the beginning of their quest, the children also know that someone nasty is

working against them. As the week goes on, funny little mistakes such as not having enough pens is blamed on this being, the jealous god Set, who according to ancient Egyptian legend dismembered his brother, Osiris, and scattered his limbs across Egypt. Osiris's sister finds him and wraps his body in linen, thereby creating the first mummy. As a result Osiris is magically reborn into the afterlife where he rules forever as the great god of that world.

Heading into their classroom, the kids find a small trunk that they will come to know and love during the course of the week. Tucked inside are a video and several scrolls, one to be opened each day of the camp. In the scrolls Djed-Hor speaks directly to the children about the mission of the day. In the video, Djed-Hor (portrayed by a staff member in costume) explains their goal for the week.

"We must travel back in time to ancient Egypt to prepare my mummy, recover my treasures, and escort me back to the afterlife," he tells the children. "The trip will be filled with danger and excitement, but with the protection of certain Egyptian gods and goddesses, I am sure we will make it! The afterlife awaits me! I am placing my trust in you."

Appearing next on the video is the ibis-headed Thoth, Egyptian god of knowledge and writing. He tells the kids he will protect them throughout their day. "Remember, use your imagination, work as a team, and prepare carefully."

Wearing pith helmets and protective amulets, the kids ride the elevator up to

the gallery that displays a dozen Egyptian artworks. There they discover a basket packed with layers of items for their adventures. The first item they open is a scroll, tied in red and sealed with a gold sticker. Each day a different child breaks the seal. This one is from Djed:



As one of the few Egyptian objects in the collection, the mummy case became the central source of inspiration for many art and dramatic activities in the Quest for the Mummy camp. (Sarcophagus, 330-304 BC, Egypt)

*Without trouble, without strife, you will
begin to prepare for the afterlife.*

*Today you will slowly see the kind of
scribe you will need to be.*

*To make your way through danger
unknown, do not fear—you are not alone.*

*Today the great god Thoth will guide you
through.*

Keep all eyes peeled for every clue!

*At the end of the day, when your duties
are done,*

It will be time to have some major fun!

*Over the Nile you will go by boat to the
embalming tent.*

*You must go to see if you can mummify
important body parts.*

*Don't worry—I won't say that smarts! Do
a good job, take great care.*

Make sure I have clean underwear.

From the folds within the basket,
Groendyke-Freeman pulls out a little
mummy-shaped tin can that contains the
next set of instructions:

Place these masks upon your face.

Fly like an ibis to the mummy case.

There beside it you will find ...

A magical bird—one of a kind!

*With long arched beak and
gleaming white eyes,*

This bird will protect all faithful scribes.

Each child gets a laminated ibis mask
on a stick, which they hold up to their
faces as they stalk along with long, bird-
like legs. They follow Groendyke-
Freeman and the interns to the museum

cases where belongings like Djed's are
displayed.

Among the handful of objects is a
2,500-year-old ibis mummy case of wood,
bronze, crystal, gold, and gold leaf.
Groendyke-Freeman asks open-ended
questions about what they like and what
they don't like. They speculate about the
case's use and the materials from which it
was made. They learn that ibis birds were
sacred to Thoth, god of wisdom and
scribes.

With magnifying glasses, they peer at
Djed-Hor's mummy case in search of an
ibis hieroglyph. Out from the basket
comes a gift wrapped in muslin. There are
reed pens and papyrus paper, a gift from
Thoth for all their hard work. The chil-
dren's presents are devices to get them
asking questions and coming up with
answers about the art.

As the children return to their art
classroom, they discover big ibis foot
prints that form a curving path to a table
covered in muslin. Beneath the cloth are
materials to make papyrus. The children
take turns pounding the actual plant,
soaked with water, into a tissue-thin
sheet. They also pass around ostraca or
pottery shards on which aspiring scribes
practiced the arts of writing.

In the classroom, each child gets a
sheet of papyrus and a shard—broken up
pieces of flower pots—to make an ostra-
ca. Protected by Thoth and inspired by
their mission, they make invitations for
the guests who will join them on the last
day of class to accompany Djed-Hor on

his final journey to the afterlife.

“When I started thinking about the Egypt class, I knew that everything would center around the museum’s mummy case,” Groendyke-Freeman says. “The case covers every possible theme, so the other objects naturally support whatever topic I cover. I also wanted to give the children a sense for the idea of mystery and discovery, hidden places and secret spaces, tombs and tunnels, and presents you can open. As a child, I loved discovering things and feeling like I was a part of a bigger situation.”

Going back to her first inspirations, Groendyke-Freeman also thought about one of her favorite school experiences. In sixth grade, they turned their gymnasium into ancient Egypt, complete with a sphinx, and she played Egyptologist Jean Francois Champillon all week. Books such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and the Harry Potter stories are about stepping across a threshold into another world or time—something she wants children to experience in *Quest for the Mummy*.

Ancient Egyptian religion is imbued with journeying and thus acquiring knowledge through journeys. In the camp, each day brings a new theme to help the children gain the skills and wisdom they will need on their mission.

The afternoon of their first day, they play a game in which they make up their own hieroglyphic images for “mouth.” From her backpack of tools and supplies, Groendyke-Freeman pulls out a sacred

scribe’s box made of a rare ancient Egyptian material—wood. Back in their classroom, the kids make their own scribe’s boxes, adding the wooden handles they’ve received as another gift from Thoth. Then they are ready for the first of four embalming experiences with Djed. Before this treacherous journey across the Nile, they get fish amulets for protection against crocodiles and hippos. In a rolling cart disguised as a boat, they cautiously follow the patterned Nile down a museum hallway to a shadowy corner where Djed awaits their arrival in the necropolis.

“One thing we cover first off in the class is the subject of mummies,” Groendyke-Freeman says. “We account for any fear factor all the way through the camp, but kids love the journey. I tell them they have to be very serious. Death is important and wonderful; it’s a celebration. Djed is going to the best place you can ever imagine.”

The key prop for mummification is a life size soft dummy of Djed-Hor. From a slit in the mummy’s side, Groendyke-Freeman pulls out chocolate kisses. Every day candies appear from somewhere. This lightens the mood, but the children are still respectful embalmers. They prepare carefully, pulling out his organs (soft cloth models), wrapping them in linen, and placing them in canopic jars. They push a metal hook up his nose and fish out wooly brains. Then they bury him with Styrofoam packing peanuts before sailing back up the Nile.

Djed, just real enough to be cool, and

just doll-like enough to be comfortable, was created by fabric sculptor Vicki Anderson. After researching mummification and human anatomy, Anderson stitched him up on her fifty-four-year-old Singer sewing machine. She upholstered soft cloth around a skeletal system of swimming pool noodles. The stretchy suede-like material matches Egyptian skin tones and is durable enough to withstand a lot of handling.

After a packed day of exploits and mystery, the kids read about their adventures in images in a huge painting by Anderson that hangs across an entire wall of their classroom. Its registers of compartmentalized scenes foreshadow each day of Quest for the Mummy. The children use it to see what's coming next and



Hands-on activities teach campers about ancient Egyptian cultural practices. Emulating Egyptian embalmers, two sisters use a brain hook to remove the brain of a cloth mock up of a mummy.

to review what they did in earlier activities.

The next day, the children meet the lioness Sehkmet, goddess of adornment, who also speaks through a video to the children. Their gifts are stalks of grain that ancient Egyptians would have brewed into beer to appease this volatile deity. Wearing lion masks into the gallery, they look at pictures of perfume makers, perfume jars, and a banquet of lords and ladies wearing cones filled with scented wax that melts with body heat into their wigs, coating it with heavy fragrance.

Nearing the art classroom, the kids follow Sehkmet's lion prints to a table where they can try on an elaborate wig, also made by Anderson, and adorn themselves with eye shadow, eyeliner, perfumes, and lipstick. Later in the day, they make fans using real ostrich feathers and gold puff paint. The children add personal symbols and Egyptian symbols, such as sacred flowers, the source of perfumes and adornment. The kids learn about the symbolic nature of the lotus flowers, which come up out of the water and bloom in the morning, and then sink below the surface at night, representing the cyclical aspect of life. The children decide where to place their lotuses in this cycle and why. Finally, they add perfume and feathers.

At the end of the day, they once again get their fish amulets and ride the boat down the Nile to find Djed. They stuff him with aromatics and astringents, such as cinnamon, juniper berries, moss, and

lavender. It's a huge mess. They cover him and return down the river.

Horus, god of intelligence, greets the children on video the third day. Later, seventeen masked crocodiles slink over to the Egyptian part of the gallery to talk about the importance of collars. They inspect the flowered one around Djed's mummy case. In the art calssroom, footprints lead to a table with a reproduction of an Egyptian drill that each child uses to try to bore a hole in wood.

During the day, they make their own collars complete with tassels, leather, stone beads, flowers, and paints. After lunch, they create death masks and choose one to carry down the Nile tomorrow for Djed.

Their dummy mummy has become familiar and comfortable. Leaving him safe for the night in his tomb, they navigate the rushing river once more.

On the last day, the patron deity Hathor, goddess of love and celebration, presides over the kids as they discuss the coming festivities. The gift of the day is food, so the kids make a Egyptian style drawing of things they love to eat. While they sketch, they refer to pictures of actual food offerings painted on tomb walls, reinforcing interplay between the actual and the depicted. After finishing their pictures, they pile plastic food on a platter and bring the offering to Hathor.

Then it is time to cross the Nile one last time to adorn Djed with his death mask. Wearing their fish amulets, they navigate the Nile. By this time, the chil-



Campers create feather fans designed according to images from ancient Egypt. They will carry the fans in a dramatic procession on the final day of camp.

dren have grown to love the river. They swim in it, splash around, jump in and out of the boat, and play along its banks. This is a festive day. They've accomplished their mission. Everything has gone smoothly. In the soft light of the necropolis, they carefully rest the ornate death mask on his gently wrapped face. They slip gold tips onto his fingers and toes, slide amulets among his linens to protect him, and give him what he needs for his peaceful eternity in the afterlife.

The children have grown fond of Djed. They respect and care for him. They have made him ready for the afterlife. After a short snack break, the campers return to find nothing but a leopard-skinned journal next to Djed. He has been robbed of everything they have so carefully done so that he can return to his peaceful afterlife.

It is set! He's scattered Djed's treas-

ures far and wide throughout Egypt, in galleries throughout the museum.

Reading clues and searching urgently, the kids find the scribe's box by the Japanese scholar's tools, the collar by an ancient Maya necklace, the death mask at the foot of a Northwest Coast Indian house post.

"This journey is important because it's a compilation of the things they've learned all week," Groendyke-Freeman says. "In finding the objects, they make lots of associations. They get the idea that the fake mustache on the samurai mask was for status and display; it wasn't functional. Then they see other things, like a dragon on armor in the same case. They wonder what that creature represented. They say, 'I see predictable patterns!' They begin to see that some things are cross-cultural and that Japanese art is sort of like Egyptian art."

After restoring the treasures to Djed, they escort him up the Nile to his festive tomb which is now the art classroom. The classroom is now packed with feathered fans, miniature mummy boats, collars, scribe boxes, amulets, registers, flower bouquets, and platters heaped with food.

"The children are so empowered," Groendyke-Freeman says. "The stories they hear and the things they discover are magical. They realize they can reach deep down and create their own thing, and it's completely about themselves, but it is also a week of giving gifts and working together."

Parents Talk About Their Children's Experiences

Not only do many of the embalmers go home and talk about their tasks in the necropolis, but they also weave their adventures into the future. Some plan to be Egyptians for Halloween, and one girl even decided she wanted to be a mummy at the end of her life. All the children treasure their art, which not only reminds them of how much they've learned, but also how fun it was to travel along the Nile and prepare Djed for the afterlife.

These sorts of aftereffects are typical of all the museum's summer camps. A few weeks after class, parents are interviewed on the phone about their children's experiences. Questions address whether the children enjoyed the class, if they immersed themselves in a particular art form or culture, what activities they found particularly interesting, and which memories might remain with them longest.

Parent feedback provides invaluable insight into how the children's exploits extend beyond the classroom and into their lives. At home, kids bring up new words and terminology, but far more important than learning specific facts is that the campers feel like they've experienced the life of ancient Maya people, played like four kids who lived a century ago in a Japanese castle town or permanently taken up designing chairs. Parents consistently note the depth to which their kids became emotionally and intellectually immersed during the four days at their camp.

Activities that were rated most interesting ranged from mummification to participating in a Maya ballgame. “Getting to make and design things really brought out the joy, excitement, and expression of what she did,” commented one parent. “The teacher was fabulous and showed a lot of creativity and energy, and connected well with the kids.”

Whether they came home mentioning samurai swords, Egyptian amulets, or Maya incense jars and headdresses, children vividly recalled experiences at the museum. Small things, such as adding to their Japanese names each day, helped campers feel closer to the art and people of an ancient culture and encouraged them to learn about that culture with greater intensity.

One parent says her child wrote her own book after attending the People of the Jaguar camp. Other children returned to the museum to show their parents the chairs they now knew so well. One child, who has taken summer camps for several years in a row, amazed his school’s art teacher with his ability to talk about art.

Right after People of the Jaguar ended, Michael Allen and his grandmother, stuffed all his art projects and Maya regalia in the car and drove to the mountains for a special weekend together. At the kitchen table, they spent hours coloring, gluing, and taping, turning what had been an empty black cardboard box into the Xibalba Michael Allen imagined in his mind.

Summer Camps As Teaching Labs

The master teachers’ summer camps happen once a year, but they are the museum’s single most intense teaching and learning experience.

“These camps serve as a great testing ground for us,” says Maria Garcia, family programs coordinator. “A lot of backpacks come out of camps. Just For Fun Family Center activities spin off them. It is like a laboratory because it is a place for experimentation and thinking outside the box.”

The camps have several advantages. It is immediately apparent if attention spans lag or the room crackles with excitement. Because the teachers are with the children eight hours a day for four days, they can hear kids articulate their thoughts and feelings and literally see their enthusiasm.

“Children reveal more about their emotions than do adults,” says Williams. “Good teachers find it hard to accept kids being bored, distressed, or simply being only mildly engaged. With the luxury of working with only fifteen kids, you can feel and see what is happening with almost every child.”

Because the same classes are offered year after year, they attract ideas and insights from a wealth of sources. Teachers collect materials for a camp for years. They find great toys or books in stores, or follow up on someone’s comments or a particularly intriguing suggestion in a book. One child’s particularly creative approach to solving a problem

can provide an example a teacher lays out as a possible choice for future campers.

Master teachers also travel to other museums and countries as they continue to explore the collections that are the focus of the camps. For instance, a teacher may take very specific photographs of an architectural site to use as a teaching tool or meet with another museum educator to brainstorm new ways of teaching.

Four years of support from The Pew Charitable Trusts provided a lush opportunity to experiment in every way during the camps. “In the past, we’ve had grants where we create new programs that are wonderful, and the grant disappears and so do the programs,” Garcia says. “We approached the Pew project cautiously. We looked at our programs and asked how we could make them better.”

The grant allowed them to not only create new programs, but also to develop sustainable programs. As Maria Garcia put it “The money essentially paid for the sheer brainpower that has been put into these camps. The amount of time spent on collection research, curriculum planning, and selection of art materials was more than we can normally afford. We had full-time paid interns who could help test something four or five times to get it where it is now. A project such as a tokonoma is easy to make because a lot of testing went into it. At this point, these programs can be run extremely efficiently at fairly low annual costs.”

Camps are also wellsprings for

changing the museum. “The fact that master teachers have multiple roles in the museum means that they contribute to making the museum as a whole a family-friendly place,” Williams says. “We can hire talented classroom teachers to teach at the museum in the summer, but the master teachers make a much greater impact on the museum as they take their camp experiences and integrate them into all the other work they do.”

Master teachers collaborate with other staff on exhibition design and permanent collection installations. They serve on a wide range of museum committees for visitor services, administration, exhibition marketing, and more. Each master teacher is assigned to one collection. Camp experiences find their way into the experiences offered to visitors in the museum’s galleries.

Camps embrace differences. What goes on during the sessions should vary according to personal and professional values and teaching styles. This is quite different from how the department approaches the development of a family backpack or a children’s website component, which have more defined parameters.

“Our camps are the most personal experiences for us as master teachers and also one of the most divergent programs in the department,” says Williams. “Each camp represents the best of what we do as teachers.”



Kids Corner

Outside, it is cold and snowy. My children, ages six and eight, hurry through the parking lot to a towering red steel sculpture, “Lao-Tzu,” by Mark Di Suvero, which dominates the plaza in front of the Denver Art Museum. To them, it’s a jungle gym ready for a ritual and excited climb. Next, they head through the museum entrance, navigate the busy lobby to a splash of brilliant color: The Kids Corner.

This welcoming nook—with its bins of markers, scissors and activity sheets—is their place. It has been since they were toddlers. Back then, they would sprawl on the rug, scribble for five minutes and go. Today, they plan to see the visiting Winslow Homer exhibit. But first, they want to make their own, paper Melanesian shields. In their bright wayside corner, they select markers and drawing boards and plop down on the splashy carpet.



The Denver Art Museum dedicates premium square footage to children and families. The Kids Corner tells the story. Available all the time, this art-making nook is a permanent fixture in the main lobby, where space is extremely valuable.

This deliberate physical commitment to families sends a clear message that the museum wants them to relax, have fun, and explore art in a kid-friendly way. The corner also lets adults who didn't bring children know that they can comfortably include them in the future. And it helps dispel the aloof, distant impressions that some visitors have of art museums.

During in-depth visitor panels, parents and relatives talked about their impressions of the Kids Corner. Many people appreciated its kid-friendly activities. Others were glad they could count on being able to take breaks in the corner.

“The Kids Corner sets a tone that the museum is family-oriented,” one man said. “It’s not the classic, stuffy image that some people have of art museums. By having that corner visible, in a place adjacent to the elevators, it really helps overcome what I would call a negative image of art museums.”

The corner quietly asserts itself as a warm place that counteracts these sterile preconceptions. Set off by benches and chairs cushioned in blue and purple, the

Kids Corner is a landmark and a cozy meeting place. This area is open to anyone at any time. Some visitors like to stop by before they head to the galleries. Others save the place for later. As one mother notes, “I prefer to do the Kids Corner at the end of our visits. I treat it like dessert.”

A framed backdrop lures visitors to the colorful corner. Red bins offer markers, glue sticks, scissors, and bold activity sheets. A soft rug splashed with bright hues encourages kids to flop down. The projects are usually tied to the permanent collections but occasionally relate to special exhibitions. Activities range from making serpent headdresses or angel wings to decorating clothing on Han Chinese paper dolls.



Families are welcome to use the Kids Corner in ways that suit their needs. Kids and adults are encouraged to create a project, relax, or read a book. Because of its prime location, the corner sends a clear message that families are welcome.

Adults can create projects along with their kids, relax, or look through related storybooks or exhibition catalogues. Younger siblings can scribble on sheets or listen as their grown-up companions read to them.



Making Melanesian shields from over-sized paper and patterns is one of several Kids Corner activities.

The Kids Corner is a peaceful nook for a change of pace. Above all else, it's a tangible message from the museum to families: We welcome you.

"A sign alone can't do it," said Melora McDermott-Lewis, director of family programs and master teacher for European and American Art. "A brochure can't do it. Here's prime real estate dedicated in a very important part of the museum. Everybody wants space in the lobby, and yet we've devoted this area to kids. It's one of the strongest messages we can send."

From its beginnings as a one-time art contest in 1986 to accompany a special exhibition, the Kids Corner has evolved into one of the museum's permanent offer-

ings for families. Visitors are encouraged to have fun with a project and—if they want—carry their exploration a step further by checking out related works of art. Success doesn't look like a lesson mastered. Rather, educators hope the activities will tap imaginations, welcome families, and encourage them to return for more.

Large theatrical backdrops framed in red set the scene. "They dramatize projects," said Mara Trager, family programs assistant. "When kids see the backdrop, they say, 'Oh, my jaguar, it lives in the jungle.' The backdrop makes a connection."

Backdrops provide both scenery and a place for kids to display their art. Hung with lush vines and leaves, the Maya rain forest backdrop invites children into the jungle. Others, such as the Egyptian mural, evoke the distant past. Painted like a cracked sandstone wall, the backdrop shows how Egyptian nobles and noblewomen threw festive parties thousands of years ago. Dressed in fine linens, guests feast at a banquet. They wear elegant collars like the ones children can make in the Kids Corner. The Egyptian god, Horus—whom kids can spy on the museum's mummy case—adorns both the paper collars and the ones on the backdrop.

Successful activities share common traits. When Gretchen DeSciouse, master teacher for pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial art, and a graphic designer created the jaguar mask and paws activity, they tested prototypes with kids first to make sure the activity would be fun, easy, and successful. They quickly realized

they had to move the eyeholes closer together to fit small faces. On the sheet next to the mask pattern, they added illustrations of actual museum pieces with jaguars on them, subtly encouraging further explorations in the gallery.

“Kids need to be engaged and excited,” DeSciose said. “They probably are not going to devote more than thirty minutes to the activity. So you want it to be somewhat simple. Also, it should have some natural interest for children. The ones that have been successful over and over again are ones that kids see from a distance and say, ‘Oh, I want to do that.’”

DeSciose’s jaguar paws and masks work on all those levels. Like the other Kids Corner activities, this project begins with an over-sized, boldly printed sheet of paper. Children color, cut, and assemble the patterns into a mask with a three-dimensional nose, curved ears, and paws like mittens. When children put them on, they become jaguars. The transformation encourages an instinctive, imaginative connection with one of the most important animals in pre-Columbian art.

DeSciose has taken the project to Denver branch libraries, and even as far as Brazil. Universally, she’s found that young children and teenagers alike have enjoyed making these costumes. The activity’s deliberately simple design has been a key component of its success.

For the most part, activities should be self-explanatory, master teachers agree. At the Kids Corner, families usually don’t spend a lot of time reading directions,



Relating Kids Corner activities to objects in the collection is an important part of developing an activity. The connection gets kids interested in the art in the collection and encourages families to explore the galleries. (Lidded Urn with Modeled Jaguars, AD 600-900, Highlands Guatemala)

although minimal guidance—three or four lines of instructions—is provided.

Children start right in cutting, and often the words are first to get lost amid the scraps of paper on the rug.

Activities also should be suitable for children of various ages. Small hands don’t have the muscles or coordination for intricate snipping, and older kids must be interested enough to use their more developed skills.

“We don’t want visitors to feel like the activities are a huge process,” said Maria Garcia, family programs coordinator. “We don’t want them to be too facile, either. Families need to have a sense that there is a connection to the collection. But I don’t think they need to come away feeling like they’ve conquered some mountain

of information about pre-Columbian art.”

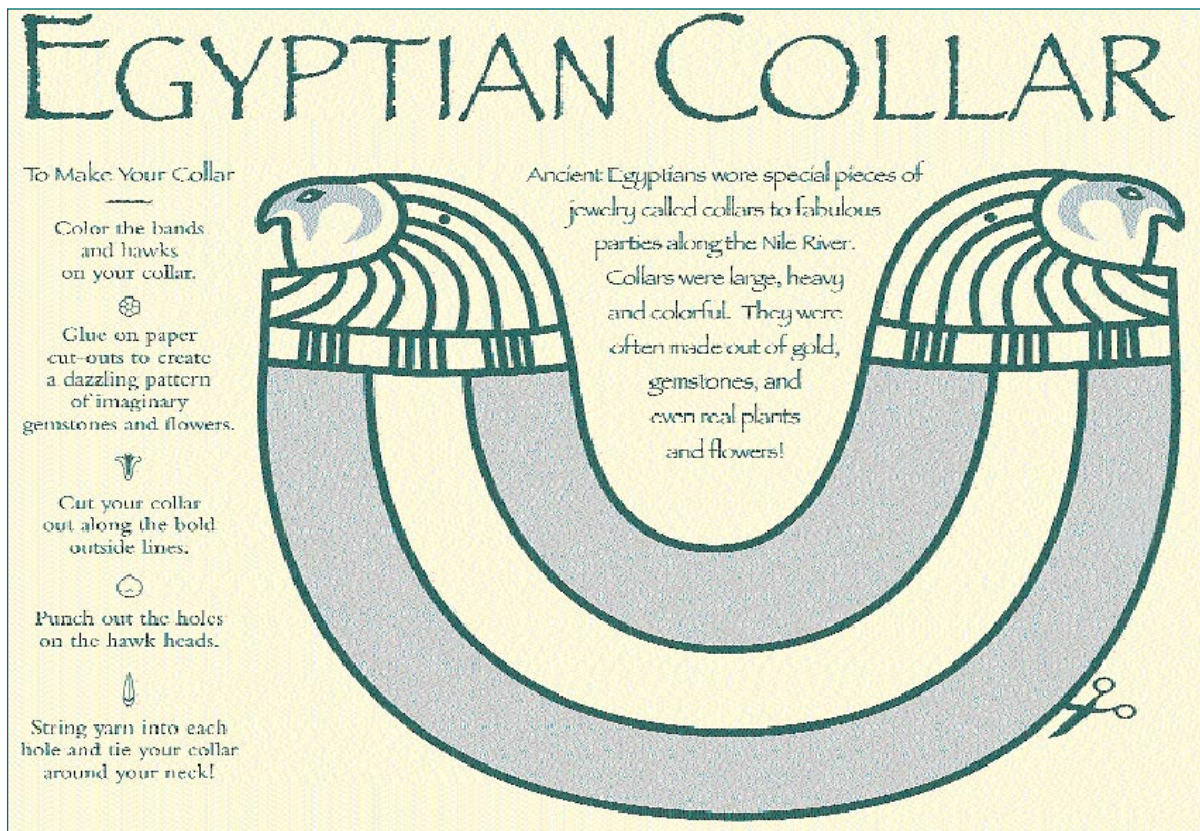
Master Teacher Melanie Groendyke-Freeman knew immediately what she wanted to design for her Kids Corner activity. During a previous summer camp she taught on Egypt, she had the children mass silk flowers and facsimiles of semi-precious stones to create elaborate collars; finery elegant enough for a Nile banquet. The kids loved the activity and quickly picked up on Egyptian notions of pattern and order.

With this in mind, Groendyke-Freeman distilled the project to its essence on paper for the Kids Corner.

After cutting out the printed collar, children can arrange die-cut paper shapes like poppy petals, chamomile, lotus flowers, and olive leaves.

Assemblage was a major part of collar-making thousands of years ago, and so it is in the Kids Corner.

The project connects to ancient Egypt in other ways. The nook’s bins are filled with markers in colors that resemble the vibrant hues found on tombs and temple wall paintings of daily life and celebrations in ancient Egypt. Even inked outlines on the sheet allude to the past. After designer Mary Junda suggested



A team consisting of a master teacher, family program coordinator, and graphic designer work together to create activities that are easy to understand and fun to do. For the Egyptian collar activity, everything from the way the collars are put together to the marker colors used to adorn them is tied to ancient Egyptian tradition.

printing in a color other than standard black, Groendyke-Freeman picked a coppery green pigment that was often used in Egyptian painting. Children don't get a Kids Corner lecture on such details, but their collars reflect these qualities and make it easier to make a connection with the painted collar on the museum's third century b.c. mummy case.

"I wanted to make sure anything we did was historically accurate, that it had a sense of grandeur," said Groendyke-Freeman. "Esthetically, I wanted it to tie into ancient Egyptian tradition. Everything we did is taken directly from paintings or graphics—actual renderings of plants along the Nile. These connections give the project an authentic feel. I want the project to be fun, but I want children to feel like they're making something special."

Designing successful projects is tricky because visitors' learning styles and creative approaches differ wildly. Some families embrace Kids Corner projects instantly and comfortably. Others hesitate and deliberate. The nook and its activities need to embrace these variations without a teacher's supervised help.

Like many of the offerings for families, the Kids Corner is not constantly staffed.

The materials are replenished each morning, and staff checks in once or twice a day. Materials are reviewed by conservation staff and security. Careful signs give adults the help they need, but allow them and their children to take off in any direction that comes to their imaginations.



My son quickly decides he does not want to color. Instead, he cuts out and rearranges every shape into an intricate pattern on his Melanesian shield. My daughter, on the other hand, scrutinizes all the completed sheets pinned on the large backdrop, comparing, contrasting, and talking about each one. Finally, she begins. A few minutes later, a mother with two impeccably dressed daughters wanders by. The sisters tug at their mother to stay, but she wants to look at the related art first and then return to the Kids Corner. Meanwhile, a father grabs an activity sheet and lets his three-year-old scribble briefly, while he takes a break. Another family hovers at the edge of the corner, deciding how to approach the project. The mother suggests

This mummy case was a source of inspiration and reference in the development of the Egyptian collar activity. (Sarcophagus, 330-304 BC, Egypt)

coloring first, then cutting and pasting.

There are all sorts of styles, and soon the floor becomes crowded with children ranging from age four to preteens. Most stay for about twenty minutes to half an hour. A few post their work and leave it while they visit the museum. Others roll up their papers to take home. At some point, every child looks around to see what the others are doing and then returns to his or her work. It's fairly quiet, despite the fact that there are at least fourteen people packed into the space.

Kids Corner projects can be as varied as the individuals who make them. For one activity, McDermott-Lewis and graphic designer Mary Junda created a backdrop based on Edward Hicks' *Peaceable Kingdom*. Kids populated the painted landscape with their own animals. It was so large it gave the impression that children could actually step into the scene as they pinned their creations to the backdrop.

In another project, kids used round white stickers and animal stencils to create bright blue paper versions of the ceremonial button blankets of the Northwest Coast Indian culture.

Throughout the years, museum staff have refined the nook and its projects. "It's something that has morphed and evolved," McDermott-Lewis said. "Our thinking has gotten a lot clearer based on living with it, hearing from families about the area and other family offerings, and coming back and looking at it afresh."

Toward this end, Garcia and McDermott-Lewis are now working with master teachers to refine about six of the most successful Kids Corner activities. Instead of changing projects every two months, these six activities will be rotated every three months over a two-year span. This is a cost-effective and efficient way to change offerings while keeping their quality high. It also allows the museum to invest in new backdrops that can be used again and again—and reflect the sophisticated yet playful look that has evolved since Kids Corner's more humble beginnings.

"We want our things to look like they were made specifically for our museum," Garcia said. "I want visitors to know they are still in the art museum, that they are in a place where all these cultures are represented."

As ideas are refined, master teachers' expertise and knowledge translate into basic but stimulating projects for families. "I really like the diversity and richness of all the activities as a whole," Garcia said. "They are all very different."

However, they all share common goals. Essentially, kids need to be excited. The Kids Corner is not simply an art nook; it's an imagination place. It's a way for the Denver Art Museum to instantly, assertively say it is committed to families.

Thirty minutes have passed, but my children wouldn't know it. Engrossed in their coloring, cutting, and gluing, they look up only to check out other kids' work or to find more markers. Finally, they

decide to post their projects on the backdrop, feeling proud about what they've done. They find pins and place their shields as prominently as possible. Now they are ready to ride the elevator to see the shield that inspired their own. They can't believe how huge it is! In three minutes or less, they circle the gallery before deciding they are ready for the Homer exhibit.

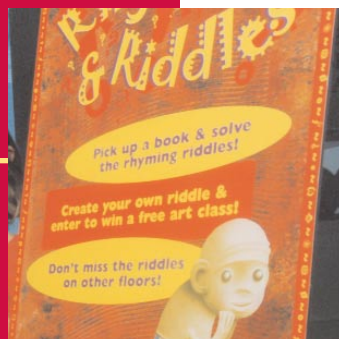


Holiday Weeks

Q: What's seven stories high and filled with games and riddles when schools are out and families are lounging around the house wondering what to do next?

A: The Denver Art Museum, during its winter and spring holiday weeks.

During these special holiday weeks, families can find riddles and games throughout the galleries that they won't find at any other time of year. These "limited time only" events urge folks who have been wanting to visit—but have never gotten around to it—to head down to the museum and approach art in a playful way.



Rhymes and Riddles and Great Games activities ranging from spiral-bound books of mind teasers to magnetic tic-tac-toe boards are offered for six to eight days each winter and spring. These special holiday weeks coincide with Denver Public School winter and spring vacations—times when parents are looking for fun things to do, and the media is emphasizing family-related features. In addition to the special activities that come out only at these times, the museum welcomes visitors with a full menu of family offerings normally available only on weekends or during the summer.

“These weeks were conceived as attractor events,” said Melora McDermott-Lewis, director of family programs.

“There are so many things going on in people’s lives. How does the Denver Art Museum get them to make that initial visit? Once we get families here, we know they’ll have a good time. But we need to get them in that first time. These ‘prompt to action’ weeks create a sense of urgency. If you don’t get down here this week, you will miss out.”

The holiday activities are an easy, dip-your-toe-in introduction to the museum.

They are less of a commitment than a paid class or a forty-five-minute backpack experience, but they still offer an enjoyable way to engage kids with art. With activities on each floor, they also give families a chance to move through the museum and discover what interests them.

During Rhymes and Riddles week in late December, signs featuring Seymour, the family programs’ monkey mascot, lead visitors to brightly decorated tables in the galleries. There adults and children find colorful laminated books with five separate poems, each about a different object found somewhere in that gallery:

A large black stallion turns its head in surprise

The man on its back looks behind with steady eyes.

Leather leggings and a fiery red shirt

Protect this Western trapper from the fierce wind and dirt.

A hat with a rolled brim

And a saddle blanket with bright red trim.

Far off to the left purplish mountains stand tall.

In the lower right corner, find the artist’s name, and that’s all.



Families can pick up Rhymes & Riddle and Great Games activities at colorful tables strategically placed throughout the galleries. They also can enter the riddle contest.

At the request of parents in visitor panels, answers are printed on the back of each page. Looking for the right object is fun and encourages families to look at a variety of pieces before finding the



Rhymes & Riddle and Great Game activities are rooted in the DAM collections. To solve the riddles families must scour the galleries in search of such paintings as Longs Jake. (Charles Deas, *Long Jakes: The Rocky Mountain Man*, 1844)

answer. As they figure out clues, they get tidbits of interesting information, all in the guise of a whimsical game.

“Sometimes families make it a contest between adults and kids,” notes Mara Trager, family programs assistant. “Some people will figure out the painting before they finish the riddle, but then they try to find all the details described in the poem.”

If inspired, visitors also can make up their own riddles and enter them in a contest. That was what ten-year-old Chris did during his holiday outing. Glancing back and forth between his object—a samurai suit of armor—and his paper, he wrote:

*I may be bold, my armor is black.
I carry a sword upon my back.
I fight for Japan, day by night,
In hopes of chasing enemies out of sight.
I wear a mask on my face,
With some string held in place.
I am a warrior, big and bright.
Who am I? You guessed right.*

Within a few minutes he finished, dropped his poem into a brightly colored entry box on the riddle table, and went on his way. Routinely, during holiday weeks, more than two hundred people submit contest entries to win free spots in an upcoming museum workshop or sleepover. The kids have fun making up a riddle



Objects in the DAM collections such as this samurai suit of armor are sources of inspiration for kids entering their own rhymes and riddles in the contest. (Suit of Armor and Helmet, Edo period, 1700s)

or solving a word search and when they fill in the entry form the education department gains names for its family mailing list.

Parents have noted that the riddles feed their children's excitement and interest in art. One person wrote, "What a brilliant way to draw a child's attention to the details in paintings and artifacts!" Another individual said, "It's a delightful device to create a feeling of involvement and the thrill of discovery and wonderment." In visitor research panels, adults almost universally said the rhymes and games draw their families into the art and get them looking in new ways. "The activities were a great way to pay attention to the details," said one mother of a five-year-old. "The game tells you to focus on a specific thing. I like it."

The riddles and games are deliberately based on activities that adults and kids like and already know how to play. For inspiration, master teachers turned to kids' magazines and games. What activities do they play again and again? Which do they know instinctively? Denver Public Library librarians offered up several popular kids' publications.

"We were trying to get into children's brains and figure out what appeals to them," McDermott-Lewis said. "I grew up with kids' magazines. I remember my *Humpty Dumpty* magazines and the rebus stories, and *Highlights* magazine with its games. I looked forward to them. In the course of the grant, I spent a lot of time looking at current kids' magazines and

was struck by how smart they are about engaging kids."

Although magazines and popular games were wonderful sources, they had to be adapted specifically for an art museum. The games needed to be fun and fairly intuitive, but they also had to help people connect directly and visually with art in the galleries—and do so quickly and simply.

"There is no missing that it's about looking at art," said Trager. "Everything that is created is targeted to make that connection." All of the games focus on particular pieces in the galleries. "There's no other place in the world where you could be doing it," Trager said.

During spring break, Seymour signs direct families to the game tables throughout the museum. Riddles, similar to those offered during winter break, are available in the second floor Architecture, Design and Graphics galleries. On the third floor, laminated Crack the Code rebus books with simple drawings give clues about art in the Plains Indian gallery. For example, a picture of a head and a dress describe a headdress on display.

When playing the Eye Spy game on the fourth floor, visitors stand in front of a pre-Columbian pot to figure out which of its painted details are hidden on their game boards. This activity, while based on a popular series of children's books, has not proved to be as compelling as some of the other games, and eventually might be replaced, Trager said.

“Tic-tac-toe, on the other hand, is wildly popular,” Trager noted. “You automatically know what you are supposed to do. You don’t need to read anything. It’s also an attractive board that you can carry around on your own.”

Tic-tac-toe is played in the Asian gallery on the fifth floor. On sturdy magnetic boards, rows of photographs feature details from sculptures or carvings. Using chunky magnets, visitors can mark off each printed image as they find the corresponding art. Some people race each other to get three in a row first, while others work as a group to fill their entire board.

The What’s Wrong with This Picture game is tailored to two European paintings on the sixth floor. Visitors have to look at the art to find out how the image on their board has been subtly changed. “Parents and children have always liked this game,” McDermott-Lewis said. “But, it’s been improved to help families be more successful. The games need to be challenging enough to be fun, but not frustrating.”

During the past three years, the education department has observed, brain-

stormed, tested, and refined its holiday week activities. The games are deceptively simple on the surface, but work because of repeated evaluation and revision. For example, the What’s Wrong with This Picture challenge was changed after parents said they had trouble spotting all five discrepancies. One parent suggested

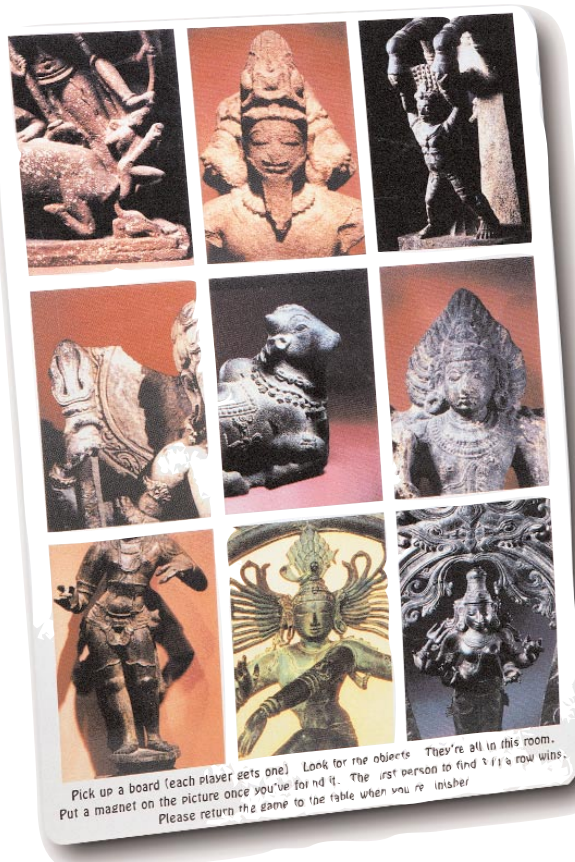
dividing the image into sections. Boards now include lines marking off five areas, each of which includes one detail that does not match the corresponding art.

Instructions for Great Games and Rhymes and Riddles are written so the activities can be done without supervision. But having someone to talk to can make a museum visit work much more smoothly, just as a librarian can make

a library visit more successful.

“Libraries are these wonderful, welcoming, accessible places. And as we partnered with the library on the Pew grant, we realized again and again how

Games are deliberately based on activities families already know and enjoy. They also are versatile. This version of tic-tac-toe is suitable for families on the go as well as those who want to examine each object closer.



critical this interaction with a friendly and knowledgeable person could be,” noted McDermott-Lewis. “With this in mind, we began to look for new roles for our docents.”

Trained volunteers are key to both the Great Games and Rhymes and Riddles weeks, said Marilyn Newbry, the docent liaison for family programs. “If someone is staffing the game table, almost everybody will stop,” Newbry said. “It there isn’t a docent, some people are more likely to walk on by.” Many people just need a simple invitation to get started.

When Newbry staffs the seventh-floor Great Games table, she encourages people to play the Memory Match game with two contemporary oil paintings, one of a wet fish slumped on a faded armchair. The players spread out twelve Memory Match cards on the floor and take turns flipping them over to find pairs. Once they make a match, they have to find a detail in the painting. After the children have completed the game, Newbry asks them to tell her a story about how the fish ended up in the chair. “They come up with all sorts of things,” Newbry said.

“One little girl told me a story about how this painting was actually of the fish’s house.”

Benita Goltermann, another docent who volunteers during Rhymes and Riddles week, loves to ask the children who stop by her table to make up riddles about American Indian pieces to stump

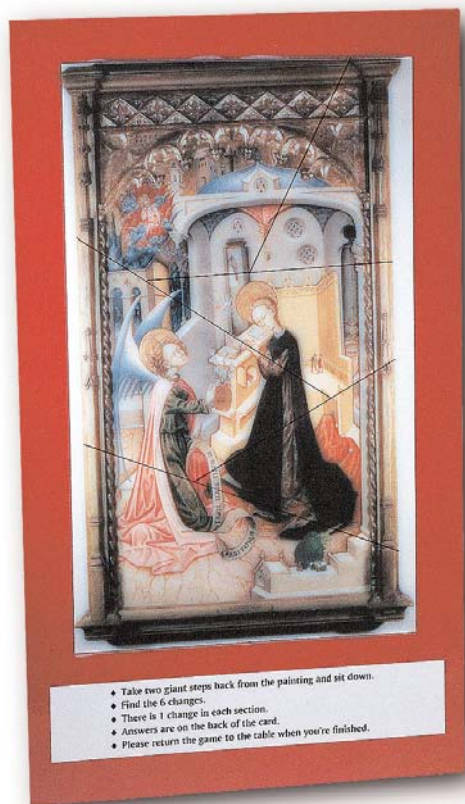
her. They end up scurrying back and forth to check out more details about their object, because Goltermann keeps asking for more clues. If they have questions, she’s happy to respond—though the point isn’t a mini-lesson.

While the education department is working to increase docent involvement, the program itself is designed to be run with minimal effort. “We knew from the start that we needed to develop something that could be maintained by a reduced

staff once our grant was over,”

McDermott-Lewis said, “so we invested in devising and refining ‘hard copy,’ in this case, games and riddles that can be used over and over again.”

Trager, assigned to coordinate the holi-



Visitor input has led to improvements in several activities, including the What’s Wrong with This Picture game. When families had trouble spotting all the discrepancies in the picture, the education department added quadrants to make it more intuitive.

day weeks, starts two months in advance. She works with the public relations department to get press releases to area newspapers and encourages docents to talk up the program with school groups. Families receive special “prompt to action” postcards in the mail. In a recent December reminder, the card depicts Seymour amid snowflakes. In the spring, he wore a wreath of daisy petals around his head. Trager also works with library staff to cross-promote holiday week activities at both institutions. This cross-promotion lets families know that they will

find fun things to do at the museum and the library, which are connected by an underground concourse. The children’s librarians are invited for coffee and a chance to try out the games or riddles for themselves so they can personally encourage families to come over after their library visit.

Once the word is out and the docents are recruited, Trager pulls out the games and sets up the tables when the week begins. With minimal maintenance, the families do the rest. Carrying around boards, or sitting on the floor working out puzzles or memory games, they begin to transform the museum. Their comfort within the galleries is infectious. It sends a message that this is a kid-friendly place.

“A lot of people come here expecting it to be really quiet—people walking around stroking their chins, looking at paintings, and contemplating the art and history of the world,” Goltermann said. “When a person walks into the gallery and sees people spread out on the floor playing games and peering up at the art, it’s a completely different ambience—one that says, ‘Well, go ahead and see what you can do! Go and have some fun!’”



“Prompt to action” postcards are sent to families prior to Rhymes & Riddles and Great Games week. The postcards let families know that there is something fun for them to do at the Denver Art Museum during those weeks.



Backpacks

As her three children and their two friends sit cross-legged around her, waiting, Tari unzips a red Wild Woman of the Woods backpack. She pulls out a cedar-colored, canvas pouch boldly labeled “1.” Inside the pouch is a laminated card. She begins to read the tale: “Lost in the Forest.” Except for her voice, it’s quiet in the Northwest Coast gallery.

The children in Tari’s group imagine themselves entering a dense forest along with a group of Northwest Coast children. The children have been warned to stay out of the woods, or they might stumble upon Dzunuk’wa, the giant woman who lives in the forest and loves to eat children.



“Let’s see what else is in here,” Tari says, fishing out a riddle book to help them find the cannibal woman in the room. Opening to the beginning, Tari reads, “Look out for the giant who lives in the woods. She’s scary and mean and up to no good. You’ll find her nearby in this gallery space.

Follow the clues—they lead right to her place.”

There she is, right in front of them, carved into towering house posts. The kids recognize her fat red lips and sleepy eyes.

During the next half hour, Tari’s kids follow Dzunuk’wa around the gallery, going back and forth between the snippets of story and related art on display. In the story the cannibal woman kidnaps all

the village children except two, a lucky boy and girl who hide and then pursue her as she races along the shoreline in the moonlight. As Tari reads about the boy and girl finding a dugout canoe and paddling furiously after the wild woman, her sons Joe, seven, and John, five, decorate their own paper canoes. They solve riddles to find a carved wolf mask in the gallery. Then they turn their attention back to the story. A wolf is howling in the distance as Dzunuk'wa runs along in the night.

From inside the backpack, Tari pulls out a wooden box latched with a leather strap. The lid reads "Bentwood Box



This carving of Dzunuk'wa, subject of a Northwest Coast Indian legend, inspired the story and activities in the *Wild Woman of the Woods* backpack. All backpacks are rooted in the DAM collections. (Douglas Cranmer, House Post, c. 1980, Kwakiutl)

Mindbender." As her kids lean forward for a closer look, she opens the box and pulls out the next story card. In "Children for Dinner?" the village boy and girl hide behind boxes like the ones displayed on a platform nearby. From the shadows, they watch Dzunuk'wa build a bonfire to cook her captives. Just in time, the brother and sister leap out and scare the giant, who stumbles. Her long black hair catches fire. With a bloodcurdling scream, Dzunuk'wa runs into the ocean to put out the flames as the children escape back to their homes.

Tari pauses. The kids sit mesmerized as she digs into the scarlet backpack. She pulls out a pouch stuffed with cedar needles and a real abalone shell. As her kids breathe in the woodsy cedar smell and swirl their hands in the shell's smooth cup, she continues with the story.

The entire village celebrates the children's return, feasting on salmon, halibut stew, and abalone cooked over a fire of sweet-smelling cedar. There are even fresh blackberries for dessert!

The story's over, but the kids aren't ready to leave the gallery. They wander around looking for a bentwood box like the ones the kids hid behind in the story. Joe returns to the house posts and stares at Dzunuk'wa. "This is her sleeping, but she's really staring," he says. After a moment, he heads over to the canoe again, thinking about a chase in the night. "This is the canoe. It has leaks in it, and they only have broken paddles," he says. "They are trying to get her! They do get away!"



Backpacks are designed to make gallery visits relaxed, interactive experiences. Families are encouraged sit on the floor and have fun while on their backpack adventures.

Finally, after the children are done retelling details of the chase and have taken a last look at their favorite masks, Tari zips up the red Wild Woman of the Woods backpack and hands it to Joe, who slings it over his shoulders. She stuffs the canoe art projects into her own tote. Leaving Dzunuk'wa behind for now, the clan moves on to explore the ancient Maya with Michael's Rescue of Bird Jaguar pack.

The museum's ten backpacks are do-it-yourself gallery adventures that lead intrepid explorers on art and culture expeditions that last forty-five minutes to an hour. Inside each pack are art projects and real things to touch, such as a lacquer picnic box in the Japanese Picnic pack or delicate rattlesnake skin inside the *Jaguars, Snakes & Birds* pack. There

are games to play and riddles to solve. Available for free on weekends and during winter, spring, and summer breaks (approximately 150 days per year), packs are geared toward families with children age six to twelve.

Backpacks vary. Some are open-ended—their activities can be done in any order. Others follow a specific and clearly labeled sequence. Some backpacks are more about examining and drawing; others focus on storytelling or role-playing. But all are intended to help families successfully engage with objects in the collections. When kids first strap backpacks on their shoulders, they have a general idea about what's inside. The bright cover images and chats with the check-out attendants in the first floor lobby clue them in on the activities.

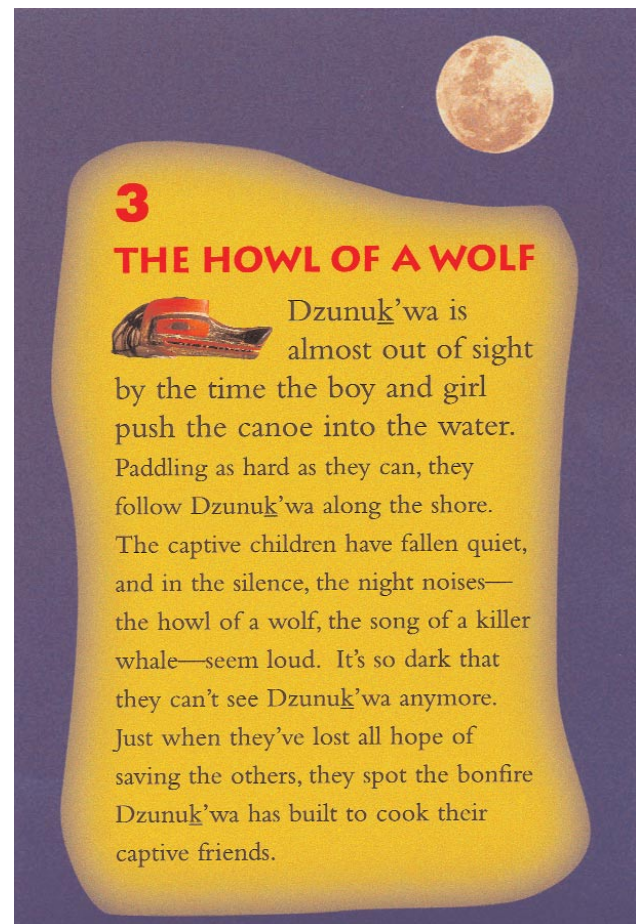
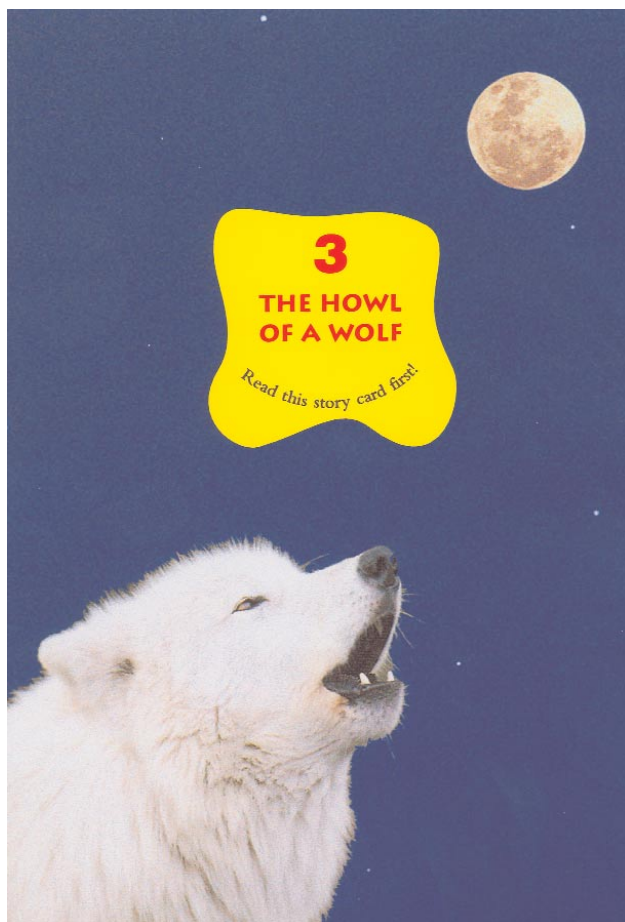
But their adventure doesn't unfold completely until they start traveling through the gallery, unzipping and digging into the custom-designed pouches and containers in the packs. Here they will discover unexpected binoculars, real bullet molds, rain sticks, bottles that let out a subtle whiff of chocolate when squeezed, crayons, scissors, or whatever else is hidden inside.

"The minute kids strap on a backpack, you should see the looks on their faces," says Maria Garcia, family programs coordinator. "They're ready for an adventure, and they are the ones in charge. We hope

the packs give kids a sense of ownership in the museum and make it their space."

Backpacks are designed to help families feel at ease in the galleries. Written directions and maps are included for easy navigation. Instructions are repeatedly tested for clarity and simplicity and even include a line urging families to feel free to sit on the floor and spread out.

A flagship for the museum's free drop-in programs, backpacks encourage independent family forays into galleries. Emboldened by a stuffed adventure pack, families can explore more easily and purposefully on their own. No matter the



Story cards sometimes guide families through backpack activities. The cards use minimal text, encouraging family interaction with each other and the objects displayed in the gallery.

theme or subject, the activities get them to slow down and look more closely at a few of the thousands of objects on view.

The museum's backpack program dates to the early nineties. Melora McDermott-Lewis, master teacher for European and American art and family programs director, came up with the idea and developed it with four other staff members. The packs they crafted were an experiment intended to last only one summer.

In *Granny's Adventures in Africa*, children opened envelopes and packages covered with African stamps and read illustrated letters from their traveling grandmother as they looked at related art in the gallery. Kids became trappers in the *Western Adventure*, wearing rugged felt hats as they explored the Western collection with rawhide-stitched pouches and leather journals. In *Baskets, Pots, and Parfleches*, they designed their own parfleches, leather carrying bags, and searched for pottery patterns using shards. The fourth backpack focused on contemporary art. Inside metallic silver and hot-pink bubble-wrap envelopes, children found transparent color paddles that gave them a feel for mixing colors while looking at a vibrant Jim Dine painting.

Initially, backpack covers and contents were handcrafted. Staff members created graphics and wording on the computer or by hand and used laminated film and Mod Podge finish to make things last. While somewhat rough in execution, they clearly were successful.



Binoculars are one backpack tool that makes interaction with landscape paintings and other collections fun for families.

After that first summer, the education department decided to offer backpacks on alternate Saturdays throughout the fall. Gradually the schedule expanded and so did the number of packs. Each time additional funding was available, a few more would be created. During the past four years of support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the education department has added five new packs.

Initially visitors selected and checked out packs from a gray pushcart in the museum lobby. This cart also has evolved, now serving as both a dramatic display rack for the backpacks and a welcome station supplied with family program brochures.



The backpack attendant is a critical asset to the program. In addition to providing families with a warm welcome to the museum, attendants can help them select packs that suit their interests and needs.

It's hard to miss the huge custom cart on red wheels set up on the first floor of the museum. Backpacks hang off blue steel pegs. Sewn onto the front of each pack is a bold colorful photograph or illustration and a title hinting at what's inside. Younger kids are drawn like magnets to the jaguar gazing languidly at them from the cover of the bright yellow *Jaguars, Snakes & Birds* pack, the most popular of all the packs. Dzunuk'wa's sleepy eyes track kids from the front of the *Wild Woman of the Woods* pack. Seymour, the monkey mascot for the museum's family programs, wears his own backpack on the cover of the *Patterns* packs. Available in lime green, brilliant orange, and bright blue, these packs are

color-coded according to the floor on which they will be used.

Six-year-old Caroline, back at the cart with Tari and the other kids, looks up at all the packs and points to the one with a trapper astride a horse. She watches as the attendant plucks it off the hook and hands it to her. Kneeling, Caroline unzips her Western Adventure, pulls out a deliberately worn-looking hat, and puts it on her head. She slings the pack over her shoulder and is ready to go.

"It just makes me feel good," she says, bending a bit from the pack's bulk. "It's going to be an adventure. It might be about horses and cowboys and stuff like that. It's like carrying a game!"

Wearing an extra hat that the attendant gives her at the last minute, Tari leads her clan off to the elevators and on to another adventure.

On the back of the cart are generous shelves to replenish everything from art activity sheets to snakeskin. There are scissors, staples, colored pencils, paint sticks for Japanese fan handles, yarn and glue sticks for a bird mask, cleaning supplies, and tissues for runny noses. The packs can be instantly restocked when they are returned or adapted to individual family needs.

Since the cart is on wheels, it can be moved easily from one location to another. On weekends and during school breaks it

is set up in a prominent place in the lobby with a staff member available to check out packs and answer questions. Often the cart attendant is the first family programs person visitors meet after coming through the front doors. A warm welcome and pragmatic information helps kids and adults get oriented.

Cart attendants can help families select packs based on their interests and needs. Some families want to include younger siblings in the experience; others have time constraints or already have done several packs and are looking for a new one. Some plan to make a connection with a school assignment. Each situation is unique. The friendly staffer, perched on a stool next to the cart, sets the tone for anyone wandering by or pausing to look.

Although backpacks are one of the most popular family offerings at the muse-

um, the education department evaluated the program along with others. During visitor sessions specifically focusing on backpacks, panelists rated them highly. Having tested the packs, some parents preferred a story line with sequential activities because they said it helped to tie their experiences together. Others didn't want a set order. Either way, visitors have said that they want to know whether or not they should follow a certain sequence.

"A backpack is like having a teacher lesson plan," said one mother, during the visitor panel. "You have everything right here, and I find that's nice because then I can relax, and I too can learn. I'm not struggling to teach or entertain."

Visitor panelists said they wanted even more hands-on items, such as the blunted ulu, a cutting knife traditionally



Families can take advantage of backpack activities like making feathered bird masks. These activities not only enrich a child's experience, they help families relate to objects in the galleries.



Offering varied activities is an important aspect of the backpack program. When families open this backpack, *A Japanese Picnic*, they'll find a silk package with plastic sushi, chopsticks, and a picnic box that introduces them to the art of food arrangement.

used by Inuit women; or baleen from a whale's mouth. But they also wanted the activities in the packs to be varied. If one activity focused on touching, the others should emphasize something else.

Parents also noted that their children loved art projects. "My favorite is being able to make something like hats or masks," one mother said. "To go home with something is wonderful." But simplicity and speed were critical. Fifteen to twenty minutes for a project was all the

adults wanted to spend.

Parents also responded to the "wow" aspect of the packs' packaging. Outside covers are boldly printed on durable bright materials and sewn to last. Care is taken with every detail. One mother likened unzipping the backpacks to opening a treasure chest.

When families unzip *A Japanese Picnic*, they'll find a silk pouch patterned with frothy waves. From inside the bag tumbles plastic sushi. The activity encourages visitors to arrange the sushi pleasingly within the constraints of a lacquer picnic box. When they reach inside the *Jaguars, Snakes & Birds* pack, kids will find a soft rattlesnake puppet, complete with fangs and a red tongue, peering at them from inside a bag sewn from shimmering mock snakeskin. As they pull out this beguiling reptile, its rattle shakes dryly amid boxes containing real snakeskin, a delicate skull, and instructions for finding snakes in the sculptures and objects around them.

Drawing from insight gained through the visitor panels, the education department devoted several planning meetings to talking about the program, reflecting on what they had created, and deciding where to go next. Thanks to support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, they had additional time and resources to explore the program anew and articulate what had evolved steadily for years.

"To make a great backpack, you need time to try things out, and then you need to step back and reflect," says

McDermott-Lewis. “Forcing ourselves to articulate what was or wasn’t working and why helped us get at the essence of the successful activities.”

To help master teachers and other education staff members refine their thinking about packs, McDermott-Lewis pulled examples of five different activity types—touchable items, sensory materials, looking exercises, “manipulables,” and art-making projects—from existing packs. She then asked the group to examine and critique the examples by type. Staff was asked to think about what they heard from visitors, but to add to that what their teaching instincts told them.

Successful kits included touchable objects, or “cool stuff” as one parent put it. For example, the *Western Adventure* backpack includes flint and a steel striker like the ones that trapper Long Jakes carried inside his sack in an 1844 Charles Deas painting. *Jaguars, Snakes & Birds* contains a delicate snake skull inside a Plexiglas box and rattlesnake skin that children can finger as they look at snakes in pre-Columbian artwork. The *Silkworm to Dragon Robe* pack includes an actual silkworm cocoon that helps kids imagine the intricate processes involved in creating lavish Chinese textiles from such tiny strands unwound from the cocoon.

A second category included components that evoke a particular sense, such as smelling or hearing. Inside the *Jaguars, Snakes & Birds* pack is a noisy rain stick that sounds like a downpour in

an ancient Maya forest. Another kit includes a little plastic squeeze bottle that sends out a whiff of chocolate reminiscent of the scent of the cacao beans that the ancient Maya traded and ground into a ceremonial hot chocolate drink.

A third category included activities that encouraged thoughtful looking, such as the *Western Adventure* pack’s simple leather journal. Each parchment paper entry includes part of a description. Children fill in the blanks by exploring the art in the gallery.

A fourth category focused on activities that allowed families to manipulate something. In *Scales, Tales, and Whales*, children can arrange shiny white buttons of all sizes on a dark blue felt square, along with fabric animal cutouts that correspond to carvings and other images on display in the Northwest Coast Indian gallery. Other packs include puzzles that can only be pieced together by looking at a work on display.

“Being aware of different types of activities was important, but so was thinking about what was important in each category,” McDermott-Lewis says. “We knew that visitors liked art-making activities in the packs, but that they seemed to prefer art-making activities that were more than just a flat coloring activity. We realized that the projects didn’t need to be complicated, but if you could add a string, if you could fold it, if you could go beyond just the flat sheet of paper, it made a difference. With each category we tried to say, ‘What made some of these

work better than others?”

These discussions proved to be inspiration for new packs and also a stimulus to refine existing ones. In developing *Chairs: More Than Four Legs*, one of the new packs, Carla Hartman, master teacher for architecture, design and graphics, relied on her lifelong passion for chairs. Only a handful of parents and children will ever take a class with Hartman. But in the coming decade, thousands will benefit from the ideas that evolved during her weeklong summer camp in which children nine to twelve years old spend a week making chairs of every shape, size, and variety. Hartman's

camp was a springboard from which she began to design her backpack. She collaborated with Garcia and McDermott-Lewis, and together, they created a pack with content that addressed the needs of both children and adults.

“We worked well as a team,” Garcia says. “Carla wanted kids to be designers and go through a design process. That brought up, What do designers do? Well, a kid wasn't going to read a long story about how to design a chair.”

In pooling their expertise and keeping visitors in mind, the project flowed onward. Hartman says, “I knew what worked with kids in a classroom situation,



A museum educator is able to reach only a handful of visitors face to face. Backpacks take the expertise of the educator and make it available to hundreds.

but for the backpack, I needed Melora and Maria to help me in the sense of, What makes something fun? What makes things work?”

A colorful photograph of a gilded, 200-year-old Empire chair is on the front of the backpack. Next to the photo are four panels that say: “Vote for your favorite and least favorite chair parts,” “Color the detail,” “Choose an arm,” and “Design a back.”

In the gallery, families have to carefully consider chairs on display to complete the activities. As they hunt for what they consider the best and worst feet, arms, and backs, they intuitively learn about furniture anatomy.

“You can get into multiple levels of discernment through this simple voting

technique that kids love,” says Hartman, who had already seen voting in action while visiting a parent-child workshop taught by another master teacher. The topic of the workshop was Japanese flower arranging. Parents and children were asked to cast their votes for their favorite and least favorite arrangement. Delighted with their ballot responsibilities, the kids were intrigued and extremely thoughtful. Not only were they thrilled with the power of making choices, but they also had the opportunity to debate, haggle, consider, articulate, and describe.

Hartman translated this voting energy into a boldly labeled backpack activity. Inside a brightly marked black pouch labeled “Vote for your favorite and least favorite chair parts,” families will find a



Scaling back on text and making activities intuitive for families was key. The number 1 and the word VOTE on this activity bag let's families know immediately what they're in for.



Variety is important when creating the contents of a backpack. Coloring and designing a chair back were two vehicles that encouraged families to look closer at the chairs on display.

sturdy magnetic board printed with nine photographs of gallery chairs displayed like chess pieces on a hot-pink or green checkerboard. Picture size was critical. If images were too large, children wouldn't look at the real furniture around the room. The photographs are deliberately small, so kids have to stand close to each chair

to inspect it before casting their ballots. Kids mark off their selections with magnetic statements rimmed in green or pink: Least favorite chair, seat, leg, back, and fabric; and favorite chair, seat, leg, back, and fabric. At the bottom of the board, they are asked, "How did the others in your group vote? Find out why."

After voting, a second black bag encourages everyone to "Color the Detail," nudging grownups with "Adults, don't be shy—color one too!" Another tip warns "Open this bag only when everyone's finished!"

To do the exercise, backpackers simply color in an upholstery design outline any way they want. After they are done, families search for the corresponding fabric in the gallery. They get to compare their own design and see how color choices affect the overall look.

By this time, backpackers are ready to take on the third pouch: "Choose an Arm. Which art do you think goes with each chair?" The activity consists of six arms printed on transparent laminate squares. The arms are to be placed on top of silhouettes of armless chairs printed on a board. Backpackers can change the look and feel of furniture depending on their pairings. A final note, honoring visitors' opinions, says, "Find the chair? Which arm do you like better?"

A fourth pouch, labeled "Design a Back," contains sturdy stencils of chair backs and oversized sheets of drawing paper printed only with a chair seat. Kids can trace the stencil or use their

imaginations to embellish the outline in their own way.

All these components involved extensive changes and countless iterations to get from overall concepts to details, such as where to place arrows, how to label pouches, and which colors and graphics to use. Hartman and others interviewed children and asked families to test prototypes of each activity. Hartman's teaching assistant, Julia Tomasini, spent hours researching stencils, which had to be thick enough to hold up over time but also work for the small pencils little hands need to hold. She watched kids trace inside and around the plastic form to find out how big and how intricate it should be. Then she found a manufacturer who would be able to make and replace sturdy stencils that would last for years.

Tomasini created a mockup of the instructions on the computer, tested them, and then turned the best choices over to Mary Junda, a graphic designer who developed the final, striking, and minimal look essential to a backpack devoted to design. In turn, Junda's prototypes were tested to work out any remaining kinks in wording and instructions.

From the beginning, Hartman deliberately designed the backpack to be interesting for adults as well as children, and to inspire discussion and discernment. She knew it was critical that grownups were as involved as their kids in the gallery.

"Adults are at least a third to half the

party doing this, so the backpack should be as intriguing to parents as it is to the children," she says. "That way, much more dynamic conversations and discussions will ensue."

Even after years of refinement, program evaluations, and articulations, backpacks remain in spirit what they were at the beginning. They are like presents to open, animating art through real objects, games, riddles, projects, and stories that stick in the minds of visitors long after they've returned the pack for someone else to explore. As one visiting mother says, "My four year old loves the backpacks. She wants one from Santa for Christmas."

