Principles to Practice Session Summary

- Costumes can inspire, open-ended, imaginative play ...even in exhibits not originally designed for such.
  [BUT] Including costumes in an exhibition does not automatically lead to pretend play.
  [AND] Adults and children engage in pretend play with and without costumes.
  - Pretend play was more closely linked to the environment and the child’s motivations (CMI).

- Intentional costumes can help to support intended visitor behaviors.
  [THEREFORE] Think about what a costume does rather than what it is.
  [FOR EXAMPLE] Costumes can affect behavior, such as where families dwell in an exhibit.
  - Visitors using costumes had a longer dwell time in a pretend play exhibit (PNNM).

- Costumes can change perception, providing a new frame or approach to an exhibit
  [EVEN] Conversational content can be influenced by costumes.
  [WHICH MEANS] Learning goals can be supported by costumes.
  - Participants’ reported learning aligned with costume condition (CMP).

- Costumes can provide new, unexpected experiences for kids
  ...and grown ups.
  [REMEMBER] Visitors are full of surprises!
  [SO WHILE] Costumes can be used to convey a specific story or experience.
  [ALSO] Be prepared to learn from them and have your assumptions challenged!

Practical Tips

Consider including a photo op (and link it to your social media).
Costumes don’t have to be clothes (and this might be a good place to start).
Provide costumes for everyone (of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds).
Be intentional in the presentation (and think about how that invites engagement).
Less is sometimes more!

Aprons, vests, and backpacks are easy to wear and fit many sizes. Jumpsuits and zippers can be tricky.

Some visitors are uncomfortable sharing things that go on feet. They are usually the last piece of costume to be used.

Things on heads are accessible and easy to wear. Some visitors (and staff) may worry about lice, but most trust the museum to keep them safe.

Pairs rarely stayed paired up, leading to disappointed visitors.
Exhibit Design, Costumes, and Pretend Play Matrix

Costume Size
Make sure all visitors who want to can and are invited to participate. Depending on costume style, sizes that fit adults also fit larger children.

Inviting Play
In some museum environments, visitors may need to be invited to dress up. Signs and other exhibit elements can help facilitate dressing up and pretend play.

Props
Props can be used alongside costumes and can be good additions for individuals who do not or cannot dress up themselves.

Putting It Away
Ensure that even the smallest visitors are able to reach to put their costumes away. Doing so makes the costumes more accessible and keeps the area neater and more inviting.

Other Factors to Consider