

# Creating Cultural Empathy



Tuesday, May 17, 2022  
10:45am – 12:00pm

**Brendan Cartwright, Moderator**  
Association of  
Children's Museums

**Leda Riley**  
The Magic House,  
St. Louis Children's Museum

**Catherine Ndegwa**  
The Magic House,  
St. Louis Children's Museum

**Stephen Wisniewski, PhD**  
Independent Consultant

# WELCOME!

- Brendan Cartwright, Program Manager  
Special Initiatives, Association of Children's Museums
- Catherine Ndegwa, Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum
- Leda Riley, Exhibit Manager  
Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum
- Stephen Wisniewski

# THE OPPORTUNITY OF CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS

- Children's museums have opportunity to present and introduce multiple cultures to audience
- Similarities and differences between cultures that celebrate diversity and unity
- Magic House has done exhibits on China, Kenya, India, and Argentina
- The Freeman Foundation has sponsored a series of exhibits about East Asian cultures
  - Current round is for small museums
- This session will discuss the process of creating cultural exhibits respectfully and empathetically and provide examples for other museums to follow.

# FREEMAN FOUNDATION ASIAN CULTURE EXHIBIT SERIES



FREEMAN FOUNDATION  
*Asian Culture Exhibit Series*

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Administered by Association of Children's Museums

# INITIAL GOALS

- Raise level of awareness of Asian cultures in children's museums
- Significantly increase the number and quality of exhibits that focus on Asian cultures for children
- Enhance existing partnerships and relationships with Asian cultural organizations

# FIRST EXHIBITS

- *Five Friends From Japan: Children in Japan Today* (Boston Children's Museum)
- *Japan and Nature: Spirit of the Seasons* (Brooklyn Children's Museum)
- *Jump to Japan: Discovering Culture Through Japanese Art* (Minnesota Children's Museum)
- *Dragons and Fairies: Exploring Vietnam through Folktales* (The Children's Museum of Houston)
- *Monkey King: A Journey to China* (Children's Museum of Manhattan)
- *Song of Korea* (Austin Children's Museum)
- *Hmong at Heart* (Madison Children's Museum)

# ON TOUR

- 79 cities in 36 states
- 23 media markets
- Over 3.5 million visitors



# SECOND ROUND OF EXHIBITS

- *Children of Hangzhou* (Boston Children's Museum)
- *Hello from Japan!* (Children's Museum of Manhattan)
- *Heart and Seoul* (The Children's Museum of Houston)
- *Children's China* (Magic House, the St. Louis Children's Museum)
- *Voyage to Vietnam* (Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose)



# ON TOUR

- 49 museums in 31 states
- 22 museums in cities, 20 in suburbs, 7 in rural locations
- 3.5 million visitors

# STEPS TO ENSURE CULTURAL EMPATHY

- Focusing on specific aspects
- Centering the culture
- Activities and costumes were true to life
- Authentic presentation invited comparisons that revealed differences and similarities
- Inviting review and contribution from cultural groups and experts
- In-person experiences by the design teams
- Some kind of pre-existing connection to the culture

**CHILDREN'S**  
**CHINA**



**Celebrating Culture, Character & Confucius**

**The Magic  
House**<sup>®</sup>  
St. Louis Children's Museum











**KENYA'S**  
 **KIDS**









**KENYA'S**  
**KIDS**



ARGENTINA'S  
NIÑOS





namaste  
INDIA





namaste  
**INDIA**





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**INDIA**



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**INDIA**



## Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)

= the process by which a person acquires and applies key competencies related to self- and social-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills.

## Imaginative play

= “a time when [children] break through the walls of reality [and] pretend to be someone or something different from themselves.”

-- Marie Cecchini, *How Dramatic Play Can Enhance Learning* (2007)



# PROCESS

**Creating cultural exhibits  
in children's museums**



# PARTIES INVOLVED

- Children's Museum
- Advisory Committee composed of individuals born in the selected world country/culture
- Extended community

# ROLE OF THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

- Determine nation/culture to highlight
- Commit time and resources
- Create Advisory Committee
- Communicate role of Advisory Committee

# ROLE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Time Commitment.
- Input on culture of country of birth.
- Input as needed for authenticity of representation at the exhibit.



# ROLE OF THE EXTENDED COMMUNITY

- Children
- Adults
- People of featured country

# BRIDGING OF WORLD COMMUNITIES



*"It takes a village to raise a child."*

- African Proverb

# FFACES 3.0

## Goals:

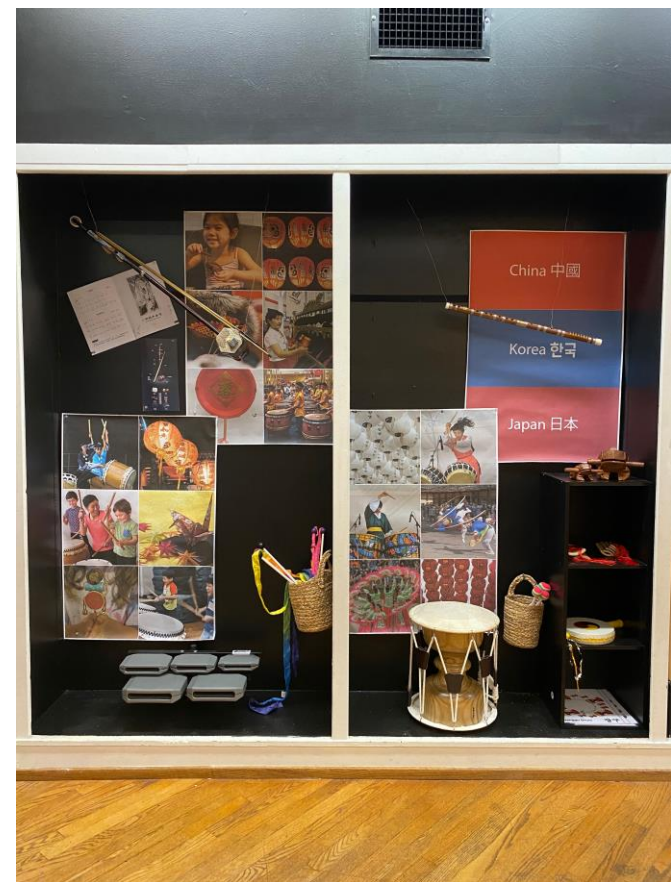
- Provide small and under-resourced museums with the capacity to host cultural exhibits
- Get cultural content into regions and communities that have not hosted exhibits in the past
- Professional development opportunities for small museum staff
  - Building empathy

# How does a focus on small and under-resourced museums reframe our approach?

- Not just a matter of “shrinking” existing exhibits
- Some small museum conditions that guided us:
  - Footprint
  - Flexibility and modularity
  - Small museum staff
  - Supervision and maintenance
  - Exhibit *voice* and small museum communities
  - **“IMMERSION”**: What does it mean? How do we achieve it?

# PROTOTYPING WITH SMALL MUSEUMS





# What can this approach mean for institutions of all sizes?

- Thinking critically about mission, resources, audiences, and communities.
- Recognizing the innovative work that small museums do, the unique and important roles they play in their communities and learning from them.
- Expanding ways we can work toward goals of building empathy.

# AUDIENCE ACTIVITY

**How would you design a hands-on activity or experience intended to introduce an aspect of your own culture to others?**

## **Instructions:**

- 1. Reflect** on how you would want to represent your own cultural identity, region, or hometown.
- 2. Think** with other participants or independently about the cultural aspect you've identified.
- 3. Design** a single hands-on activity or experience for children that could introduce visitors to an aspect of your culture. Use the themes introduced by the Freeman Foundation's most recent prototypes for inspiration, or create your own:

**MUSIC**

**CELEBRATIONS**

**HOME / LIFE**

**FOOD**

**PLAY**



# CONCLUSION

# CULTURAL EMPATHY



AUTHENTIC  
VOICES



INPUT FROM  
THE COMMUNITY

# COMMITMENT FROM THE MUSEUM

**INTENTIONALITY**

**RESPECT**