



WONDER, CURIOSITY & CONNECTION;

Meaningful Learning Experiences with Objects-Based Programming

Presented by:

Vanessa Eastmure, Exhibits & Collections Manager, London Children's Museum

Jamie Fenton, Programs & Services Manager, London Children's Museum

Lindsay Genshaft, Senior Manager, Family and Community Programs, Denver Art Museum

What do we mean by Objects-Based Programming?

At its root, objects-based programming uses objects that inherently elicit an emotional response or can create an emotional response during a program. Using objects to spark feelings like curiosity, awe, excitement, anticipation, connectedness, and empathy helps draw visitors into a memorable and meaningful learning experience.

What are the Impacts & Benefits?

Invites children to join as actively engaged learners

Objects-based programming is built upon the participation of museum visitors. By sparking emotions such as curiosity, these programs put children in the role of information seeker, encouraging the development of knowledge building skills and helping children to form an understanding of the world. By placing children in the centre of the program, they are asked to extend their knowledge through perspective taking and role play.

Helps communicate abstract ideas and concepts

By linking big ideas and abstract ways of thinking to tangible items, objects-based programming is an ideal method for communicating complex topics. Pairing authentic items with models and replicas allows children to visualize STEAM concepts such as fossilization, impact craters and circuits. Similarly, storytelling and theatre help make real the social constructs and historical context behind objects.

Offers accessible programming experiences for all visitors

Centring a visitor interaction around a material item allows children to access the experience at their own level, according to their own interests with minimal barriers to learning. Objects serve as powerful tools to create connectedness and belonging.

Meaningfully engages staff

Allowing museum staff the opportunity to learn and discover through training helps create an interesting and engaging job experience. What's more, when those staff members are able to share their learning and genuine interests with children, their enthusiasm and sincerity creates impactful visitor experiences.

Provides multi-generational learning opportunities

Objects-based learning is an excellent opportunity for children to show and tell what they know. Care-givers, siblings, and adult museum staff members often engage in meaningful back and forth conversations with children both sharing and receiving knowledge, building connectedness and recognition.

What Are Some Strategies for Object-Based Programming?

Engage children with objects they already care about

When objects-based programming centres around objects that children care about, whether they be the child's personal belongings, or objects related to specific subjects of interest, the chance that the child will become engaged with the program is much greater. Emotional responses can help deepen learning by meeting the participant where they are at.

Illustrate specific details through storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful tool in sharing information. Stories can engage children emotionally in a topic and help build knowledge and understanding about objects and ideas. Storytelling is a natural connection to objects-based programming because objects often already have a story to tell.

Allow the child's interest and/or questions to lead the experience

Because objects-based programming so often results in conversation and question asking, museum staff have the unique opportunity to follow the interest of the child to offer the most appropriate and engaging educational experience possible. When we think deeply about the objects we use as learning resources we can prepare to follow children down many different avenues of information. One object can serve as the entry point for a conversation about multiple topics such as science, history or engineering depending on what interests are sparked.

Use authentic objects

Authentic just means real. Authentic objects do not need to be old, rare, expensive or fragile in order to offer valuable learning experiences, but they do provide uniquely powerful opportunities to engage visitors emotionally, sparking curiosity and knowledge seeking behaviour. Authentic objects exist everywhere, even out in the community, that programs can be built around.



How Can You Offer Objects-Based Programming Without a Collection?

Take a broader view in how you look at objects. Some objects like artifacts with interesting backstories, or natural history specimens like dinosaur fossils make this type of programming easy to engage visitors. However, even everyday objects, or objects that exist outside of your institution can serve as the centre of engaging objects-based programs.

Close Looking Using DAR

At the Denver Art Museum one strategy to engage visitors with objects is called close looking through the describe, analyze, relate or DAR method. This method can be used in a variety of situations with many different types of objects.

The DAR Procedure:

- When discussing a work of art or object, ask descriptive questions such as:
 - What do you see? What is in the forefront (or background) of the object?
 - If there are figures, how would you describe their body language? How would you describe their facial expressions?
 - If more abstract, what textures are there? Colors? Lines?
- Then move to analytical and interpretive questions such as:
 - What relationships are you seeing?
 - What does the situation or story seem to be?
 - Whose story is this? What do you think the artist is trying to say?
 - If more abstract, why might the artist have chosen to use these colors/textures/lines?
- Then move to questions of relevance or relating such as:
 - What might this situation or story have to do with our world today?
 - What are the similarities/differences?
 - Have you ever experienced or know someone who has experienced a situation or story like this?
 - How do you or don't you personally connect to this work of art or object?

Finding Authentic Items

Authentic objects are also readily available all around us. Explore your local environment, reach out to institutions like Universities or Clubs for resources, or even check out local thrift stores. The cost and barriers to bringing authentic items into an institution are much lower than the potential learning outcomes.

THANK YOU