Exploring Religious Literacy in Children's Museums: Some Whys and Hows
Introductions:
Who we are & where we're coming from
Who we are
> dedicated to children birth-12 and their families since 1980
> 1+ million served annually, including 250k in neighborhoods
> audience reflects Houstonians
> bilingual, English and Spanish
City of Houston’s child population is one of the largest & most diverse in the nation.

- 1.35 million ages 0-12\textsuperscript{10}
- 29% live in households below the poverty level\textsuperscript{1}
- 19% Black, 54% Latinx, 20% White \textsuperscript{1}
- 28% foreign born \textsuperscript{1}
Project-based learning
linked to school standards

Exhibits

12 exhibits
Tot*Spot
SECRET spy missions

Learning labs

- Science Station
- Power Science Lab
- Maker Annex
- Library
Free visit programs

- Free Family Passes
- Open Doors group visits
- Free Family Nights weekly
- Family Math Adventures

Open Doors partners

1,200+ partners:
501(c)3, local government, faith-based, school-based, WIC

Onsite

>30% free annually

Invention Convention Exhibit, Earthquake Table
Community programs
100% free to families

Out-of-school time programs
- Afterschool STEM
- Summer literacy camps
- Activity kits for home use

Parent engagement programs
- Parent/child workshops
- School family learning events
- Literacy kits for loan & to keep

Cuney Homes Community Center

Alief Henington Library
Highlights

- Founded in 1913 by science teachers and professors
- Fostering child-directed play and learning through hands-on open exploration
- Visitor demographics
- Arts & Culture overview
Introductions:
Who we are & where we're coming from
Activity

What's something you believe deeply?

3' free write
Activity

What’s something you believe deeply?

Notice: how do you feel reflecting on this?
Activity

What's something you believe deeply?

Notice: how did this experience feel?

Share Out

Wonder: what might visitors experience?
Faithful Friends
Exploring Religious Differences
CMH Kids

32 Topics  32 Members

Apr 19, 2022
What words describe you?

Mar 10, 2022
Tell Us All About You!

May 23
Being a good friend

Mar 9, 2022
Tell Us About Your Faith
What do you value?

Identify the 5 values that are most important to you.

- respect
- honesty
- generosity
- working together
- knowledge

- Draw cards from the PULL pile.
- Place the cards you want to keep on the numbers, filling all 5.
- Keep drawing cards!
- As you see new cards, you may want to swap them out with others you had chosen.

You are allowed to go back and take one from the DISCARD pile.

- traditions

PULL  DISCARD

What matters most to you?

You can play this by yourself, or with family.

Or you can play one side of the table, and have a family member or friend, play the other side.

Then compare!
Religious Symbols (prototype)
How are we alike/different? (prototype)
What are your reasons for wanting your child to explore the values and traditions of different religions?

- Reduce fear of unknown; Increase respect for others
- Highlight shared values, like love and hope; Reduce misconception and stereotypes
- Create helpful dialogue within families
- People understand how to ask questions of others to show support through well-wishes during times of special observances
- Help make children better friends with people from different faith backgrounds
- Learn about shared values like love and hope
- Help children understand how to make friends with people from religious backgrounds different than their own
**What are your reasons for not wanting your child to explore the values and traditions of different religions?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is confusing for children to be exposed to different religions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit could show bias to another religion that I do not believe in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion divides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I choose for my child not to know about religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you think it is important for children to be familiar with the values and practices of different religions? And, at what age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>11-12 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13 years old or above</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5-6 years old</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7-8 years old</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not so important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9-10 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>under 5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Resources / Inputs
- What we have to support this work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisors</th>
<th>Partnerships</th>
<th>Physical Facility</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(children, families, religious experts and lay leaders)</td>
<td>(interfaith organizations and places of faith)</td>
<td>(Museum gallery, workshop, and performance space)</td>
<td>(educators, developers, exhibit contractors, workshop leaders)</td>
<td>(children and families)</td>
<td>(Lilly Endowment implementation grant and sustainers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strategies / Activities
- What we do to make progress toward outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faithful Friends exhibit</th>
<th>Workshops, Performances</th>
<th>Seasons of Sharing</th>
<th>Faces of Houston resource</th>
<th>Interfaith Educator</th>
<th>Offsite Outreach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 yr initial 1,800 sf installation, then refreshes and returns within 4 years</td>
<td>Event series timed with religious observances throughout the year</td>
<td>Annual Nov/Dec exhibit and programs dedicated to showcasing family traditions of 7 religious observances</td>
<td>900 sf resource space housing rotating Faithful Friends exhibit components and temporary installations on relevant topics</td>
<td>Dedicated facilitator to engage with families in the exhibit and during programs</td>
<td>120 activity kits circulating through 38 Houston Public Library neighborhood locations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outputs
- The products we create and services we provide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of visitors</th>
<th>Pct. Free admissions</th>
<th>No. of partner organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Short-Term Outcomes
- The short-term changes that result from our work (satisfaction, knowledge, attitude)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults and children will be satisfied with their experiences.</th>
<th>Children will be engaged with the exhibit and programs.</th>
<th>Families will discuss religious beliefs, similarities, and differences.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults and children will gain knowledge about religions and how Houston families practice them.</td>
<td>Staff will understand the basic characteristics of the major world religions and the project's importance for Houston.</td>
<td>Staff will develop skills for facilitating visitor dialogue related to religion and difference, including conflict resolution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mid-Term Outcomes
- The mid-term changes that result from our work (action/impl., change in performance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families will increase their skills in discussing religious topics.</th>
<th>Children will increase their interest in learning about religions.</th>
<th>Children will develop alliances and friendships with children who practice religions other than their own.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houstonians hold respect and/or love for others who have religious beliefs and traditions different from their own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Beginnings of Religious Literacy at Boston Children’s Museum
Religious Literacy Orientation

Framework #1: Mona Abo-Zena, Assistant Professor, College of Education and Human Development, University of Massachusetts, Boston

- Cognitive - “Is God bigger than a dinosaur?”
- Social - “Why does grandma wear a prayer shawl?”
- Physical - “Why don’t we eat pork?”
- Emotional - “Where did the dead dog go?”
Religious Literacy Orientation

Framework #2: Diane L. Moore, Founding Faculty Director of Religion and Public Life, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

- In order to reduce stereotypes, prejudice, and violence, it is critically important to recognize the great diversity within religions.

- An embodied understanding of the ways religion has enacted structural violence, particularly towards marginalized communities.

- A tool for examining the positionality and power structures inherent within institutions.
Religion and spirituality is embedded in each person’s development, lived experiences, and culture.

Mainstream [white, western] religious beliefs and values are threaded into everyday experiences, and can uphold structures of oppression.

The omission of religion and spirituality limits our ability to reflect the reality of children’s lives and engage families.

By keeping spirituality and religion invisible, there is no opportunity to have dialogue about bias, stereotyping, and misinformation.
Mission

The Religious Literacy Initiative supports families by providing opportunities to develop a curiosity about the ways in which religion is embedded in identity and culture. Through various platforms, including exhibits, programs, object-based learning and community collaborations the goal of this initiative is to help children, families and caregivers feel more comfortable talking about their religious identities and develop skills to practice empathy towards other people.

The overarching goal of the Religious Literacy Initiative is for children, families, and caregivers, regardless of belief systems and practices, including those with no religious beliefs or affiliation, to feel supported in engaging with topics that affect children’s identity development and wellbeing.

The Religious Literacy Initiative is designed to provide children, and the adults who care for them, opportunities to:

- Understand how beliefs and values develop as a facet of identity
- Develop a sense of curiosity and comfort around differing belief systems and lived experiences
- Celebrate religious, cultural and familial traditions
Our vision is to establish Boston Children’s Museum as a model for other cultural institutions to center the lived experiences of children and families with diverse identities, beliefs and religions.

We do this through:

- Generating ongoing learning opportunities about religious literacy from experts in the field, and offering staff professional development
- Serving as a resource to other museum professionals by sharing materials, tools, research and facilitating convenings
- Defining new ways of integrating a religious literacy lens across our work, policies and procedures
Religious Literacy Application

- Encourage play and curiosity
- Share knowledge and build cultural wealth
- Explore values that connect with religious ideas
Reflecting on Religious Literacy at Your Museum
OR VISIT

pollev.com/religionacm125
Based on what you’ve heard today, what might be some ways that you can start approaching Religious Literacy within your museum?

- Individual reflection: 2 minutes
- Pair and share: 4 minutes
- Group of 4 share: 8 minutes
Questions