



2012 - 2013

Teacher Think Tank

What does success look like
for a school tour at an art museum?

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Program Overview

The Noguchi Museum Think Tank is a group of 15 classroom teachers and museum educators who meet five times over the course of a school year to collaboratively discuss a question of mutual interest. During the 2012-13 school year, Think Tank participants explored the question, “What does success look like for a school tour at an art museum?”

Meetings:

October 18, 2012

- Initial brainstorm on what makes a tour successful
- Opportunity to respond to selected articles about museum/school collaboration
- Development of individual research questions

November 6, 2012

- Collaborative work: Teachers and museum educators plan imaginary museum experiences. What is required for these experiences to be successful?
- Development of research and communication strategies

January 17, 2013

- Small group discussions about research
- Larger group discussion in The Noguchi Museum galleries

April 4, 2013

- Presentations: Research results

May 30, 2013

- Presentations: Changes in individual practice
- Brainstorm: Implications and ideas for schools and museums

Findings:

The Think Tank resulted in the following collections of advice for those booking, participating in, offering, and leading art museum tours for school groups. Also included in this report are the articles read by Think Tank members, which may be of interest to both classroom teachers and museum educators.

Advice for Schools and Teachers

Before the trip:

- Choose a museum to visit for what students might learn through looking closely at works of art on view. Interesting biographical, geographical, historical, or political information may not be well-conveyed through an encounter with certain works of art.
- Create relationships with museum educators, and be open and clear with what you are interested in.
- Let your contact at the museum know what you are doing to prepare students for their visit. The more information you share, the better a museum can ensure the tour relates to your classroom work and goals.
- Practice observation-based discussions and/or sketching in class, so that students are prepared with the skills they might use on a museum visit
- Let kids know what to expect on the trip. Be very specific with them. If you don't know what to expect, feel free to ask the museum specific questions in advance – for example, about timing, logistics, and what you will see.
- Encourage students' families – especially those who will be coming along as chaperones – to visit the museum website. This is particularly useful for students who have transition/sound/ space issues.
- Communicate with other staff at your school about trips. This allows classroom teachers and specialty teachers such as art teachers to work in tandem to make the most out of a trip. It also helps schools build on multiple visits that happen over a number of years; let the museum know if classes may have visited the previous year.
- When booking a tour, ask for a free pass to visit the museum in advance. Also ask what other helpful materials might be available: most museums have useful information and images on their websites, including teacher resources, timelines, information about artists, and more.
- Museum educators often plan a lesson only a few days before your visit. If you booked a trip three months in advance, and your curriculum has opened up new or different possibilities for museum connections, call or email the museum and let them know.

During the trip:

- Most museum educators try to create an experience rather than lecturing or teaching facts. On a tour, expect to visit only a few works of art, and for students to discuss a few open-ended questions at each stop.
- Show up with students wearing name tags, or have name tags prepared and ready. That way museum educators can use each student's name.

After the trip:

- Be creative with activities that follow a museum trip. They can be fun and can help foster future memories for the students. These activities can also take place months after the visit.
- Let the museum know about things that happen after the trip which reveal student learning or interest.

Advice for Museums and Museum Educators

Before the trip:

- Communicate with teachers before they visit to let them know that their voices are important. For example, let them know that information about their class is useful. Share important information about the reality of your museum's booking process. Is it okay to change tour topics a week or two in advance? Where should the teacher go to find useful pre-visit activities and information online?
- Further empower teachers by asking targeted questions; be explicit about seeking relevant information. (Where are you in the unit? What works of art have you looked at in the classroom?) Make phone calls, follow up, show enthusiasm about collaboration. Seek out follow-up experiences – explicitly ask teachers to share what their students say, make, or write after the trip.
- Be clear about what a museum educator is, their role on the trip, and what might happen on a tour. Put this information on your website. The field of Museum Education is a mysterious one to many teachers – demystify this career, perhaps even publishing information about what museum educators do in teacher publications.
- Provide information about what to expect. This might include a summary or narrative of the tour experience, or a video or pictures showing things like where students will enter, where the bathrooms are, and the layout of the museum.
- Offer teachers who book tours a coupon for a free visit for two people, expiring the date of the tour – this will encourage them to visit the museum in advance.
- In materials that describe tours, use teacher and student quotes that are specific and substantial. This offers teachers information about the tours in familiar language.
- Make available a printable letter for principals justifying the field trip. NAEA has a model that they use for teachers who want to attend the national convention at <http://www.arteducators.org/news/convention-13/make-your-case>.

During the trip:

- Take the time to recognize that you are working with a community of individuals. Make a connection with students and teachers by being genuinely friendly, and ask open ended questions at the beginning of the visit to support this connection. For example, one museum educator always asks: “Welcome. Everyone go around and tell me your name and a place you have never been before.” Make connections with a few class members and remember their names.
- Remember: This is supposed to be fun.
- Ask teachers about school culture: Is there a sign for “I agree” or a system for lining up?

After the trip:

- If a group seems especially interested in a topic, or expresses a strong connection with specific objects, ideas, or areas of the collection, follow up with an email sharing handouts or directing them to web resources. Teachers especially appreciate things that are easy to print out and send home, such as worksheets.
- Consider sharing easily printable post-visit prompts that would support or replace student thank you notes. What do you want to know from kids?

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Next Steps

Members of the Think Tank are considering convening in Fall 2013 to consider a multi-visit program in which:

- Teachers use open-ended inquiry with art in their classroom, engaging students in dialogue similar to that which they will experience during museum visits.
- Classes visit two or three museums, connecting these visits through an open dialogue involving the classroom teacher and museum educators.
- This community determines certain shared teaching strategies and management techniques to lend these classroom discussions and museum visits coherence as a program.
- The focus is on teaching critical thinking skills, rather than specific content-based classroom connections.

Think Tank Participants

Becky Aleman, Brooklyn Museum

Marissa Anne Ayala, PS 134M / Muscota New School

Diane Berman, PS 87M

David Bowles, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Amy Boyle, The Noguchi Museum

Rebecca Shulman Herz, The Noguchi Museum

Anna Lundgren, Greene Hill School

Erin McLaughlin, Bay Ridge Preparatory School

Barrie Miskin, Academy of the City Charter School

Jennifer Oleniczak, The Noguchi Museum, The Frick Collection, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Madeleine Stern, VOICE Charter School

Kate Sutlive, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art

Liz Titone, The Packer Collegiate Institute

Lauren Walling, Adolph Schreiber Hebrew Academy of Rockland County