



One Size Fits All?

Engaging Families at the USS Constitution Museum

Anne Grimes Rand

President, USS Constitution Museum



USS CONSTITUTION

- Active duty commissioned warship
- Undefeated in War of 1812
- Guided tours provided by USN sailors
- Located on Boston's Freedom Trail



USS Constitution Museum

- Across the dock from "Old Ironsides"
- Free Admission
- 300,000+ Visitors / Year
- Family Audience
- Mission = memory & educational voice

Who are USS Constitution Museum visitors?



- Most visitors arrive with others for a social experience
- More than half of summer visitors arrive in family groups with children
- Many have little knowledge of *USS Constitution* or 1812

The Family Audience

A survey of 5500 museum-going families by Reach Advisors

Bad News

History museums are least popular

- 31% visit historic sites
- 23% visit history museums

Opportunities

Age of oldest child determines what museum to visit

- When oldest child enters elementary school, history rises

Grandparents are 20% more likely than parents to take children to a history museum

The Appeal of History

- An authentic, hands-on, active experience for families
- See, touch, feel and experience it vs. book (just read about it)



The Benefits of Embracing a Family Audience

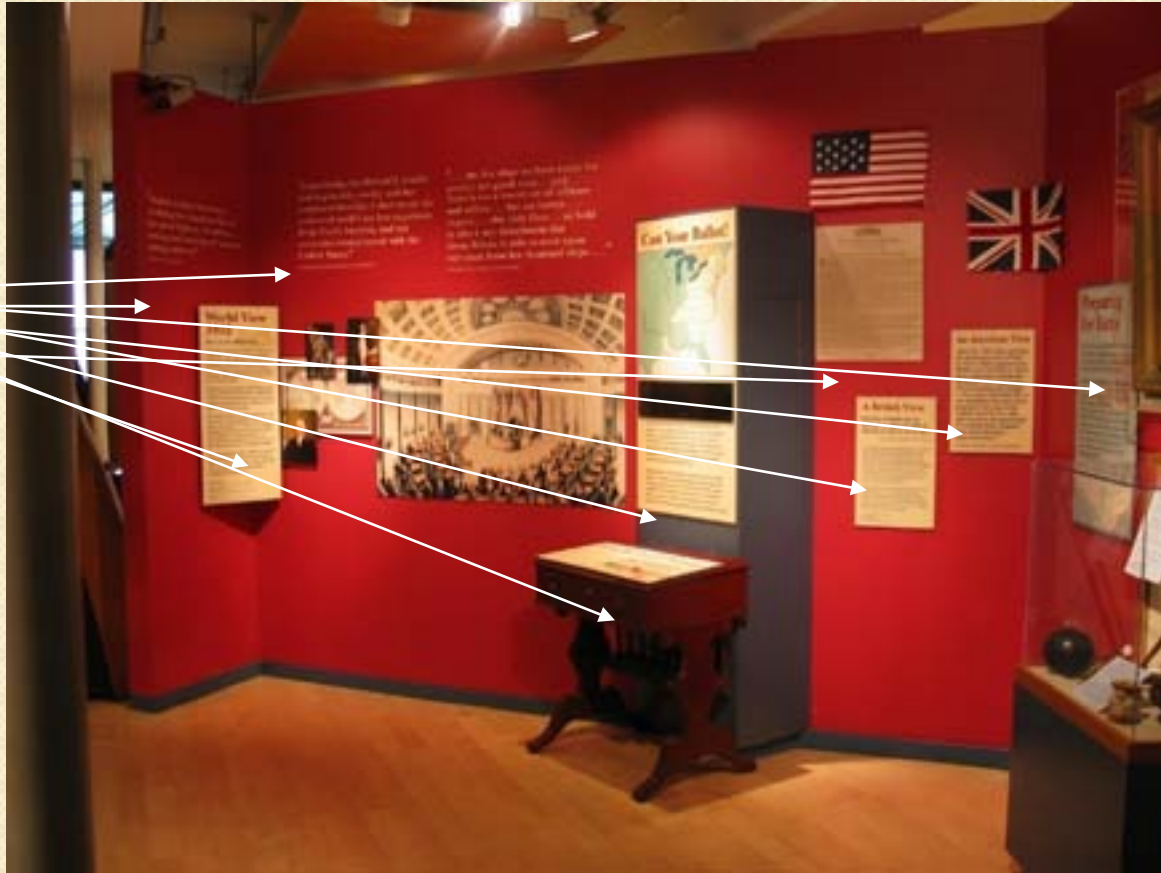


- Expand your audience
- Build future museum visitation
- See people laughing and learning together
- Show visitors that museums can be engaging
- Perhaps even see the impact in the bottom line!

Caution: it can be noisy, messy & very rewarding!

The old way: Book on the wall

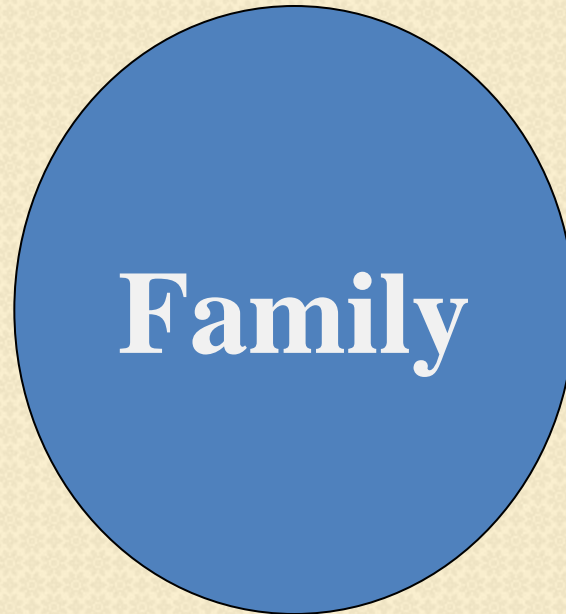
text



The old way: Authoritative tone / Museum voice



Paradigm shift



Putting families first

The Family Learning Project at the USS Constitution Museum



- Study successful models
- Prototype exhibit
- Extensive formative evaluation
- Visitor research
- Share results online

“Conversation is the currency of family learning.”

- Minda Borun, Franklin Institute

IMLS National Leadership Grant Goals



- Study how families learn in unfacilitated galleries
- Encourage family learning through **CONVERSATION**
- Identify low-cost, low-tech interactive elements that can be replicated
- Disseminate effective techniques through website



Thanks to IMLS for funding today's workshop!

Thinking Differently

What is the Goal?



Traditional Exhibit



Family Learning Prototype

What content is appropriate for a family audience?

Themes and topics

- Select stories & collections with family appeal
- Look for universal themes

Tell a good story

- Consider emotional trajectory of exhibit
- Difficult topics are ok – they prompt conversation



Personal connection

Conversation and Social Learning



- Exhibit elements connect with families' shared knowledge and experiences
- Encourage intergenerational conversation and engagement

Learning styles to consider

Howard Gardner's intelligences:

- Linguistic
- Logical-mathematical
- Musical
- Bodily-kinesthetic
- Spatial
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal



4MAT System

- Innovative Learners
- Analytic Learners
- Common Sense Learners
- Dynamic Learners

Try a matrix!

Philadelphia/Camden Informal Science Education Collaborative (PISEC)

- **Multi-sided** (families can cluster around)
- **Multi-user**
- **Accessible** (can be used by children and adults)
- **Multi-outcome** (not one "right" answer)
- **Multi-modal** (appeals to different learning styles and levels)
- **Readable** (text is clear and easily understood)
- **Relevant** (links to visitors' existing knowledge and experience)

Designing Exhibits to Engage all Ages

The Recruiting Interactive – a test model

PISEC Qualities

- Multi-sided
- Multi-user
- Accessible
- Multi-outcome
- Multi-modal
- Readable
- Relevant



Recruiting – You try it!



More questions!



Ask Your Recruit

Do you have all your fingers?

Give us a score card!

More game like!



Let us play a role!

Give us more information!

Recruiting Interactive: Later Version



Ask Your Recruit

2. Do you have all of your teeth?
3. Do you have all your fingers?



Losing your teeth was a sign of an unhealthy sailor and it was important for seamen to stay fit to perform the difficult tasks at sea. It is easier to tie knots and work with the sails with all your fingers!

Doing Things Differently

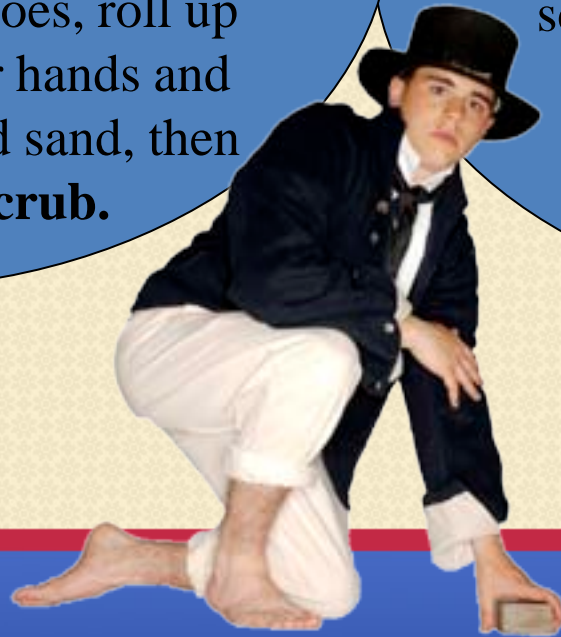


1st or 3rd Person Voice

Get on your knees and scrub!

One of the things I dislike most about being a sailor is holystoning (scrubbing) the decks each morning day after day. The worst is when it's cold. We take off our shoes, roll up our pants and get on our hands and knees, add salt water and sand, then **scrub...scrub...scrub.**

Every morning sailors holystoned (scrubbed) the deck. They took off their shoes, rolled up their pants and then got on their knees and scrubbed with water and sand. Sailors disliked this chore especially when it was cold.



You Vote!

Which label do you prefer?



Historical Quote – “The most disagreeable duty on the ship was that of holy-stoning the decks on cold, frosty mornings.” Samuel Leech, 1810.

Contemporary Question – What is the chore you dread the most?
How often do you have to do it?

Historical Question – Can you imagine being a sailor in 1812 and starting off your day with a cold saltwater scrub rather than a hot shower?

What have we learned?

Visitor preferences

- 47% prefer historical quotations

...because they are “real” and “authentic.”

- 34 % prefer historical questions

...they create a bridge between visitor and content

- Most did not like contemporary questions

... they didn't deliver any new information



When we observed visitors in exhibit

* Visitors engaged in conversation 3x more often with the historic question than with a quotation!

Reflections on Labels

Less is More

Label Format we used

- 50 words
- 1st person voice

Visitors said

- Easier to follow
- 2 to 1 visitor preference over traditional labels

*“It is not dumbing down,
it is lightening up.”*



Prototype Exhibit





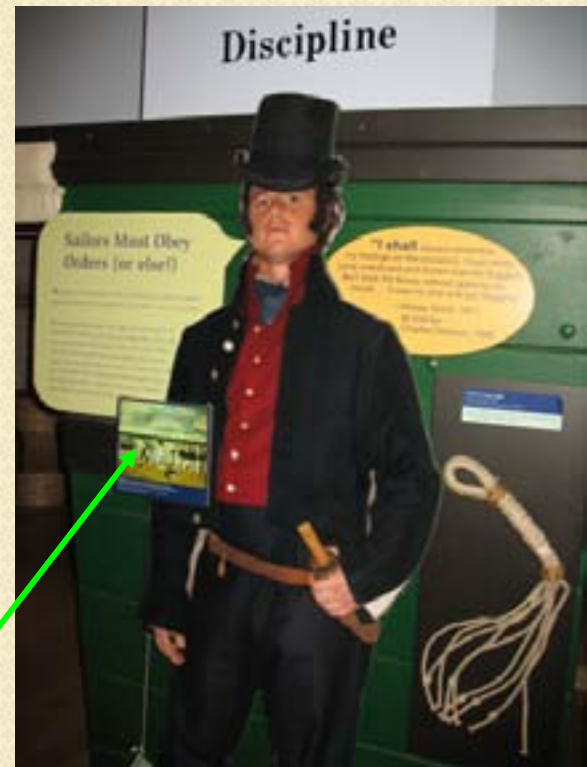
Text reinforced by artifacts, design, graphics and interactives

How do *YOU* compare to the Average Sailor in 1812?

- How tall are you?
- What color is your hair?
- How old are you?
- What color are your eyes?



Families are much more likely to be drawn to a text panel if there are graphics



One image makes a difference!

Where did all the information go?



Prototyping Works

Make visitors part of exhibit development!

Visitors spend 3x longer in new exhibit



- New exhibit is smaller (2200 vs 3500 sq ft)
- Greatest family conversation & engagement at interactives
- Visitors most often repeat ideas reinforced by interactive experience

A New Strategy at the USS Constitution Museum



The Museum will provide a hands-on minds-on environment where inter-generational groups seeking an enjoyable, educational experience can have fun and learn as they explore history together.

Impact of the New Strategy

Increased:

- Donations
- Time in Gallery
- Satisfaction



Visitor Response

43% Increase in Voluntary Donations

2005: 37 cents / visitor

2009: 53 cents / visitor

25% Visitation Increase

2005 = \$74,328

2009 = \$140,104



Total donations increase 93%

Visitor Response

- “I enjoy hearing it from people who lived it not a second hand dry account. History should be alive and this type of label gives you a chance to be a part of that.”
- “I thought history was always boring but now I © it!” - Kelly, age 10
- “Wow, this is way better than Disney.”



Broader Applications of Strategy

- Interpretation for all ages
- Gallery programs
- School programs
- Museum theater



"Old Ironsides" 1812 Discovery Center

What's next?

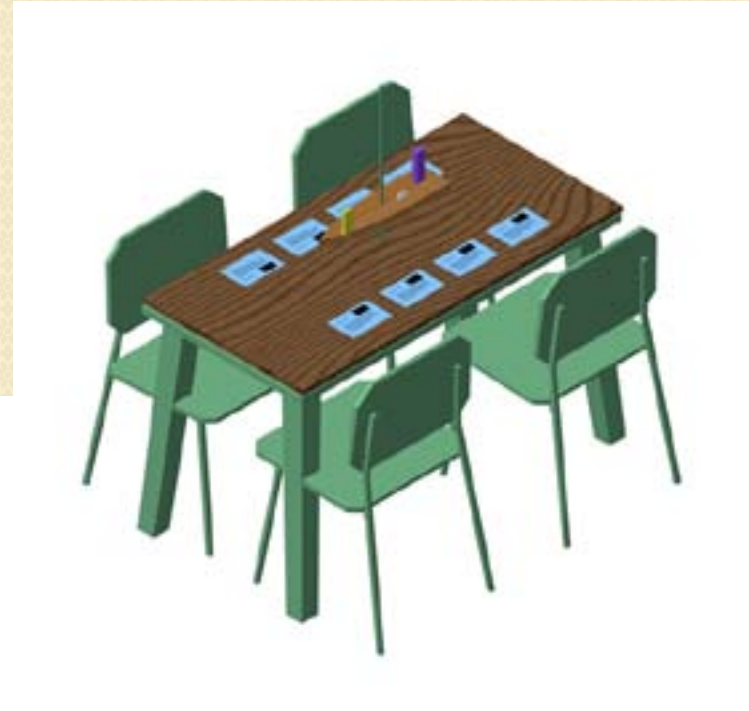
**Integrated exhibit
& program space**



Tabletop Interactives

The Power of Play

- Social Learning Space
- Form follows function
- Use technology sparingly



Will it work for all ages?

Unconventional methods pay off



“Old Ironsides” Trivia:

Where did sailors go?



At the forward end of the ship, the head, is a plank with a line of holes opening to the sea below. These primitive facilities allowed a direct deposit into the ocean. Bathrooms aboard ships today are still called the “head,” regardless of where they are located.

Think about it . . .

. . . no splash . . .

. . . no splinters . . .

Aren't you glad you're at the Museum now?

and restrooms

Please make a donation to keep our doors open to all.

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Aren't you glad you're at the Museum now?

Power of Prototyping



Try it out!

Solve staff arguments
Successes & failures

Failures:

Crew cards
Pack your seabag
Exhibit title



family learning forum
encouraging family learning in museums



family learning forum
encouraging family learning in museums

For museum professionals

Includes:

- Success stories
- Research
- Case studies
- Multimedia resources
- Reading lists

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A project of the
USS Constitution
Museum

About Family Learning Reflecting Exhibitions Engaging Text Programming Evaluation Resources

A resource for museum professionals to explore family learning.

Free Workshop!
Check out our upcoming workshop for museum professionals.

Family Learning
What is family learning and why is it important for museums?

Start and Sustain!
Find out what others have done to start successful family learning programs.

Welcome!

Families are a highly desired museum audience, but the same museums have the least about. We're trying to change that. To learn how families learn. And share it all with you.

- What is Family Learning?
- What can we learn from family group visitors?
- How do we design exhibits for Family Learning?

The Family Learning Project is a three year family research study at the USS Constitution Museum funded by a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. This website is a forum for sharing thoughts and results.

• 10 Steps to Encourage Family Learning
• Integrating Learning Styles

• Why Listen to Your Visitors?
• Developing Content to Engage Families

Join Our Mailing List!

Email:

Go



USS Constitution
Museum

Family Learning Forum is a project
of the USS Constitution Museum

See for Yourself!





Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

- **Spatial** (visualizing)
- **Linguistic**
(written/spoken word)
- **Logical-mathematical**
(logic/reasoning)
- **Bodily-kinesthetic**
(movement)
- **Musical** (sound)
- **Interpersonal**
(interaction)
- **Intrapersonal** (self-reflection)
- **Naturalistic** (physical surroundings)
- **Existential**
(questions/concepts behind "hard data")