Learning Tool:
Touch Tours and Other Tactile Experiences

Definition
For many people, touch is the primary way to acquire information or access a work of art. For others, tactile experiences help to complete their mental image of an object. In addition to touching original works of art, tactile experiences include: replicas, models, props, handling objects which convey one aspect of the work, and contemporary art made to be touched.

How Museums Use Touch (:60)

Watch Read

How Museums Use Touch (1:27)

Listen: Audio Described

Examples

Tactile Museums

Museums in many countries provide architectural and sculptural models that make masterpieces accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. Exact plaster copies of original sculptures can be touched, and architectural structures reproduced as small-scale tactile models offer opportunities to explore the exterior and interior of a building.

Guided Touch Tour

Touch Tour, Cummer Museum. Jacksonville, FL

Many art museums and galleries offer visitors who are blind or visually impaired the opportunity to touch original artworks, displayed either in the galleries or in an alternative space. A trained education professional or docent guides the tour. A team of conservation and museum education professionals chooses the works, which are usually thematic or representative of the museum or gallery collection.

Erin Narloch, Woodson Art Museum (2:37)

Read

Erin Narloch, Woodson Museum of Art, Wausau, WI on Woodson's Sculpture Garden Touch Tour

Self-Guided Touch Tour

Self-Guided Touch Tour, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Some museums allow blind and visually impaired visitors to explore art on their own in the museum's galleries. Touchable objects are identified by braille and large-print labels, or by instructions in a recorded audio tour. This option requires security personnel to receive additional training.

Rebecca McGinniss Metropolitan Museum of Art (5:32)

Read

Rebecca McGinniss, Access Coordinator, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, on the Met's Egyptian Touch Tour

Handling Sessions

Handling African mask

Some museums offer visitors in-depth tactile investigation of selected works, frequently in an alternate space. It is crucial that this not become a "segregated" program, but rather a supplementary educational approach to gallery programming. Some stimulate the user's imagination and metaphorical thinking. For example, educators at the Tate Modern use splintered Plexiglas to recreate the quality of some of Pablo Picasso's Spanish Civil War paintings. In the same program, silicone breast implants convey the paradoxical quality of some of Salvador Dali's Surrealist paintings

Three-Dimensional Models

A three-dimensional model can supplement a touch tour in the galleries when an artwork is two-dimensional or oversized and so cannot be fully explored through touch,

Replicas, Facsimiles, and Props

Art and historical museums sometimes use three-dimensional props, and replicas of the objects depicted in a work of art to make it accessible to visitors who are blind or visually impaired.

Touching Sumerian sculpture replica Los Angeles Braille Institute

Three-Dimensional Interpretations and Relief Sculptures

Three-dimensional interpretations can recreate not only basic composition and color but also translate stylistic properties such as texture and brushwork into a touchable experience.

Original altarpiece and tactile reproductions, Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama

Contemporary Artworks Made to Be Touched

The Nest (slate) by Ann Cunningham

Many artists, both sighted and visually impaired, expressly create tactile and multisensory works of art for blind and visually impaired people to explore.

Debbie Hegstrom
Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1:35)

Read

Debbi Hegstrom, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN on the Touch Tour as Universal Design

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Practical Considerations:

TIPS FOR GIVING A GUIDED TOUCH TOUR

1. When welcoming and meeting a group, in addition to your standard introduction you should give a verbal description of the space you are in to help orient people.
2. As you move from one gallery space to another, give brief verbal descriptions of the spaces you pass through, even if they are not on the tour. A few words are enough and will give visitors a sense of the scope of the exhibition or museum.
3. Limit guided touch tours to 3-5 objects.
4. Keep the tour group small, 3-6 people at most. While one or two people are exploring by touch, give background verbally to others waiting.
5. While visitors explore a work, encourage dialogue and responses.
6. When choosing objects for the tour, be aware of the pedestal height and the object scale relative to the viewer. It's best if visitors can reach all parts of the object. If not provide tactile diagrams.
7. In a guided touch tour, like a verbal-description tour, you must allow additional time for visitors to process tactile experiences.

See a Guided Touch Tour (2:30)

Watch Read

See a Guided Touch Tour (2:57)

Listen: Audio Described

- Any interactive program is appropriate for tactile experiences. Docents and lecturers can be trained to include a tactile-friendly work on their public tours. Keep in mind that introducing a tactile element requires more time for your tour or program.
- **Tactile experiences are appropriate for a variety of audiences, not only those who are visually impaired.** People with developmental or cognitive disabilities may benefit by the introduction of multi-sensory information. But just about everyone enjoys objects which give a sense of textures, weight, and the feel of objects in art or historical depictions. Applying this tool to a broad audience may help in fundraising.
- Make sure you include Verbal Description of your tactile objects and experiences. Try to make the verbal description, along with other background information, available **before** the museum visit, either on your website, in a mailing packet, or at your information desk or gift shop.
- If possible, get involved with the early stages of planning the exhibition. This makes it easier for your advisors to gather the resources and objects necessary for your touch tour. Your curators may also find objects that are appropriate during their searches (this is particularly relevant for historical, natural history, or science museums.) This participation also brings accessibility issues and awareness to other museum staff.
- Many of these techniques can be adapted to the classroom for pre or post-museum visit sessions, including: handling sessions and other tactile experiences; replicas, models, facsimiles, and props; and tactile diagrams with verbal guidance of the hands.
- If you normally charge for tours, consider offering one day of free touch tours. This creates publicity for your accessibility program, and allows for feedback and involvement in your museum from people with disabilities. This type of outreach creates an opportunity for visitors with disabilities to understand what your museum has to offer and encourages support of your efforts.

How to Buy It or Make It…Cheap and Easy

- Discuss with curators and conservators objects that may be appropriate for touch. They may also have ideas on how to recreate the work, or how to find comparable materials or objects, perhaps from a study collection or objects for deaccession.
- Your museum store may have replicas or models of objects from the collection.
- Check out online replica or reproductions sources, particularly of historical or ethnographic objects.
- Commission local artists to create tactile interpretations of these works. A competition or award could be used to elicit selections.
- Look to staff members' hidden talents. Are there any model makers or artists on staff? Ask them to create an architectural model of the museum, elevation or floor plan. Use textured cloths and papers on floors and walls to help users distinguish different rooms or areas of the model.
- Craft and hardware stores are good sources for props and objects for handling sessions.
- With a little imagination, use ordinary household objects to enhance the tour and encourage discussion.
- For utilitarian objects, flea markets and online auction sites like EBay may be a good source for comparable objects and reproductions.

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Tactile Diagrams

Definition

Tactile diagrams translate images into a tactile language.

They are **not** exact relief reproductions of visual images.

Tactile diagrams allow people access to the visual information in works of art, maps, architectural and other diagrams, and three-dimensional objects and spaces.

Tactile map of museum near entrance of Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

Tactile diagram of painting, Art History Through Touch and Sound

Examples

AEB's multisensory art encyclopedia, ***Art History Through Touch and Sound***, has hundreds of tactile diagrams, with accompanying verbal descriptions. These diagrams are also available online at [Art History Through Touch and Sound Online.]

Ma Jolie, Picasso

Tactile diagram of Ma Jolie

See How to Use Art History Through Touch and Sound Tactiles (1:26)

Watch Read

See How to Use Art History Through Touch and Sound Tactiles (2:14)

Listen: Audio Described

Practical Considerations:

Tactile diagrams should always be used with narratives that guide the user through the diagram in a logical and orderly manner. In addition, the narrative provides art-historical information and a detailed description of the actual work, which give meaning to the tactile translation of the object in the diagram.

In the museum, tactile diagrams can complement a touch tour, for example when a sculpture is too large for a visitor to access completely through touch. In the galleries, tactile diagrams of paintings can focus and enrich verbal description. Tip: remember to provide a hard surface, such as a clipboard or piece of cardboard, for each member of the tour.

Classroom teachers can use tactile diagrams to prepare students for a museum visit, or to study art, literature, history, and other academic subjects. Learning to read tactile diagrams is essential for blind and visually impaired students, since it strengthens the skills necessary to read tactile maps, scientific diagrams, and graphs.

See Art History Through Touch and Sound Online for an example of how to use a Tactile Diagram.

Writing Directions for Touching Tactile Diagrams

All tactile diagrams require an accompanying verbal narrative to guide the user through the image. A user must first understand the standardized patterns, lines, and icons used in the diagrams. A good way to introduce this information is with a diagram legend featuring the tactile vocabulary and the corresponding names. The narrative must guide the user through each aspect of the diagram, always referring to the patterns by their names. For example, “The coffee can is represented by a solid-rough pattern.” Usually, the narrative begins at one of the diagram’s corners or outer edges. From this starting point, the narrative works inward in an orderly progression. Each image presents certain challenges, and the narrative must address these. But in general, a narrative should follow this basic structure:

1. Convey the standard information including artist, title, date, mediums, dimensions, and the custodian or location of the work.
2. Provide an overview of the historical period or cultural context.
3. Give a general description of the subject matter and color or qualities of the medium.
4. Tell the user how many diagrams will be used to explore the work and what each diagram represents.

5. Cue the user that the tactile narrative is about to begin.
6. When reasonable, provide a brief overview of the patterns that represent the various elements in the diagram. Remember, however, that if the image is too complex this information may be more confusing than helpful.
7. At this point, you may begin guiding the user's hands through the diagram. Always start at the diagram's outer edges, not with an object in the center. In a representation of a two-dimensional work, start with the background and move forward toward the foreground, or vice versa, but do not start in the middle. In a representation of a sculpture, begin with the figure's head, and move down, or begin at the figure's feet, and move up. In representations of architecture, begin with the informational icons. After exploring the compass point and the human-scale indicator, move to the entrance arrow and doorway. Then enter the building.
8. The narrative should guide the user through the diagram in an inch-by-inch path. Always move from one area to an adjacent area. Do not jump from one point to another without accounting for the diagram's intervening areas. Explore the elements in a way that encourages an understanding of the whole.
9. After you have explored all the elements in the diagram, you can talk about the work in the same way that you would talk with a sighted viewer. Among the subjects you can introduce are the work's formal features, iconography, significance, theoretical premise, patterns of intention, or any other relevant issues. Finally, summarize the image and explain its historical importance.

Robert Jaquiss, Vice-chairman and Executive Director for VIEW International Foundation, on the range of materials and technologies available to create Tactile Diagrams and Objects.

Robert Jaquiss
VIEW International
(14:00)

Read

How to Get It or Make It …Cheap and Easy

Reproducing Images in Relief

Verbal Description

Definition
Verbal description uses nonvisual language to convey the visual world. It can navigate a visitor through a museum, orient a listener to a work of art, or provide access to the visual aspects of a performance. Dr. Margaret Pfanstiehl, founder and president of The Metropolitan Washington Ear Inc., and her husband, Cody, developed the art and technique of verbal description in 1981.

A verbal description includes standard information included on a label, such as the name of the artist, nationality, title of the artwork, date, dimensions or scale of the work, media and technique. More important, verbal description includes a general description of the subject matter and the

composition of the work. For more information, see AEB's Guidelines for Verbal Description, and Samples of Verbal Description.

Examples

Museum Tours

Verbal description as part of a touch tour enhances the visitor's tactile experience. It can also provide access to a museum's collection when the works of art are not available to touch. When a group of visitors includes blind, visually impaired, and sighted visitors, museum professionals or docents can incorporate in-depth verbal description into their regular tour. If a classroom teacher conducts the tour, it is advisable for educators to visit the museum or historical site first to prepare the verbal description.

Audio Guides

Some museums create an additional audio guide for blind and visually impaired visitors or include extensive verbal description of artworks in their standard audio guide. Sighted museum visitors report that they benefit from this practice as well.

Classroom Lessons

Verbal description and discussion about the work of art can be a part of a class that precedes or follows a museum visit. Teachers can incorporate verbal description of art, architecture, and design objects into history, social science, math, and other classes. Precise and organized description is one of the basic tools of effective communication. It can improve students' awareness of their environment and enrich their vocabulary.

Multisensory Books

Multisensory art books created for people who are blind or have limited sight integrate verbal description, high-resolution reproductions of the images, a tactile component, and sometimes an audio component.

Mariann Smith, Albright-Knox Art Gallery (1:35)

Read

Mariann Smith, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY on Verbal Description Tours

Practical Considerations:

For Educator or Docent-Led Tours:

You can use verbal description throughout a gallery tour to describe an artwork, to respond to particular questions, and to encourage dialogue. You can adapt the pace and level of detail of description to individuals based on their degree of sight loss and their prior experience making art or looking at art.

When planning your tour, **keep in mind that verbal description takes time**. Therefore, you may have to discuss fewer works. A general rule of thumb is to use half the number of works you would use in a tour without verbal description. So it's important to carefully select the works for your tour.

Develop verbal description scripts for the objects on your tour (see AEB's Guidelines for Verbal Description) and **review them with your visually impaired advisors for effective language, clarity and length of the descriptions, and appropriate pace of the tour**. Verbal description is also an essential part of a touch tour or a tour that includes tactile diagrams or tactile elements. As you develop your verbal-description skills, these scripts will serve as guidelines, rather than as a text to be memorized.

When first meeting a group that includes people who are blind or visually impaired, briefly describe the lobby or meeting space. Then, so that you may adjust your tour to your visitors needs, find out more about the type and degree of visual impairment. As with all audiences, try to relate the individual's life experiences to the content in the work of art. This is especially important for visitors who are congenitally blind, as they have no visual memory. **Throughout your tour, include brief descriptions of gallery spaces through which you pass and museum architecture.** You might include the size of the space, type of art, or other general information about the atmosphere or ambience of the museum. **It is important to keep verbal description separate from information about the historical context.** If your tour includes both sighted and visually impaired people, present your verbal description first. This creates equal opportunity for further discussion of historical context, biography of the artist, or other information important for all audiences to understand the work.

One strategy frequently used during school-aged group tours could be used with all groups: elicit audience response through directed questioning. If you have an integrated class, with both sighted and visually impaired students, **include everyone in the verbal-description process**. Ask sighted students to describe elements in the work through directed questioning. This creates an engaging atmosphere and strengthens observation skills. At the end of each description, restate student responses and summarize observations.

Get feedback. After the description of the first work, ask one of the tour participants if the description is meeting their needs or if you need to make any adjustments.

At the end of a tour for people with visual impairments, take the opportunity to emphasize the museum's accessibility features and programming. **Create a sense of welcome and encourage a future relationship with the museum.**

For Audio Guides or Audio-described Self-guided Tours:

Once you have developed verbal-description scripts, you can adapt them to create an audio guide that all visitors can use in the galleries independently. For the user with visual impairments, incorporate verbal description and navigational and orientation cues. When designing your tour, consider the effect of frequent physical changes in the galleries, such as chairs that are moved, deinstallations, or construction. Also, museum staff who distribute audio guides to visitors should provide a short orientation on how to use the player and guide. Another tip: the player should have some type of neck strap so that a user has both hands free to use the buttons, hold a tactile, or use a cane or other assistive device.

Note: The audio guide involves significant staff time, as well as resources for editing and recording, and purchasing portable tape or CD players.

How to Get It or Make It.Cheap and Easy

Verbal description requires primarily an investment of staff time. College interns or volunteers are ideal for researching and writing drafts that can be reviewed by museum educators and/or curators. This skill does take time to refine; education needs to stay involved in the editing process to ensure that the description is accurate. Writing verbal descriptions for selected works could also become part of the curatorial and exhibition development process.

Enlist students to help. Precise and organized description is one of the basic tools of effective communication. It can improve students' awareness of their environment, enrich their vocabulary, and improve the accuracy and variety of their sensory description when they are encouraged to ask questions. Have students write and test verbal descriptions for each other, creating a library of verbal descriptions for your institution. If you have a local school, university, or other organization that has a strong drama or audiovisual department, it may record your scripts to create an audio library for your institution.

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To train your local volunteers, we suggest:

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2. Listen to Samples of Verbal Descriptions
3. Hear more examples at AEB's Art History Through Touch and Sound Online.
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need orientation and navigational information, so keep this information as a separate "track" that will not get lost as someone moves forward through the tour. That also allows the sighted user to skip such information.

Through infrared amplification, visually impaired visitors can use assistive listening devices available in your museum to privately access an audio description of a program, lecture, or performance without disturbing others around them. This can expand programmatic access significantly for those who are blind or visually impaired.

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The easiest method of reproduction is to use microcapsule paper and a Tactile Image Enhancer. The photocopied image on microcapsule paper passes through the Tactile Image Enhancer, which heats the paper, causing the black lines and patterns to rise. Only the black areas will rise because these areas attract the most heat. The untreated areas of the page remain flat and smooth.

In order to create a tactile diagram using this method, here is what you need:

- Tactile Image Enhancer/Tactile Image Maker, a photocopier, special paper
- Guidelines for Making Tactile Diagrams. Includes detailed instructions and examples of different types of tactile diagrams.
- Tactile Patterns that you can download from this site. These are reproducible pages that you can copy and use in creating your own diagrams.

Remember that tactile diagrams are always used with verbal narratives as described in AEB's Guidelines for Making Tactile Diagrams. The narratives guide the user through the diagram in a logical and orderly manner. A narrative also provides art history information and a detailed description of an artwork.

Watch this video to see the basic steps of how to design and reproduce tactile diagrams.

See How to Make a Tactile Diagram (2:47)

Watch Read

See How to Make a Tactile Diagram (2:55)

Listen: Audio Described

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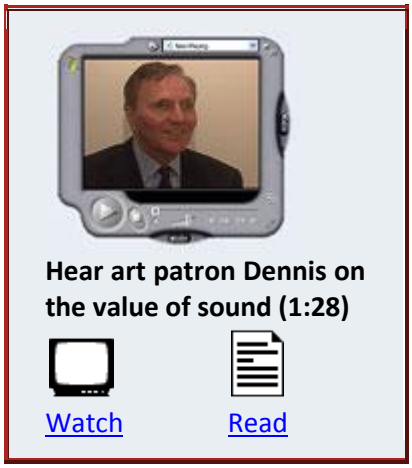
Sound and Drama

Definition
Sound can enrich the sensory experience of art and aid in conveying concepts to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. By combining movement and sound, creative drama maximizes an audience member's kinesthetic impressions, sensory experience, and emotional response.

Examples

Sound Images

AEB's **Art History Through Touch and Sound** encyclopedia contains interpretive sound compositions called Sound Images. They combine sounds, music, and narration to create aural equivalents of a particular artwork or an artistic style. They help to evoke the experience of a work of art for people without sight. They can be listened to alone or in coordination with the narration and tactile diagrams of AEB's encyclopedia.



Music of the Period

Period music in galleries and classrooms or multisensory publications can evoke specific ages and regions. For example, Renaissance or Baroque music, African drums, or medieval church bells can provide a sensory understanding of a work of art and its context.

Hear music in Art History Through Touch and Sound volume "The Art of Ancient Egypt." (:55)

Watch Read

Using Musical Instruments to Convey Motion, Rhythm, and Action

Encourage children to experiment with simple and handmade musical instruments to connect sound with different rhythmic motions.

Physical Movement or Re-enactment

Docent assumes pose of Giacometti sculpture Museum of Modern Art, NY

In order to understand a composition, ask students to act out or assume a pose of the figures in the painting or sculpture.

You can also use movement if there is enough staff to guide the students through the movements safely. For example, ask the students to imagine what might happen next, while educators describe any clues given visually in the composition by the artist.

Practical Considerations

- Sound and drama enhance touch tours. Educators can also recommend sound compositions and creative drama to tour groups as part of a pre- or post-museum activity.
- Teachers can use sound compositions, period music, musical instruments, and creative drama to prepare students for a museum visit, or to augment a lesson on history, social sciences, literature, or the arts. This technique can be used in all classrooms.

Remember: Music and drama will not be appropriate or possible for every work of art. Also, remember that people who are blind or visually impaired enjoy, study, and professionally perform arts such as drama and music.

How to Get It or Make It. Cheap and Easy

Many public libraries have music collections through which you can explore the music of a particular historical period or cultural group.

Introduce students to a variety of simple instruments, such as bells, rhythm boxes, whistles, simple pipes or stringed instruments. Students can also make many of their own instruments; for example, a sealed cup with rice, beans or bells inside.

Examples of Sound Images

You can find Sound Image compositions in volumes of AEB's **Art History Through Touch and Sound** encyclopedia. Some compositions are about specific works of art; others convey the aesthetic properties of a style of art.

They can be used by individuals or played in classrooms or galleries.

- In ***The Building Blocks of Art*** - "Building Blocks"
- In ***European Modernism: 1900-1940*** - Duchamp, "Nude Descending a Staircase," "Surrealism," "Abstraction," and "Cubism"
- In ***Baroque Art in the 17th Century*** - Rubens, "The Triumph of the Eucharist," Rubens, "The Gathering of the Manna" DeHeem, "Still Life with Parrots"

You can also hear Sound Image compositions at AEB's Art History Through Touch and Sound Online.

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Art Making

Definition
Art making is a fun and rewarding way for people to express themselves and to learn a broad range of skills and concepts. In making art, students explore the materials and techniques used by artists and architects, and experience the decision-making practices that artists have used over the centuries. While many art educators emphasize the creative process and exploration through art, others focus on developing studio skills and a fully realized final product. Students interested in working further in their craft become amateur or professional artists.

Benefits of Art-Making Programs Include:

Building Confidence

When educators emphasize the art-making process over the final product, students increase their sense of mastery, decision-making, and feeling of inclusion and independence, and ultimately grow in self-awareness. Working in groups offers opportunities for shared risk taking and completing works through teamwork, cooperation, and the exchange of ideas.

Hear about the value of art making (3:33)

Watch Read

Hear about the value of art making (4:39)

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Enhancing the Curriculum

Collecting and working with natural materials to make a collage, for example, can expand students' learning in an environmental-studies program. Science classes can use modeling and construction projects. Basic physics can be addressed through sculptural projects. Math concepts, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and geometry can be reinforced through creating patterns that incorporate both line and color.

Developing Thinking Skills

When students make art, they have the opportunity to express their feelings, fantasize, tell stories, and give their ideas concrete form. They can reflect and draw upon their everyday experiences and observations. Students find relationships between objects, consider alternatives, and make choices. They identify with the ideas and feelings explored and expressed by well-known artists.

Improving Tactile and Motor Skills

Student creates mosaic, ArtAccess Program, Queens Museum of Art, New York

Art making is a fascinating and effective way to introduce students to a wide variety of textures and help them develop their tactile exploration skills. Younger students develop their motor skills when working on construction or modeling projects that involve manipulating paper, cardboard, clay, plaster, and other materials.

Practical Considerations:

This learning tool is a basic component in almost all programs for children. School programs frequently use art to access other areas of culture. **Art making, even with limited materials and resources, can enrich almost any museum program.** Paper and pencils are safe to use in most gallery settings. Create clipboards for writing and drawing with cardboard and binder clips. Then incorporate other materials.

Creating "temporary" or ephemeral art in the galleries is a good, safe alternative. No wet media or adhesives are involved; therefore it is safe to use near works of art. This exercise also emphasizes process over product, which builds confidence and encourages freedom of expression and creativity. For example, place a large 2' x 3' piece of white foam board on the floor. This can be your blank "canvas" on which to create your temporary work, ranging from a "Pollock" created with yarn dropped by tour participants, to a "Mondrian" made with strips of black poster board and geometric primary-colored shapes. Or to explore concepts of pattern and repetition common in almost all art, including non-Western and modern art, have each person place a repeated shape on the board.

Art Workshop for Older Adults, Cummer Museum of Arts & Gardens, Jacksonville, FL

If possible, include art making in adult programs as well, either before or after a tour. While some older adults may initially find art making challenging, there are ways to approach art-making experiences to make them less threatening. Minimize the need for representational drawing, and emphasize process and freedom. A collage project is a good place to start. While you should emphasize process throughout, adults may prefer products and materials that are naturalistic as opposed to craft materials.

Older adults enjoy and benefit greatly from art-making experiences. Suggestions for further research, reflection, or activities, even if they are only informally presented at the end of a tour or mentioned in an exhibition brochure or flyer, may encourage adult audiences to explore their creativity and responses to the art.

Art Workshop for Older Adults Cummer Museum of Arts & Gardens, Jacksonville, FL

If you have a multi-visit program where participants can become comfortable with the art-making processes, **consider exhibiting their work**. This allows participants' friends, family and other members of the community to recognize their efforts, gives participants another chance to discuss and enjoy their work, and creates an opportunity for outreach and education for all museum audiences. You will find resources for planning an exhibition in the Community Outreach and Open House module of Art Beyond Sight's Programming A - Z.

Accommodations for Art Making by People with Disabilities

Basic supply list: long-handled paint brushes, masking tapes (assorted widths and colors) poster board/cardboard, foam board, Masonite boards, thin foam strips and scraps (packing supplies)

Some people may need **thicker handles** to facilitate grabbing; wrap foam and masking tape to reach the desired width. Others may need **longer handles** or extensions of tools. Keep long-handled paintbrushes and masking tape on hand.

Create physical, visual, or textural boundaries for work. Tape down edges of paper to table with contrasting color masking tape. This secures the object, and creates strong boundaries and a clearly defined, safe space for creativity and self-expression. Use trays to help control materials and supplies and provide a safe working area.

For wheelchair users: Some wheelchair users may want to use a slant board. There are slant boards placed on the arms of wheelchairs. Alternatives include Masonite or Plexiglas boards placed on arms of wheelchair. These can also be used as table extensions from wheelchair to worktable.

How to Get It or Make It. Cheap and Easy

You do not need expensive art supplies. For many audiences, the benefits of art making can be had with simple media: black crayon or oil pastels on white paper may provide enough contrast for individual with low vision.

Go hunting and gathering. Besides your local art store, use **recycled and found materials**. If your museum has an in-house shop or framing studio where crates or pedestals are built, it may have scraps of foam, wood, Plexiglas, or matboard. Your gift shop or mailroom may also be a source for packing materials, foam, boxes, cardboard, etc. For household items like paper-towel tubes, cans, or plastic bottles, send an email or mailing to your docents for donations and collections. Check the butcher or meat department of your local grocery store. They may be willing to donate unused meat trays.

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Educational Extensions

Definition
Exploring the visual arts can be part of a dynamic process of understanding the natural world, history, and world cultures, as well as philosophical, aesthetic, socio-political, and spiritual questions. Multifaceted approaches to art can hone critical thinking, instill self-confidence, and provide a means of self-expression.

Examples

- **Arts of the Period:** Incorporating the drama, dance, music, and poetry of the artwork's period can clarify and deepen our understanding of the art.

- **Cultural History:** Cultural heritage does not consist of art masterpieces alone. Educators can integrate into art education familiar areas of daily life, such as furniture, food, fashion, lifestyles, medicines, jewelry, games, rites, and rituals, to help students form a comprehensive image of a culture.

- Cultural history also helps teach that art trends do not exist in a vacuum. Art movements inform future evolutions in the world of art and are often in reaction to other movements in art, literature, music, politics and so forth. Cross-cultural influences also play a part in the development of trends in art.

- **Identifying Personal Responses to Artworks:** Discussion following an art experience can develop self-awareness and self-expression. Students can consider: What is the emotional impact of this art? What do I find attractive about this work of art or works by this artist? Does it provide an emotional or intellectual challenge?

- **Critical Thinking:** Discussion following an art experience can focus on developing critical thinking. Ask students to integrate their knowledge of cultural history and different art forms with their response to individual works of art, to compare and contrast different works, or to do a creative writing exercise.

- **Curriculum-Integration Activities:** Some of the skills that students learn by experiencing and discussing artworks—tactile exploration, critical thinking, language skills, and cooperative

learning—are transferable to other curriculum areas, such as map-reading and mobility, history and social science, language and literature, science, math and technology.

- **Group Building:** Arts activities and discussions can help create an inclusive environment. Individuals learn how to clarify their opinions and to develop communication skills. The visual arts provide a forum where each person's viewpoint is honored, imparting confidence and a sense of inclusion.

Practical Considerations

Family and school programs frequently use art to access other areas of culture and integrate art making, writing, music or drama into tours and other programs. This type of integration is especially important for those who cannot receive visual information. Cultural context provides meaning to the visual art object and the object enriches the information about the culture. Comparisons and parallels to the other arts may clarify art-historical comparisons. For example, ask students to compare and contrast early Renaissance music with early 16 th-century music, or compare Italian and German or French music of the same period. For 20 th-century work, compare modern jazz and bebop to the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists. Or compare early 20 th-century poetry and Cubism. Take advantage of other experts or people with specialized knowledge; work with a colleague who teaches music or literature to design lessons or tours.

Some adults may view art in its own box, and desire mostly information on style and artist. Explore concepts of how art and images are made and promoted, and how they affect the political and social circumstances of the society in which they are made. For example, portraits of leaders, such as Augustus Caesar or Napoleon, were often used as propaganda, with images of the divine included next to the individual in power. Gender roles in societies are reinforced by images in art. In contemporary culture, visual references on television and other media frequently affect political and economic decisions. It is important for those who do not have access to these images to be aware of and understand this process.

Adults and seniors bring much to the discussion of art. Incorporating their personal life experiences and cultural knowledge creates a dynamic relationship with the art object. Adults also benefit by introducing art making or personal reflection and writing into their programming.

One strategy for encouraging and validating personal response to art is to ask all students to describe an object to a partner or to the group. Create an open, comfortable environment by allowing them to describe what they notice first, second, third, etc. In contrast with a structured verbal description given by a sighted person, try not to impose a hierarchy or structure of information on their description.

How to Get It or Make It. Cheap and Easy

Again, this tool is an adaptation of a practice used with all audiences, and the same resources apply. Libraries and the Internet are good sources for information on historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts of art objects.

See our teacher's resource center for our Lesson Plan Database for more ideas on integrating art into programs for blind and visually impaired students.

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