

# National Docent Symposium 2015

Cathy Levinson's Notes from Cincinnati, Sept 2015

## Weston Art Gallery, Docentitos Academy

<http://www.cincinnatiarts.org/weston-art-gallery/learn/docentitos-academy>

The Weston Art Gallery in the Aronoff Center for the Arts shows contemporary art exhibits. Each summer they have a class to train 9-12 year olds through a \$5,000 grant and a nominal \$10 fee/student. The students are trained in art and how to give tours of the exhibits on display. Several Cincinnati people who have experienced the Docentitos tours said that these students give excellent tours. The students wear a white shirt/blouse and black pants/skirt when they give a tour. Some students are accepted for additional summer terms and mentor new students. The students have to apply and be accepted for the program.



## Preparing the Museum for 2025 - Opening panel discussion

### Contemporary Art Center

- Use all five senses
- Pair art with music and literature
- How to measure creativity, adaptability, empathy?

### Taft Museum of Art

- Change. Be flexible
- **Memory loss** and home school programs developed with Cincinnati Museum & Contemporary Art Center
  - I have the detailed notes and handouts from the Cincinnati Art Museum for their **Touch Tour Tips & Guidelines, Art Beyond Sight** – thanks to CAM Docent Camille Frye who worked in the NDS Registration Desk every day. I especially like their idea of having Japanese Tea Ceremony implements on a cart – would be great to use in the HMA Chinese Garden with the sounds of water, the breeze, and birds.
- Impossible to please everyone
- Frequently asked questions are posted on the wall, e.g., low lighting for photos
- Docents are best interactive technology
- No funds available for research & development, so use best practices from wealthier museums
- Empathy! Stories of years ago to sensitize students. Aim for more compassionate, better lives for citizens
- Spooky Tour for Halloween
- Live animals for Chinese New Year in corral
- Spinning wheel for lambs' wool.

### Cincinnati Art Museum

- Selfie spot(s)
- More art posted on the internet draws visitors to see the real thing.
- With standardized tests, why art? Art teaches creativity. 7 transferable skills, e.g., what if?, divergent thinking. Adaptability is key.

- 3D visual acuity to see the difference between Titian and Veronese reds helps dental students.
- Develop transferable skills for the next generation
- Millennials come to museum with a friend. Older visitors come alone, to be contemplative.
- Serve wine at the Coffee Bar?
- 900 attend Art After Dark

**Docents' spontaneity and empathy are human skills needed for a peaceful world.** Liberal arts are needed for students and adults (e.g. Book Club)

Carnegie Museum of Art: **Writing/Sketching Tour** - Breakout Session

- "If you could introduce music (to the art), what would it be? Describe and say why." Student played music from his cellphone – students loved it!
- Franz Klein painted to music
- Gallery with projected photos, jazz music playing, and benches in center of the room to write. Choose photo. Respond to it in writing or sketching.
- Sketching prompt with a demo first. Move around a sculpture and do it again. 30-45 seconds per stop. A 90 minute tour with a few stops. Don't look at the paper! Looking = judging.
- **Looking to Write** tour begins with a general, broad prompt. Do a blind contour drawing from two different views. Use senses: "What do you hear? Taste? Smell?" "Write a line poem."
- "Evening for Educators – Teachers Night Out" for teachers' development time.
- Sketch Van Gogh's *Wheatfield* by dividing the painting into horizontal thirds. Mimic Van Gogh's brushstrokes in the bottom third. Sketch brush strokes in each horizontal third for 1-2 minutes each third. What kind of brush strokes – describe.
- Lead Docent talks to Teacher before tour. If students have no writing experience, do writing experience together.
- **Art Inspires Narrative Writing** tour for 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Older students think brochure is too childish, so do two versions of the booklet.

Denver Art Museum: **Docents Mentoring Docents** - Breakout Session

**Mentoring docents are key to successful docent training**

- DAM has 125 active docents.
- Recently started free museum admission for age 18 and under
- Tours for K-2, 3-6, middle, high school, adults
- In Fall 2014, wanted new DOT class of 50. 200+ applied. Had large informational meetings ten times. Aim was for 50 school tour docents because 80% museum tours are K-8<sup>th</sup> graders. Those who wanted to do adult tours or learn art history dropped out. Conducted interviews by three teams of two people with the same set of questions: what are their interests, their thoughts on docent life. Settled on class of 60.
- January – December 2015, 10 months training for school tours.
- January 2015: 50 began giving full tours (6 dropped out due to life changes)

- Mentor Docent had four to five provisional docents for 11 months in random pairings.
  - Worked Monday and another day.
  - Allowed three absences – kept attendance records.
  - Homework assignment duties
  - Gallery activities
  - Tour demos: mentor did school tour and DOT shadowed
- Staff did lectures. Mentors did galleries.
- Mentor/mentee relationship strong with advice, counsel, support
- Syllabus over summer given to DOTs and Mentors.
- Mixed up Mentors, Mentees in gallery demos
  - What story would you tell about this picture? What's going on?
  - Do you see any shapes?
  - What do you see first? Where did your eye go first?
  - What is the background?
  - Have you been to a place like this?
  - What time of year? Weather? Hot or cold?
  - Who are these people? Are they related?
  - What is the mood of these colors, atmosphere?
- Mentors follow Mentees giving three tours.
- Staff and Mentors said **this was the best trained group of docents ever!** The new docents were well-informed, well prepared, and the mentoring program melds the DOTs with the seasoned docents.
- DOTs were very happy.
- January 2016: 7 of 10 Mentors will repeat being Mentors
- Contact DMA person, Frieda Levine, [frieda5levine@comcast.net](mailto:frieda5levine@comcast.net)

San Francisco De Young, Legion of Honor: **Docents Go Digital** – Breakout Session  
 Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco [www.art.famsf.org](http://www.art.famsf.org)

- Electronic newsletter with 90% docent work published Monday via [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com) Program produces statistics of who received, opened, clicked on. Technical support is \$10/month
- 200+ Docents and Supporting Docents, an autonomous group
- Public, private and school tours
- Weekly lecture series
- Design and execute own training program
- Digital Image Library
- Kapsul Platform [www.kapsul.org](http://www.kapsul.org) – free, can access from home. 7,000+ images with information. One docent spent two days/week for two years to load images and information about each piece of art work. Password protected.
- Survey Monkey to measure opinion – 50% response rate, \$278 annual cost
- Continuing Ed
- Docent Travel
- Word docs for text and graphics
- <http://www.artstor.org/> ArtStor.org has 1.8 million images

- Tour Scheduling for 200+ docents, 18 tours/day, 6 days/week, at two museums
- Were using paper to record docent hours, then entered manually to Excel Spreadsheet. Needed record of Docent No-Shows for tours and automatic reminders of tours. Record keeping is the need. Now use Google Docs (free) to record tours instantly by docent, day of week, type of tour, number of visitors. For three transition months, did both paper and Google Docs.
- Google Docs: sign in with name and email. Prints lots of reports.
- Tips for Success
  - Assess and prioritize needs
  - Steering Committee
  - Research possibilities
  - Hire an expert web designer
  - Train specific docents to monitor, create reports
  - Train docents. Docent tested three times with feedback.
  - Communication Plan and Execution
  - Launch w/ flair & fireworks, champagne, chocolate dipped strawberries
- Added Community Speakers, School Tours, Access
- New Docent Website was born June 2015 with a budget of less than \$3,000, input from lots of docents, over 6 months.
- Begin with due diligence, best practices, core team, assess what have/want/need, explore new models from NDS museums' websites, identify real possibilities, develop communication plan
- Put all training materials into WordPress.org. Other museums used Word Press. Record tour assignments, tour count, calendar, document directory, museum website.
- Docent Directory with name, etc., plus touring day, audience, content
- Collections AV Library
  - Focus Objects - loaded Docents' research papers with disclaimer Study Materials
  - Lectures and Gallery Talks
  - Kapsul images
  -

Dr. Nick Nissley, Executive Director, School for Creative and Performing Arts, Cincinnati

### **Stretch your imagination**

Pair up and share an artifact of yourself with our partner

- Notice volume increased with talking, body language leaned in with smiles & physical intimacy: had permission to share a personal story.
- Think of artifact as art – engage through art
- Connect visitor's story with art

Mr. Hershey went bankrupt 4 times. When successful, he built a school for orphaned and poor, needy children. In 1945 he said, "I never had a vision for the chocolate company. My vision was to solve poverty in America, one child at a time." Mr. Hershey was a fatherless father who raised 17,000 children.

Lesson #1: Art Affords an "Other" Way of Engaging

Lesson #2: Don't Be Afraid to Engage Folks in the Intersections – Engage visitors not just with art but with their lives.

Lesson #3 Art Can Create Space for Conversations

Lesson #4 Arts Offer an “Other” Language to Help Us in Sense-making and Storytelling.

Lesson #6 The Effective Practice of the Docent Requires Narrative Competence. Columbia University says of Narrative Medicine, “The effective practice of medicine requires *narrative competence*.”

**Engage visitors with art, not to art.**

Children are seeking their voice, to understand themselves, to find their voice with Nourishment through the Arts. The arts help fill the empty spaces inside us. Help us engage with Art, with Life.

**Storytelling: New Ways to Engage the Visitor** – Diane Macklin

**People yearn to connect with another human being**

Too much “us”, not enough “we”: there are kids whose parents/grandparents have never been to a museum; who believe that museums are not for “us”.

Use art as a jumping off point. Tell the story. Find the humanity to link with another.

People want to hear a story!

Tang Dynasty Horse

- What have you ridden on?
- Would you want to ride a horse like this?
- Where would you want to go?
- Why do you want to go to ...?
- Pull out the story by continuing to ask questions: who, what, where, when, why
- Life is fast. How wonderful to connect with another person: you're worth being listened to. Reach in. Acknowledge the other.

The Story is the Journey. The end is not the goal.

- Listeners nod and connect to the Storyteller.
- The story has a beginning, a middle, and end.
- How does it begin? Then what? How does it end?
- Docent offers structure.
- “That's a great ending”

Choose a picture, assign characters, and tell their story (Gallery 3, Musical Conversation, Three Children)

How to engage teenagers?

- Begin where people are at
- What are they bringing into the museum?
- What do they care about?
- Instead of curriculum, start with them. Then go to the curriculum.
- I care about you. I respect you. I believe in you.
- A blank face is a mask. They are thinking, feeling.

“Re-mem-bering” People need time to rearrange relationships,

- At 9/11, people couldn't talk about it then, but can talk about it now

- Time is a variable

A child's difficult story

- Plant seed that other kids will keep their secret
- Gift of their sharing something precious
- Thanks for sharing
- Think about when to share and not

Sound of your voice brings people in.

Cross-cultural codes and political correctness: Live in our humility and ask for compassion.

**Powerful to feel that someone gets you**

Taft Museum – **School Tours with Connections**, Connecting Art & Core Curriculum

**Probability Math Tour, 6th to 8<sup>th</sup> graders** Art + games

Terms: Population – collection of anything

Sample – set/ representative of collection

Probability – number value

Chance – sometimes, possible, likely

Docents each carried a cloth purse with sets of laminated cards for the various games. (Purses looked like a Maruca from Boulder CO, but were made by a Docent.)



Thanks to Mary Ellen Slauson, head of the NDS 2015 Showcase of Ideas, I have the Taft Museum of Art 11"x17" bifolds explaining each of their school tours:

- Passport to Art
- Daily Life in the Past
- The Apple and the Rectangle
- Ohio "State of the Art"
- China Connection
- Probability Tour of Taft Treasures

National Docent Symposiums in the Future

2017 Montreal

2019 Freer & Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution, D.C.

2021 Three museums are vying.

The NDS Vice President asks that Hawaii apply because the directors are looking for Location. HMA working with other local museums would receive computer programs help and advice from NDS of what to do and how to do it.

Orchid lei and loose orchid blossoms on our Showcase Table were a big hit with attendees.