



'See-Think-Wonder' at the Ministry of Education kindergarten in Tampines

PLAYTIME AT MUSEUMS

ENJOYING MUSEUMS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

By Karen Chin

Play is essential to a child's development. The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights recognises play as a right of every child. Museums are designing spaces and programmes to promote play. Children can now have fun at PLAY@National Museum of Singapore or participate in child-friendly programmes at many museums. With a few tips, any parent or teacher can transform even serious museums into places of wonder for young learners.



Family Treasure Trail at Peranakan Museum

Tip 1: Make a plan

What excites your child? What draws his or her attention the most in class? Choose an art museum if the little one adores painting. Select a history or science museum if you have inquisitive children who love to play detective. The Museum Roundtable website (www.museums.com.sg) offers an overview of more than 50 museums. You can also find out more about Children's Season, an annual holiday programme that spans the months of May and June (and sometimes July) where museums in Singapore design exhibitions and activities for young children. Knowing your children's interests, the museum's opening hours, nearby parks or eateries and available programmes makes for a stress-free outing.

Tip 2: Start being curious

To cultivate curious minds, try the 'See-Think-Wonder' routine on any object with your children or students before you arrive at the museum. Created by Project Zero, an educational research group at Harvard University, this routine helps children make careful observations of artworks, explore

multiple viewpoints, and reason with evidence. "What do you see?" is usually the first question to encourage young tots to look closer at something. Questions such as "What do you think it might be?" and "What makes you say that?" present opportunities to look for clues and explore various ways of looking at an object. Inviting children to wonder about how an object was used or made encourages curiosity and creativity, which are two important skills essential for life-long learning. Try out this routine at home, in school and at the park too.

Tip 3: Slow art + play talk

With pre-schoolers, exploring just three objects in one gallery is a great start. Spending 30 minutes of quality time is more meaningful than going through 10 galleries for three hours. Primary school children might appreciate a trail challenge such as the Family Treasures Embossing Sheet at the Peranakan Museum. They might also relish the chance to investigate three to five objects with a parent, teacher or docent for an hour. Spend at least 10 minutes discovering each museum object with the 'See-Think-Wonder' routine or play



Exploring at PLAY@NMS

an 'I-Spy' game. It is more important for your child to look at and talk about the artwork than to be told what he or she is seeing. The research of Betty Hart and Todd Risley, both child development specialists, demonstrates that 'play talk' enhances language skills that are important for success in school and in life. Museums are perfect settings to engage in such play talk in English or in Mother Tongue languages. Parents and teachers can chit-chat about what drew the children's attention, tell stories together, and pretend to be a statue or imagine what life was like in the past.

Tip 4: Become keen observers

While children play at a hands-on station or speak with peers about an object in a more traditional gallery, what can parents and teachers do? You can become a keen observer of your children's interests. Museums have enabled young children to learn about the world around them. Observe how your children respond to different artworks, interactive stations and programmes so you can discover what really intrigues them. Then you can do more of what they find exciting at home or

in the classroom. You can also encourage curiosity by being a keen observer of museum objects as you explore together as a family or class. You can start a dialogue by sharing "I see an animal, I think it is a dragon, I wonder why this robe has a dragon on it." Then, have the children take turns to share their own observations and questions.

Tip 5: Museum manners through games

You may want to start talking about what you might see at a museum before discussing what people, not just children, need to be aware of when visiting a gallery. Experiment with learning about how to behave in a museum through games. Adapt the game 'Simon Says' with hand or body gestures that remind children of basic museum manners. Have them come up with actions or drawings to recall the need to "Use your museum voice", "Walk like a mouse", "Touch with your eyes" and "Snack outside the gallery". When it becomes a little challenging in the museum, you can also play inspector and have children place their hands behind their backs to 'inspect' an object on open display.