

Museums -- Where the *WILD* Things Are!

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Saint Louis Art Museum

Introduction/Framework

In order to tap into what museums do best (especially in the fast-paced, fragmented, media-saturated, technology-driven, politically-divided world we live in), I believe we have a responsibility to spotlight creativity and imagination in the human-centered work we do as educators.

Ford Bell, president of the American Association of Museums, gave his address entitled “Creativity is What Defines Us” at AAM’s annual meeting last month, stating: **“Creativity is what defines and distinguishes the museum community.”**



I want to begin this workshop with the 5 words that have quite possibly inspired more pure creativity and raw imagination (and the capacity for that type of raucous thinking) than anything else over the past 50 years: **“Let the wild rumpus start!!”**

In order for creativity to flourish, we need to set up an environment where risk-taking and experimentation are encouraged and valued rather than stifled.

Warm-Up: physical warm-up, vocal warm-up, howling (yes, like the wild things we are)

- In order to enter a more creative, imaginative space as a learner, it is very effective to get outside of our comfort zone as a group. This can actually work as an ice-breaker with student groups – do something silly at the beginning that seems to “break the rules” of a museum (but does not, of course). Even just asking students to shout out their names can get a tour started on a more creative path with the students more willing to take risks and be honest.

You hold the ability to change the world! And it’s not because of what you know, but because of what you’re willing to discover. If we stop behaving like explanation machines (when those who know are teaching those who don’t know) and instead behave more like those who know something engaging with those who know something else, we are much more able to follow the life of an idea or objects with others.

“we need to step onto smaller and more vulnerable roads and allow for learning to replace teaching, camaraderie to replace competition, the homage to replace the explanation, and the dance to replace the chess move.” (Anthony Huberman)

Looking

Let's direct our attention to Gerhard Richter's *January, December, and November*, and open our imaginations and creative selves to these paintings (leaving behind "what we know" in order to experience these works of art in a new and more meaningful way).



- 1 Minute Looking Silently
- Pair and Share (chat with someone sitting next to you about what you see)
- Move Closer and Look Again (using paper tubes as telescopes)
- Pair and Share again (chatting with your partner about new observations)

EXPLORE through creative strategies

We're going to be breaking up into 4 small groups, or thinking teams, for the next part of this workshop in which we are going to explore these paintings by "not just talking" – but through acoustic and kinesthetic forms of response that tap into creative thinking and artistic practice. Instead of simply being passive learners, we need to become "makers" in order to more effectively connect to the creative process.

Each small group will be assigned one of the forms of response, and they will have approximately 10 minutes to create their group's response (working together as a team to engage everyone's ideas and sense of imagination). And it is important that we shut off our internal critics, those voices in our heads that tell us that this type of activity is about "touchy-feely stuff" and that it is not relevant to museum work. ***Creative, participatory engagement IS a central part of the museum experience in the 21st century, and it is a core part of what will keep museums relevant in our community.***

- ***Acoustic Response:*** These groups will be provided with a range of sound-making items, with which they should experiment and experience the types of sounds they can create. Then, each of these groups will work collaboratively to compose a sound-based, acoustic response to the paintings in three phases: beginning, middle, and end (no more than 1-2 minutes).
- ***Kinesthetic Response:*** These groups will use their own bodies and physical movement to deepen their exploration of the paintings, working collaboratively to "body-storm" and compose a series of movements that respond to the artwork in three phases (beginning, middle, end) – no more than 1-2 minutes.



“I believe there is no part of our lives, our adult as well as child life, when we're not fantasizing, but we prefer to relegate fantasy to children, as though it were some tomfoolery only fit for the immature minds of the young. Children do live in fantasy and reality; they move back and forth very easily in a way we no longer remember how to do.” - Maurice Sendak

PERFORMANCES and structured noticings

We will then bring groups together to create super-teams (which will consist of 1 acoustic group and 1 kinesthetic group). These teams will quickly work together to decide how they will integrate their “products” into a single performance. Each team’s performance MUST include everyone’s contributions.

Each team (which includes 1 group of acoustic and 1 group of kinesthetic responses) will enter the performance space in the center of the gallery to perform their various creative responses. Everyone on this team, and everyone on the non-performing team, needs to be respectful of every member of the performing group.

After each team performs their acoustic and kinesthetic mash-up, the non-performing team will have an opportunity for structured noticing and observations. A facilitator will ask them to state several noticings, interpretations, and questions, using the prompts:

- I noticed...
- I think...
- I wonder...

The performing team will not have an opportunity to “talk about” their performance, or their choices. This is similar to how we experience creative expression when we rarely have the creator/maker/artist here to *explain it to death*.

The other team will then perform, following by another session of structured response.

CLOSING/WRAP-UP

“Once a little boy sent me a charming card with a little drawing on it. I loved it. I answer all my children’s letters — sometimes very hastily — but this one I lingered over. I sent him a card and I drew a picture of a Wild Thing on it. I wrote, “Dear Jim: I loved your card.” Then I got a letter back from his mother and she said, “Jim loved your card so much he ate it.” That to me was one of the highest compliments I’ve ever received. He didn’t care that it was an original Maurice Sendak drawing or anything. He saw it, he loved it, he ate it.”

-- Maurice Sendak

***Thank you, Maurice
Sendak. Your inspiration
and spirit will live on in
all of us!***

