

Chapter 50

School and Teacher Partnerships at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines educational programming at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. The educational value of single and multi-visit field trips is discussed. The author shares how the Brooks structures its STEAM field trip and provides instructions for an art making activity. The community impact of the Mid-South Scholastic Art awards is explained. Consideration is given to the importance of designing museum programming aligned to state curriculum standards. Examples of teacher workshops are provided. Best practices for successfully welcoming school groups to the museum environment are also shared.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1916, the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art has served as the anchor arts organization for the Mid-South for over 100 years. The Brooks Museum houses a collection of over 10,000 objects spanning 5,000 years of human history, making it the only global art museum within a 250-mile radius. Sharing this rich collection with a wide and diverse audience drives the work of the museum's education department. The docent program, in continual operation since 1965, serves as a testament to the museum's long-term commitment to education and civic service. Today the Brooks carries on this tradition of educational excellence through a variety of efforts, including field trips, teacher workshops, and the Mid-South Scholastic Art Awards.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3706-3.ch050

BACKGROUND

The free single visit field trip program is a central part of the Brooks Museum's educational programming. Recent large-scale studies have proven the importance of offering this type of program. In the landmark report "The Educational Value of Fieldtrips," Greene et al. (2014) worked in partnership with the newly opened Crystal Bridges to demonstrate that students who attend field trips have stronger critical thinking skills, display higher levels of tolerance, have more historical empathy, and an increased interest in return visits. More recently, the National Art Education Association and the Association of Art Museum Directors (2018) examined single visit fieldtrip outcomes in "Impact of Museum Programs on Students Research Study User Guide". This report demonstrated that field trips teach students to ask complex questions, to accept multiple interpretations of a work of art, to think about the physicality of art, and to experience emotive recall. As these studies make clear, the single visit field trips provided by the Brooks Museum are a valuable resource and play an important role in the community.

FIELD TRIP PROGRAMMING

At the Brooks field trips can be adapted by teacher request, but the standard format is a forty-five minute tour followed by a forty-five minute studio class. The minimum group size is ten, the maximum is sixty. In the case of thirty or more students, half of the students complete the tour portion and half of the students complete the studio portion concurrently, and then the groups switch. Tour groups consist of 8 to 10 students, with one chaperone required per group. A broad range of ages are served by the field trip program, from pre-k groups to AP studio art students.

Tours are led by highly trained volunteer docents. Before giving tours, docents are required to complete a six-month training course which meets twice a week and is offered every other year. Topics covered during the course include art history, the Brooks' permanent collection, touring techniques, and interpretation strategies. New docents further develop their skills by observing veteran docents in action. Once the docents have completed their training, they are asked to be available to give museum tours one day a week. Further training is provided to all docents during monthly meetings. During these meetings, the education staff provides training on the latest interpretation techniques, curators give talks on temporary exhibitions, and guest speakers such as local artists demonstrate art making techniques. As a result of the in-depth training provided by the Brooks the docents gain the ability to lead students in rich, inquiry-based discussions. Docents use high level questioning techniques such as compare and contrast and the evaluation of evidence to support the development of students' critical thinking skills. The Brooks is fortunate to have a very dedicated docent corps, many of whom have been volunteering at the museum between ten and thirty years. During the 2018-2019 school year the docents volunteered a combined total of six hundred and sixty hours, clearly demonstrating their commitment to civic engagement. The docents truly make the field trip program possible.

The Brooks education team strives to support student learning by being as relevant to teachers as possible. One way in which the museum does so is by providing a variety of program themes to choose from. These themes include Narrative in Art, Arts of Global Africa, Role of the Artist, and Urban versus Rural. Data suggests that field trips aligned to previous classroom lessons are strongly remembered by students, which creates opportunities for long term learning (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p.154). Keeping

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