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From a Path of Study to a Way of Life: Humanities and Lifelong Learning

Part I: Art History in Action: Children in the Art Museum

The five tips below are ideas designed to help children (and adults!) talk about art together. The more confidence children have in their abilities to talk about pictures, the more enjoyable their experience of art museums will be. It can be daunting to step into an art museum with a child, especially if you've never done so before. But children belong in art museums. So here are 5 tips to help you get the most out of your experience.

1. Think of art museums as sources of inspiration.

The goal of taking young children to art museums isn't to turn them into little connoisseurs. They don't need to be able to talk about art movements or famous artists. Instilling a love of art in a child is about creating an experience that they enjoy, and an experience that they want to repeat.

2. Imagine pictures as opportunities for conversation.

Learning to engage images has to begin somewhere. And let's face it: some images are easier to crack than others. There is value to standing in front of an image and thinking about it. And the process of pondering a more complicated picture can be very rewarding. You can begin to discuss just about any artwork by starting with a simple question: What was the first thing you noticed about this image?

3. Don't be afraid to articulate what you don't like.

Not every work of art will speak to you, and the same is true for children. Part of the fun of exploring art museums is being able to say what you really don't like and why. Art museums are not funeral parlors. It's okay to talk, and it's okay to laugh.

4. Pick your favorite picture.

Choosing a favorite picture is a good way to start a conversation about art with children. It can be playful and fun, and it encourages children to express their opinions, which isn't always easy to do. Pick your own favorite picture and share your own thoughts and ideas with your child. Kids are remarkably good at this.

5. After you leave the museum, keep going.

When wandering an art museum with a group of small children, one of them turned to me and said "When do *I* get to create something?" A visit to an art museum is a wonderful way to tap into your own desire to be creative, and this is no less true for adults than it is for children. One of the best ways to end a visit to the museum is to go home and make your own art. The goal of this isn't to make something brilliant; the point is to express yourself.

I hope that these tips work for you! And please leave a comment if you have more of your own.