DAVID & PEGEEN – introduce selves

Good morning and welcome to: REIMAGING MUSEUM TOURS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE LOW VISION”
My name is Pegeen Blank. I’ve been a Museum Guide and Docent for over 7 years at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.
PEGEEN: We will be using “People First” language through out this presentation.

*People First Language* puts the person before the disability and describes what a person has, not who a person is.

So instead of “blind person” or visually impaired people we will say “people who are blind,” or “people who have low vision.”
PEGEEN

To get a feeling for who we are speaking with today, let’s start with a couple of questions:

Who works or volunteers for an institution that has a program?
Goal of this Presentation

- To inspire you to create
- To help you reimagine

PEGEEN:
The Goal of this presentation is To inspire you to create a tour for people who are blind or have low vision if your institution does not have one yet or to help you reimagine a tour that is already in place.
PEGEEN:
With these goals in mind, today we will be going over:
- Discuss Why we chose to revamp our older tactile tour
- The importance we found in working with community partners
- AND The game plan we used while we reimagined the tours

We will look at the new teaching strategies and hands-on materials we introduced on the new tour

And, what you might find interesting, the theoretical framework behind the tour – whole-part-whole theory and journey of discovery

As you see, we are hoping to cover a lot of ground. We have built in time at the end for any questions you may have and to hear about your experience

We’ll be happy to share the powerpoint and all the materials we will be discussing
PEGEEEN: Thank you to our long-time docent, Betsy Piebenga. Betsy spearheaded and help develop our original Tactile Tour. She also contributed greatly to revamping and helping to create the new Art Beyond Sight tour.
What were Tactile Tours?

David
DAVID:

- Old tour was ten years old and was not well attended. – look at numbers
- Touching with discussion was the sole teaching strategy
- Growing awareness of current innovative teaching strategies
- A new interest in inclusion and accessibility programming.
- Desire to align the tour with more audience-centered, interactive approaches being done at the museum.
Creating the new tours

David
DAVID: We initiated a series of conversations with community organizations in the Kansas City metropolitan area who served this population and LISTENED!!!
What We Learned

- Few people knew of the old tour
- A new tour would fill a void in our community
- Advice on teaching strategies.

DAVID:
- We discovered very few people knew of the old tour.
- Our partners felt that the tour would fill a much needed void in the community.
- Our partners also offered advice concerning teaching strategies.
DAVID; Emphasize we did not dumb down the tours
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DAVID:
Over One Year:
- Did tons of benchmarking to see what other museums were doing. Leaned heavy on the Art Beyond Sight website: www.artbeyondsight.org
- Put together a key team of 25 docents to create new tour.
- Named the tour Art Beyond Sight
- With input from community partners and docents, we created a training manual and 6 new tours using a host of new teaching strategies.
- Held a number of trainings that introduced these new tours and that explored working with this target audience.
Action Plan: Creating New Tours

The Seven New Art Beyond Sight Tours
- The American Experience in the 20th Century
- Who’s Noguchi? Enter a Sculptor’s World
- Architecture or Art?
- The Body in the Ancient World
- Art of China: Prayers, Protection, and Prosperity
- Saints and Some Sinners in Renaissance Art
- Make it Modern: Line, Shape, and Texture – for children

DAVID
DAVID:
- Tested out the new tours 12 times with youth and adult audiences who are blind or who have low vision.
- Most participants came from organizations serving people who are blind or who have low vision and had little knowledge of art.
- Took feedback and used it to rework tours.

**Action Plan: Test Tours**

**Over the next 6 months:**
- Tested new tours with youth and adult
- Participants came from community groups
- Used feedback to rework tours
Comments from Visitors

“I want to be absolutely clear that I was blown away by this tour. The level of interaction was fantastic, and the docents did a great job interfacing with everyone there and making sure our brains stayed as active as our hands did. I’ve said this before, but I appreciate the risk that the museum is taking to make this kind of a tour a reality.”

Steve Dekat

DAVID
Action Plan: *Moving Forward*

- Group tours can be scheduled the same as other tours
- No monthly walk-in tour
- 2 – 3 Community Get-Togethers
- Provide transportation assistance
- Address challenges:
  - Marketing the tour
  - Changing attitudes

DAVID
DAVID: We will hold 2 – 3 “community get-togethers” for individuals to participate in. No monthly walk-in tour will be offered!
PEGEEN:
Let’s take a closer look at some of the tools & strategies we use on the *Art Beyond Sight* tours. We have adapted new tools and strategies on the *Art Beyond Sight* tour to add variety and to align these tours with other tours we give. Our tools & strategies use not only touch but try to incorporate other senses as well.
PEGEEN – touch as always is the heart of the tour
On some tours we touch every object, such as the Noguchi sculpture tour– but at least 1 or 2 objects that can be touched are included on every tour.
Conservation and Curatorial created for us a list of around 50 objects that could be touched. In general, the objects on the list are made of granite, marble, bronze and/or industrial materials.

We always use gloves, not latex or cotton used on our original Tactile Tour, but nitrile – they are thinner, hypo-allergenic and communicate a greater sense of feeling but we also.....[next slide]
PEGEEN

....pass around samples of marble/ granite uncut or polished to allow people to feel without gloves.

“Still life #24” by Tom Wesselmann – cutouts on a board w/ 3 dimension elements
As we are verbally describing the work of art, we pass around a fabric curtain of similar shape and the curtain pull as well as a plastic corn cob.
Be mindful of when a touch object is being passed around.
Continue to describe the art object or moving on to a different part of the art piece while the touch object is being passed could create confusion or lose your group
PEGEEN –
Guanyin of the Southern Sea

After touching, verbal description is one of the mainstays of
tours for those who are blind or have low vision.
A couple of rule of thumb:
  Start general & move to more specifics
  Scaffold your description to directionally make sense
  (top to bottom, left to right, use the clock for directions)
  Description can never truly be neutral so use
language that reflects the tone of the object.
  Resist the urge to over-describe.  It is better to have
less and ask “What else can I describe?” than too much.  Just
like the fatigue museum visitors experience on other tours, too
much description can just become noise.
PEGEEN

We also introduced the use of tactile diagrams.
Tactile diagrams are maps or images photocopied on to the yellow, treated side of swell paper.
The swell paper is then passed through a heat processor and the black or dark lines swell or rise to create a low relief. It kind of feels like it is embossed.

We use the tactile diagram of a simplified museum floorplan to help give visitors an idea of the buildings they are in.

The red jewels indicate where visitors entered the Nelson, where we are sitting for the introduction and where in the museum we will be going for the tour.
PEGEEN – here is a work by Franz Kline
Using swell paper, we reproduced the black line painting.

We’ve learned a couple of lessons using using tactile diagrams:
- it is important to set parameters before beginning describing.
- Make sure to move through the diagram in a sequential

- Another really important lesson we learned is..
PEGEEN –
Some objects transformed into tactile diagrams work better than others.
This 7 foot by 6 foot Assyrian relief is a complicated image – challenging to reduce to its basic lines without losing a lot of the elements that make it so interesting.
The size of the tactile diagram (8 1/2 x 11 inches) make it hard to distinguish details – especially of items that are not part of current culture – the double horned helmet, the double-handled knife and the long apron like tunic.
And to make the image even more tactiley “noisy” (meaning too much going on at once) there is a cuneiform inscription that runs horizontally, in the middle section for about 2 feet.
To aid visitors is conceptualizing this art object, we’ve also incorporated:
PEGEEN
Reenactment – recreating the pose of a human figure;

We use reenactment at every stop of “The Human Body in the Ancient World”. Here we see visitors mimicking the stance of the Assyrian winged genie. Having visitors strike this pose either before or during verbally describing the piece really helps a lot.

Even non-human art objects can be mimicked:
PEGEEN

Kinesthetic movement – recreating the tension of the Noguchi sculpture “Six-Foot Energy Void” using her body shoulders, arms and hands slightly torqueing to communicate tension in the sculpture

We preface both reenactment and kinesthetic movement urging visitors to do what they feel comfortable doing. As always, respecting people’s boundaries and good communication is key for a good tour.
We are experimenting with music and sound on many of our tours – to help create an atmosphere and engage another sense.
For those visitors who have low vision we offer hand magnifiers like you see being used on the right. Recently we have begun using Closed Circuit Television. The CCTV uses a camera to display on a monitor a magnified image of a portion of a piece. We can manipulate the image by changing the color or the contrast to allow the viewer to perceive details.
Another tool we are just now beginning to bring on line is 3-D reproductions. Working in collaboration with the Kansas City Art Institute which is located across the street from the Nelson Atkins, they have offered to scan for free and we will be paying the materials costs.

Aldo Bachetta, Director of Creative Technology...
PEGEEN
Let me give you a quick example of integrating a couple of these strategies and tools.

We have just entered our Pop Art Gallery. Pop Art was a movement in the 1950’s that incorporated images from popular culture, such as advertising and everyday object.
We are surrounded by paintings and a couple of sculptures from this period. Let’s take a closer look at the large sculpture in the middle of the room. Before sitting down, let’s walk around it to get a rough idea of the space it takes up.

Before you is a sculpture by the American artist George Segal called “Chance Meeting”.
It was created in 1989 of plaster, aluminum and galvanized steel.
“Chance Meeting” represents one of George Segal’s favorite motifs: people on a city street.

Let’s take a listen:
Pegeen:
This sculpture is composed of 3, life-size figures: 1 man and 2 women all dressed in trench coats. They are standing clustered in a triangle, very closely but not touching, facing inwards towards each other. towering behind the man is a 10 foot pole topped with 2 One Way signs pointing in opposite directions. The entire sculpture is placed on a white, 2 inch high base about 6 foot by 6 foot/
Pegeen:
For those of you who would like to or would feel comfortable, let’s reenact how one of the figures in this sculpture is standing. The man looks to be in his late 50’s or early 60s. He stands straight slightly hunched with his hands clasped behind his back. His eyes and mouth are closed and he has a neutral expression on his face.

This is because the sculpture was created by plastering the faces and bodies of friends and family. The process captures a lot of details, but does not allow for the participants to have their eyes or mouths in any expression.

Thank you. Let’s sit down.
Here is an image of the art object I was describing. I would continue with a description of the other figures. Towards the end of my verbal description, I would ask: "What else can I describe?" or "What else are you still curious about?"

If my visitors were willing, I may ask for volunteers to recreate all three figures.

A lot depends on my audience!
Theory behind the tours

David
DAVID:
As we talked with Community Partners, things need to be understood in terms of whole and parts

- *Art Beyond Sight* tours are inspired by the Whole-Part-Whole (WPW) learning strategy articulated by Malcolm Knowles and other educators.
- The WPW approach offers a helpful framework or “mental scaffolding” for learning and is a useful template for presenting difficult and complex educational content.
- The WPW framework offers a guiding, teaching construct for docents to follow while facilitating these tours.

Hotel experience
DAVID:
WHOLE = Learners are exposed to the first “whole,” in which they are prepared for new instruction by being presented a brief overview of the “whole picture” or an overarching idea or theme.

PART = Then, learning focuses on the “parts”—what has been defined as the details of knowledge, expertise, and activity.

WHOLE = The second “whole” helps learners place their newly mastered knowledge or skills in context. In many cases, the whole cannot truly be understood without an understanding and proficiency of the individual parts.
PEGEEN:
Let’s take a look at some examples of the Whole Part Whole strategy in use:
WHOLE =
During introduction, docents situate guests within the museum using a Tactile Floorplan Diagram and introduce the theme/big ideas of the tour.
PART = Docents and visitors explore galleries and individual works of art within the designated theme. We see Pati, our docent, exploring Isamu Noguchi’s “Nightland” with a visitor.
WHOLE = During conclusion, docents and visitors think about the galleries and objects viewed in relationship to the theme/big ideas of the tour and the entire building, if applicable.
Whole – the gallery where the art object is located and where in the gallery is it as well as an overview of the object – basically the information on the wall label (although not word for word)

Whole – Once have understanding of parts discuss the larger historical and social context of the work
PEGEEN:

**WHOLE** = Docent gives standard information from the label.

**PART** = Visitors discover parts of the work in a sequential way using a tactile diagram.

**WHOLE** = Docent and visitors discuss the larger context and meaning of the object.

In this case: Kline used commercial house paints and brushes as large as five inches wide to create these emphatic gestures. Named after a city in northern Italy, Turin evokes both architectural structures such as bridges and girders and the surging energy of the metropolis. Also bring in how Kline/ Turin fits into the Abstract Expressionism movement.
As with all of our other tours, Art Beyond Sight tours should be approached as “journeys of discovery,” whenever possible. When exploring objects, don’t “tell” what can be “discovered.” When you introduce a gallery and its artwork, don’t give away characteristics of a particular style that guests can discover on their own. Likewise, when investigating objects through guided touch or verbal descriptions with tactile diagrams, for example, provide an overall description of the object but let your audience discover the details through touch and questioning strategies.
DAVID:
- Take your time with the whole process—working collaboratively takes time.
- It's all about trial and error—learn from your mistakes.
- This is hard work—it takes time for docents to learn new strategies.
- Be aware of cultural sensitivities.
Lessons Learned: The Tour As a Docent

- Practice verbal descriptions
- Monitor visual cues
- Be flexible

Pegeen

Verbal descriptions have been one of the more challenging tools we’ve implemented. A couple of lessons we’ve learned:

- Start general & move to more specifics
- Scaffold your description to directionally make sense (top to bottom, left to right, use the clock for directions)
- Resist the urge to over-describe. It is better to have less and ask “What else can I describe?” than too much. Just like the fatigue museum visitors experience on other tours, too much description can just become noise.

Above all, practice, rewrite, and practice some more.

One challenge some of us have found working for the first time with those who are blind or have low vision is forgetting to verbalize facial expressions and body language cues to that we use on other tours. For example, once I gave this great transition statement to move use from one gallery to the next, turned around and began walking only to realize no one was following. On another tour, the visual cue of me turning and walking would be a sign for all to follow, I needed to clearly state “Please follow me and let’s move on to the next stop/gallery.”

As with every tour and interaction we have with visitors, be flexible. The tour is 4 stops but visitors are flagging, cut it to 3 stops.
DAVID:
This active strategy can be challenging for new visitors who often expect to play a passive role.

Lessons Learned: Our Audience

- Set clear expectations
- Be patient
Contact Information—Feel Free to Reach Out

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NATIONAL DOCENT SYMPOSIUM
PEGEEN:
Thank you for listening.
We would love to hear about your experience and answer what questions you have.

We’ll be happy to share the powerpoint and all the materials we discussed.