Project-Based Learning for Museum Docents: A Framework of Teaching for Understanding

National Gallery of Art

Nancy Deck, Liz Diament, and Deirdre Palmer
Guiding questions for our new docent training curriculum

What is “Teaching for Understanding?”

What does “Teaching for Understanding” look like in our curriculum design? A Project-Based Approach to Docent Training

The perspective of our docents

Unpacking our presentation using a thinking routine: 3-2-1
Guiding Questions

How can we create a docent education program that models the same kinds of teaching and learning that should happen on school tours?

How can docents deeply and actively learn, understand and retain vast amounts of art history content in support of their learning?
Throughlines for New School Docent Program

**Visual Literacy**
As a learner, how can I understand works of art?
As a docent, how can I help students understand works of art?

**Art History**
As a learner, how can I understand a work of art in terms of its historical and stylistic development?
As a docent, how can I draw on my knowledge to facilitate authentic conversations around works of art?

**Audience**
Although each student and each tour group is unique, what tools do I need to understand my group’s developmental needs and expectations?

**Tour Development**
As a docent, how can I facilitate student-centered tours that promote engagement, learning and rich conversations around works of art?

**Orientation**
How do I contribute to the work of the National Gallery of Art?
How will the Gallery staff and docents support and guide me?
Guiding Question

How can we create a docent education program that models the same kinds of teaching and learning that should happen on school tours?

Throughline

Visual Literacy
As a learner, how can I understand works of art?

As a docent, how can I help students understand works of art?
Throughline

Art History
As a learner, how can I understand a work of art in terms of its historical and stylistic development?

As a docent, how can I draw on my knowledge to facilitate authentic conversations around works of art?
“Understanding is being able to carry out a variety of ‘performances’ that show one’s understanding of a topic and at the same time, advance it”.

A Project-Based Approach to Docent Training: Modern and Contemporary Art Unit

- Readings and research
- Five lectures
- Two gallery walkthroughs with lecturers
- Three projects:
  - Modern Art Movements: Part I
  - Modern Art Movements: Part II
  - Object Exploration
Goals
- Recognize visual characteristics of key art historical periods, movements, and artists
- Contextualize a work of art within its social/cultural setting and broader art historical framework
- Conduct object-based research using appropriate scholarly and open access resources

Guidelines
- Assigned to groups of 3 – 4
- Each assigned a modern art movement
- Conducted research
- Created a graphic organizer
Fauvism

- Henri Matisse
- André Derain
- Maurice de Vlaminck

- Color
  An end in its self
  Emotion/balance

- Fauvism
  Salon d’Automne
  1905-1908
  Nu manifesto

- Individual expression
  Solace & joy

- Abstraction of form
  Painterly/soft brush strokes
  Two dimensional

- Return to pastoral landscapes and portraits
  Non-western influence
Cubism

German Expressionism
Influence of Cubism: Leger and Gris

CUBISM
(Picasso + Braque)
- Muted Colors
- Flatness - Merge background + foreground
- Deconstruction of subjects

Gris
- Aimed to please the eye
- Well balanced composition
- Form to object
- Collage + text

Leger
- Multiple viewpoints
- Abandoned single point perspective
- Piercing figures

- Machine-like forms
- Cylindrical forms
- Chaotic use of color + shapes

Primary colors
- 3 dimensional
- Graphic
- Large scale
Modern Art Movements: Part II

Goals
- Recognize visual characteristics of key art historical periods, movements, and artists
- Contextualize a work of art within its social/cultural setting and broader art historical framework
- Conduct object-based research using appropriate scholarly and open access resources

Guidelines
- Each docent assigned a work of art in the NGA’s collection
- Spent time in front of the work of art
- Conducted research
- Selected second work of art by same artist
- Wrote a “wall label”
Modern Art Movements: Part II
In-Class Discussion
Object Exploration

Goals
- Recognize visual characteristics of key art historical periods, movements, and artists
- Contextualize a work of art within its social/cultural setting and broader art historical framework
- Conduct object-based research using appropriate scholarly and open access resources
- Feel comfortable talking about art in front of a group

Guidelines
- Each docent assigned a work of art in the NGA’s collection
- Spent time in front of the work of art
- Conducted research
- Wrote a “wall label” and developed three discussion questions
- Presented synthesized information and questions in front of the work of art
Titian

Doge Andrea Gritti
c 1546/1550

National Gallery of Art
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance-Based Learning Technique</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Prompts</td>
<td>Focused our reading and connected it to our tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group assignments</td>
<td>Taught us how to learn collaboratively and work together on tours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-dimensional final projects</td>
<td>Helped us absorb and synthesize complex materials by allowing us to work within our learning styles, e.g. timelines, written analyses, graphic organizers, photos,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mock tours</td>
<td>Built our expertise and confidence in designing and leading tour stops for various types of art and age groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Reflections</td>
<td>Helped us reflect on how much we had learned and helped us identify skills we wanted to work on</td>
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</tbody>
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Titian

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National Gallery of Art
A Personal Reflection

I Used to Think….

The docent’s job is to be an engaging and skilled presenter in order to impart as much information as possible to the tour group about the artist and the work of art.

Now I Think…..

The role of the docent is like being the leader of a jazz band. Being a great docent is a real art. The docent sometimes leads the discussion, sometimes follows the threads and ideas of a discussion, and continually links and scaffolds these ideas and threads, like the leader of a jazz band. The docent and the tour group are all participating in the learning process, sharing ideas and theories, creating various story lines, and enriching the experience for everyone.
Work with a partner to generate…

3 observations about the information presented

2 questions that you have

1 takeaway from the presentation that you will share with your museum colleagues
Three Takeaways

- Performance-based learning involves individual and collaborative projects that help docents demonstrate their understanding of complex content in new ways.

- Visual literacy is one of the most important skills for our docents to learn.

- We wanted our docents to have “an experience” as learners so that they can provide “an experience” as educators to the students on their tours.