



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN: CRAFTING CEREMONIES OF FOOD

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Henry Art Gallery

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

For our community engagement plan, the demographic we targeted was younger children between the ages of 4 and 5. Through research, we found that younger children are typically not a part of traditional museum programming – “children’s voices are often excluded from museum programming, and their interests and perspectives are not always taken into consideration” (Vandermeer, 2019). In this study published in the Journal of Museum Education, researchers conducted interviews with museum educators who found the process of collecting and incorporating children’s voices in programming to be highly challenging, due to resource and financial constraints.

Child-specific programming is a way to create cultural educational opportunities involving art at an age-appropriate emotional and cognitive level, harnessing tactile activities, storytelling, and other methods of connection. These pedagogical approaches are proven to be significantly more effective than traditional teaching approaches, as students have higher engagement and information retention through storytelling and tactile (versus digital) methods (Chen, 2020 and Kester, 2018). In working with younger children, we aimed to create an engagement that enabled exploration of the Henry collections, taught about food and the cultural customs that accompany food, and allowed kids to expand their understanding of the artwork as pieces of traditional practices.

GOALS

Our goal was to highlight the intersections between food and visual arts as vehicles for connection, creativity, and heritage. We were also interested in exploring the similarities between artistic and culinary creation. We wanted to target children and provide a space for them to explore, understand, and share their own cultural ceremonies and practices surrounding food as a means for cross-cultural sharing by using crafting / creation activities to allow kids to connect deeply with their own and others' cultures, as well as collectively creating new ceremonies and rituals surrounding cooking, eating, and sharing meals together.

We felt this was a good opportunity to highlight items in the Henry collections, which are available to see at the Study Center but still subject to access barriers for young children due to location, transportation, hours, and age accessibility. Four to five year olds often would not have the computer skills to book an appointment at the Study Center, let alone the transportation resources to get to the Henry by themselves to view the collections. By reaching out to local children, we were able to share the collections with an audience that does not usually get to see and explore them, and also provide a unique, exciting way to engage with the artworks that expands beyond visual analysis and looking. This gave the Henry an opportunity to engage more with local youth, as well as local communities' cultural practices beyond art. This engagement helped to establish a connection and relationship between the Henry and local youth programs, and paved the way for future engagements and opportunities to connect with younger audiences.

High-level overview:

- Highlighting intersections between food and art as vehicles for connection, creativity, and heritage
- Allow space for youth to explore, understand, and share their own cultural food practices
- Create opportunity for kids to collectively create, share, & perform new food ceremonies
- Showcase the Henry collections to an underserved demographic
- Establish a relationship between the Henry and local youth programs

ITINERARY

Location

We held the engagement on May 23, 2023 at the UW Children's Center at West Campus, a day care center for UW faculty, staff, and students who are parents and caretakers of children ranging from 3 months to 5 years. Holding this space as our activity space and focusing on 4 to 5 year old kids was a good option for several reasons. First, the space has a



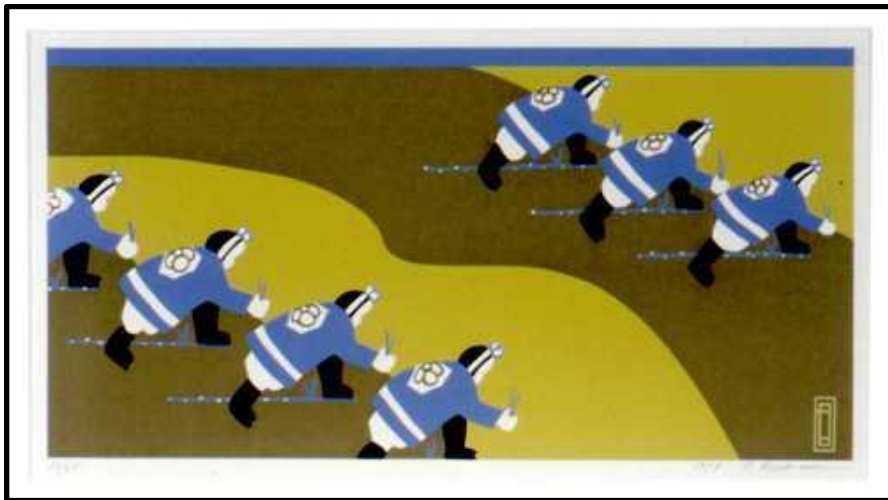
close proximity to the Henry, so we were able to point out the Henry to the participants so they and their parents are informed about it as a resource and a free location. Second, we were able to set up a relationship with the Children's Center that could manifest in possible future engagements with Children's Center groups in or around the Henry. Third, the facility's space was well-fit to our activity, with a variety of small tables and writing surfaces, chairs, and art-making supplies. Additionally, conducting the activity in a space that the children are already familiar with created a safe and comfortable atmosphere for creation, engagement, and play.

Activity: In our activity, we highlighted items in the Henry collections related to food, highlighting three different categories:

- Labor of food production and ingredient sourcing — this included images of farming, ingredient processing, and cooking as they relate to specific cultures' food practices. These images were used to discuss the labor surrounding food, and connection to community, teamwork, and heritage.
- Cookware and items that surround or support the food — the Henry has many historical cookware items in the collection, specifically from Asia and Africa. These were used to discuss the cultural significance of cookware, how it is sourced and made, and how its shape / design communicates the significance of food and specific cultural food practices.
- Food ceremonies themselves — finally, we shared artworks that depicted cultural food ceremonies as a way to discuss the food ceremonies and rituals that the kids practice in their own communities.

ENGAGING THE HENRY'S COLLECTIONS

In preparation for this engagement, we set up a meeting with Ann Poulson PhD, curator of collections at the Henry Art Gallery, to discuss our options for sharing objects from the Henry collections with the kids. Ann gave us some tips for searching the Henry's online collections database to find food-related works to engage, as well as informed us of a previous collections highlight project that engaged with food and art. We also received some strategic advice regarding leading engagements for young children. After compiling a list of potential collection items to highlight, we began structuring our engagement and reached out to Ann to obtain high quality images of the objects to put in a slideshow to bring to the daycare center. We were interested in highlighting different aspects of the food making / eating process: from harvesting to assembling cookware to engaging in food ceremonies. Below are the collections items that we used, in order:



Frances Lee Wismer Baker Blakemore, *Planting Rice*, screen print on heavy wove paper, 1979



Sake bottle (tokkuri), wheel-thrown and hand-built stoneware, c. 1900 Japan



Drinking horn, carved buffalo horn, Africa, Cameroon



Fred Jachin Bauer, *Meal*, wheel-thrown and hand-built earthenware, c. 1969-1970



Frances Lee Wismer Baker Blakemore, *Tea Time*, screen print on heavy wove paper, late 1950s



Zashiki Bon Odori (Bon Festival Dance Inside Teahouse), color woodcut print on paper, c. 1795, Japan

SCRIPT

Section	Time	Notes
Introductions	5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Henry Art Liaison intros: names + description of event to follow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why is food important? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need it to survive, but it is also important to people. People from different parts of the world eat different food. - Define ritual – special celebrations with food - Student introductions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name, age - <i>What is your favorite food and why?</i> - <i>Do your family or friends have any special food rituals?</i> For example, making special food on a holiday? Or praying before eating?
Food engagements	20 min (~7 mins per activity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation deck displays Piece 1, centering the MODE OF PRODUCTION for food stuff. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What do you see? What is this person doing?</i> - <i>Who works to get the food that we eat?</i> - <i>How do they get it? Harvest, process, pack?</i> - <i>ACTIVITY:</i> Simulate the act of planting, caring for, and harvesting crops through pretend play and storytelling** - Deck shows Piece 2, displaying COOKWARE/KITCHENWARE or food items. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What is this? What do you think it is used for?</i> - <i>Why was it made this way?</i> - <i>What does it represent?</i> - <i>How would you feel to eat/drink out of it?</i> - <i>Does it remind you of anything you know or do or use with your family or friends?****</i> - Deck shows Piece 3, displaying CULTURAL FOOD RITUALS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What do you see in this work? What are these people doing?</i> - <i>Does this remind you of anything you do at home when you eat (or anything you do on special holidays?)</i> - Brief explanation of food rituals / ceremonies - <i>ACTIVITY:</i> Using the plate / utensils you drew, design your own food ceremony! Think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What kind of food would you eat during your ceremony?</i> - <i>Who would you invite?</i> - <i>Would you do any activities before or after you eat?</i> - <i>What is your ceremony celebrating?</i> - Use cut colored paper + scissors to add food to your plate

Conclusion	5-10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Students share pieces and explain tradition- Get to eat while doing this, using ritual pieces they designed<ul style="list-style-type: none">- (Snack will be allergy-friendly)
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** Storytelling about a cultural food practice (such as cooking, or harvesting, etc.) would be a strong way to hold children's attention and connect the knowledge and art in a familiar way pedagogically.

**** We will ensure ongoing assessments of the children's attention to determine if all components of the activity can be covered through conversation or if some components need to be shortened or skipped to facilitate quicker entry into the tactile portion of the activity.

OUTREACH COORDINATION

In order to collaborate with the UW Children's Center at West Campus (run by Haggard Childcare) to organize our engagement event, we engaged in outreach efforts throughout the month of April. Our primary contact at the center was with Jack Harrington, the director of the space. Our timeline ran as follows: On April 5, we reached out to the childcare center to discuss available dates and inquire about the current age distribution of the children. We also created an itemized budget for groceries and materials needed for the planned activities by April 12. We sent the finalized script for the engagement for approvals to the children's center by the same date. By May 15, we acquired all the necessary materials for the event. Our event took place on May 23. We completed the documentation process by May 28, which included assembling photos and finalizing all relevant documentation. We hope to share more at the All-Staff Meeting at the Henry in early June, where we will tell the story of our community engagement and share our findings.



REFLECTIONS AND LEARNINGS

Overall, our community engagement plan was a success. Although the engagement we sought out to do was not exactly what transpired, we still ended up engaging with children, our targeted audience, and bringing in a focus on cultural food and art. Initially, we aimed to work with middle school students in South Seattle and Chinatown/ID communities to be able to engage in food customs and art dialogue with communities that were predominantly students of color. The major unanticipated setback was identifying and partnering with a space that would be able to hold an event for children. Partnering with these public schools was a challenge, and not feasible for our ten week timeframe. After more research on student organizations, we learned about the childcare centers on the UW campus. Identifying and reaching out to the UW Daycare Center was a major turning point in our process – we finally had a student group willing to work with us, and were then able to tailor our engagement appropriately.

The engagement itself was highly successful, with immense engagement from all three sessions with the young children — so to critique our process retrospectively, the bulk of what we could've done differently falls within the planning stages. We could have been quicker to identify various children groups with no affiliations to public schools, as this avenue requires more stringent background checks, and instead tried to become more acquainted with more casual collectives of the Seattle region. We also could have established partnership with stores in the International District earlier on in the quarter in order to source our food and materials from those businesses, which was in our original plan as a way to both support local Asian-owned businesses and introduce kids to food traditions around the world.



But overall, despite these small issues, the engagement was quite successful and definitely allowed for an age-appropriate introduction into cultural aspects of food through the use of pieces from the Henry's collections.

Our best moments in this engagement were most definitely the interactions with the kids, in particular the kids who were very interested in the session and vocal engagers. It was refreshing to be able to work with individuals to whom sharing

personal experiences related to art comes naturally. We were immensely grateful for the eagerness the young students brought, as well as their willingness to be open with us after just meeting us. We hope the Henry is able to continue in such engagements with various younger children within the UW ecosystem and beyond!

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