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A Preservation Focus on K–12 Outreach

By Gretchen Shoemaker, National Archives at St. Louis

Archives, libraries, and museums enrich the lives of the public through outreach and education. Many institutions provide resources to educators and parents through kits, digital programs, and in-person workshops. Developing preservation programming can combine science, art, history, and any number of topics to create programs that are exciting, hands-on, and valuable to the educational community. K–12 outreach can introduce an institution to a new audience that may not otherwise attend, while also nurturing a love and respect for history among younger generations.

Building a Program that Works

The key to a successful program is to identify simple themes that may be taught to any age range. In 2012 two conservation interns at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware developed workshops for the Terrific Tuesdays summer program around the basic themes of light, the environment, color, and taking care of objects. The highlight of their program is a toy clinic. Participants take pictures of their objects, fill out a condition report, carry out basic cleaning techniques that can be done at home, create storage using shoe boxes and tissue, as well as mend tears and fill losses on paintings or ceramic tiles.¹

The Preservation Program Department at the National Archives in St. Louis participated in the national Bring Your Child to Work Day last summer by teaching children how to clean and mend documents. The theme for the day's activities, which suited the site as the national repository of military personnel records, was Boot Camp. All activities had a basic training theme (weapons qualification using water balloons, an obstacle course, etc.). After a brief introduction, the kids went from station to station, cleaning, mending, and digitizing mock records about Major Jiggs, Bill the Goat, and other animals that historically served as "enlisted personnel" in the military. The children uncovered information by surface cleaning documents with brushes, Absorene Dirt Erasers, and HEPA vacuums. Next they tried their hands at mending with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste. Preservation technicians also demonstrated the process of digitizing burned records and filtering them through layers in Photoshop to reveal hidden information still present in the burned areas. The children had a great time playing

scientist and really enjoyed learning about the different service animals.

Common Core: Meeting the Needs of Educators

Last fall, schools across the nation began implementing the Common Core system of standardization. This program is a state-run initiative designed to ensure that children across the nation are reaching the same educational benchmarks at the same time and that they are learning what they need to succeed in college and/or the work environment by the time they graduate from high school.² Implementation of the new standards means that schools are, in many cases, pushing to catch students up to the standards for their grades. What an excellent opportunity for institutions to reach out to schools and develop programs that help teachers reach those benchmarks!

Contacting the local school district is a great place to begin. The district office can disseminate information about available programs to all teachers and schools in the area. State board of education websites contain school directories and any information available regarding community partnering programs. Any parent with a child in school may begin by reaching out to the child's teacher. They are usually happy to receive ideas or assistance and will share with other teachers if the resource is helpful.

Developing Outreach Ideas

Demonstration and hands-on experimentation are very effective ways to present a concept to younger audiences. Even small children can grasp a more advanced concept if it is presented as a fun experiment or activity. For example, condensation can be demonstrated by holding a pan full of ice water over a pan full of hot water. As droplets of water form on the outside of the cold pan, explain what is happening to the air around it, and how those water droplets might affect paper or other objects. For older children the discussion can include information about dew point and relative humidity.

Begin by determining what themes can be best represented by the available collections and resources. Having a clear learning objective for the program will help keep the focus on what is essential. It is easy to become excited about the subject matter and go overboard trying to

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pack in more information than necessary. Include staff and volunteers available to carry out the program when considering resources. Small children may require a lot of assistance, depending on the activity. Volunteers can be a very valuable resource when staff size is limited.

Use cheaper, nonarchival quality materials to reduce program costs. Want to make enclosures? Cut out grocery bags to create book covers. A papermaking exercise can be done with a blender, construction paper, and cookie cutters. There are many great ideas on the Internet for activities that can be done cheaply. Lessonplanet.com, for example, is geared toward teachers so the activities can be correlated to state standards.³

Win/Win!

K–12 outreach is a great way to introduce kids to the concept of caring for items of enduring value, while exposing them to the wealth of information contained in archival facilities. Children are often excited to learn in a new way, and the activities can be just as much fun for the adults leading the program. Working with the local school system can create a program that is highly effective for the surrounding community. Investing in today's youth may

lead to increased awareness later, and investing in their future is an investment in our future.

Notes

1. Melissa Miller and Megan Millman, "Treasuring Your Child's Toy at Terrific Tuesdays," *Winterthur Unreserved: Museum and Library Blog*, last modified September 7, 2012, museumblog.winterthur.org/2012/09/07/treasuring-your-childs-toys-at-terrific-tuesdays; "Terrific Tuesdays at Winterthur Museum and Gardens," *Bluehenmomma*, last updated on July 9, 2012, bluehenmomma.wordpress.com/2012/07/09/terrific-tuesdays-at-winterthur-museum-and-gardens.
2. "Implementing Common Core State Standards," Common Core State Standards Initiative, National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), last modified January 30, 2014, www.corestandards.org.
3. "Teacher Resources," LessonPlanet: Where Teachers Go to Find, Learn, Plan and Inspire, last modified January 30, 2014, www.lessonplanet.com/lesson-plans.

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