

Teens in the Museum: Are We Having Fun?

Recommendations for Offering Playful Experiences for Teens

by

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to find out how teens engage in play within museums, and recommendations on how to create playful learning experiences targeted at teenagers. Throughout this project, I found that work had to be done on each of the subjects separately (teenagers in museums / play in museums) and that the crossover between these two were quite niche— but when they appeared together, the results were wonderful. This document serves as a starting point for how to think about playful learning in the museum directed at teenagers. Though these recommendations have been built on meeting teenagers' needs, many of the recommendations would be found enjoyable by adult audiences as well. This project has taught me the importance of play in our lives, and how often we grow up and forget that. This project also inherently tackles the questions: Do museums see teenagers as children or young adults? Do museums know how to make their teenage audiences feel included?

Because of the parameters of this project, I excluded children's museums from my landscape review and did not include them in any of our site visits. This is because the purpose of this project is for all-age audience based museums with subject matters pertaining to: arts, culture, history, and sciences. Since children's museums are often focused on play, they do not fall into the gap of general museums lacking playful learning experiences. Children's museums also typically have a specific age range in mind, and if they offer anything for teens it would be crafted with specific learning goals. Children's Museums are already successful at play, so I want to find out what regular museums are offering or lacking for teenagers in regards to playful learning experiences.

I used the LEGO Institute's Five Ways of Play definitions when organizing my main findings, which are: **Physical play, Symbolic play (word play), Pretend play, Games with rules, and Play with objects**. Not all of my findings are organizable into this structure, but in my key takeaways I will summarize what kinds of play appeared most, and what teenagers want to see more of.

Background

This project is conducted as a Master's Thesis in Museology at the University of Washington. The host site for this project is foundry10, an educational research organization based in Seattle, WA dedicated to expanding ideas about learning and creating direct value for youth.

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Ferris Bueller's Day Off by John Hughes, 1986, Paramount Pictures

Methods + Project

This project was conducted in 3 parts:

Museum Sessions: Site Visits with Pilot Group Teens

A pilot group of teens was provided by the host site, foundry10. We had about 15 teens sign up with 4 museums to visit. Before participating in the project, I asked interested teens to fill out a survey about their perceptions surrounding play and museums. Not all participants were able to visit all museums, but overall we received 28 responses across the 4 museums. See Appendix A to view the questionnaire.

~15 Participants x 4 Museums = 28 Responses

These museums all in Seattle, WA were selected based on their subject matter, size, and accessibility:

1. Frye Art Museum
2. Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI)
3. Museum of Pop Culture (MOPOP)
4. The Wing Luke Museum

Teen participants were compensated for their time with Amazon gift cards after completing a questionnaire about their visit and had their tickets paid for, as well as occasional paid parking for parents.

Parents were asked not to accompany their teens, as part of this method was providing teens with the autonomy to exist in the museum space on their own. Teens did explore the museum together in groups or pairs on occasion. The questionnaire reflects their opinions, their responses, and their feelings.

Landscape Review

Divided up the U.S regionally: Northwest, West, Southwest, Midwest, Northeast, South, Southeast (Figure 1). Selected 10 museums (history, art, and science) in each region that had direct mention of teens and some kind of playful experience on their website. Used additional resources from articles, and national publications surrounding teens and museums. See References for full list.

- 70 museums total

- Tagged what its contents were to see what kind of playful opportunities were most prominent.
- Additionally, reviewed ticket type titles and programming to explore how an institution considers teen age brackets (as an adult or a child).

Interviews with Museum Professionals:

In order to get the full picture of play and teenagers in museums, I reached out to a number of different museum professionals. I wanted to speak with people involved in education and exhibits alike. I also selected museums that have an established relationship with their teen audience, as they are actively asking questions on how to serve that audience. The goal of this method was to find barriers and gaps that hopefully these recommendations could answer. I interviewed:

- Dillyn Adamo, Learning and Engagement Coordinator; and Ellie Cross, Director of Education at the Museum of Northwest Art
- Nancy Salguero McKay, Executive Director at the Highline Heritage Museum
- Blake Nakatsu, Exhibit Developer and former YouthCAN Program Manager at The Wing Luke Museum
- Alissa Rupp, FAIA, Principal at FRAME | Integrative Design Strategies

Asked museums staff (education, exhibits, etc) about barriers, setbacks, lessons learned, or positives regarding teen audiences + topics of play. The subjects pertained to time and labor, budget constraints, curriculum, and exhibition design.

Teens and Museums

A majority of teen engagement with museums of all subject matters is through programming, and the second most popular form is Teen Councils. Teen councils often feature a small number of teens, but those teens help guide and inform other teen related engagements. Art museums specifically include creative programming that can be workshops, providing a space to learn or make, and exhibit work. They also promote programming as a gathering space for socialization.

Science museums emphasized exploration for all age groups, but did have some targeted opportunities for teens through programming or activities. They were often based in STEM and still framed as career building activities, as opposed to purely for creation. Either way, the sentiment for curiosity and play existed. For example, at the Orlando Science Center, there is a flight simulator that is not stated to be for an age group, but the advertisement has teens participating in it (based on my presumption of their age).

I found that history museums as a whole lack the most playful experiences for teenagers. If programming or inclusion existed it was considered educational and related to identity or community. I'd like to note that museums did offer programs relating to teens, but mostly via connections between teachers, classrooms, and the institutions. Understandably, many history museums deal with delicate subject matter that is not deemed appropriate for playful learning for any age. This is a key gap I will address in my recommendations, as though I agree that not all history can be taught through play, I believe it can be a useful tool to appropriately teach history to teens.

Overall, between these three types of museums there was one recurring gap:

Lack of consideration for the "daily visitation teen"

Many museums are successfully connecting with their local teen audiences and communities, but often forget about what I call the "daily visitation teen." This is a teen who is either a tourist from out of town, or is a non-regular museum goer that could live locally.

A place that acknowledged this gap was the Exploratorium in San Francisco, CA. They have a Tinkering Lab in the museum, but "while very powerful, is by necessity limited in time, and only a small portion of our visitors return regularly to the workshop space." They created

afterschool programs for tinkering aimed at teens and older children. Tinkering is a form of play that exists on the museum floor designed for this age group, but it is acknowledged that visitors wished to engage deeper. But without that on-floor experience, visitors may not have sparked an interest for this programming need. The Exploratorium is an outlier as play is a part of its explorative mission, but it is a learning lesson in the importance of exhibit based playful experiences for teens and older youth.

Museums are individual institutions, though they adhere to similar structures and values, and one of the ways that they are individual is in their ticketing and pricing systems. I found this to be a barrier keeping teens out of museums.

In my review, the most common ticket types were Adults (12+) and Children (3-11). Occasional student tickets existed but were sometimes reserved for college students. Though ticket prices are often seen only by the parent or guardian purchasing tickets, these titles are the first communication of what the institution thinks of teenagers. Though it is clear these groupings are made for finances, it is important to consider. Having a ticket title of Youth or Student, instead of lumping them in with Adult or Child communicates that you as the institution *see them*. Some may argue that teens want to be seen as adults, and would have no issue with being considered this way. The main issue with this, is that teens are not adults. And understandably for the museum finances sake, they want teens to be grouped in with adults for the best financial gain on family tickets, but how does this encourage teens to visit on their own? Museums need to reduce barriers if they want to encourage their teen audiences. By denoting a ticket for Teen / Student and/or having a Teen Membership is the *first step in letting teens know that they want you in their institution*. The balance between offering this ticket type and ensuring there is no age discrimination is to acknowledge that it is on a self-identification basis, and that for Memberships a high school ID would be used to confirm.

Continuing with my review of the relationship between museums and teens, the American Alliance of Museums has published a few articles. Firstly, "Gen Z Has Entered the Chat: What We Want from Museums" which provides a list of what Gen Z needs to feel that museums are for them. This article is tackling all Gen Z which is 1997-2012, but includes teens born from 2012-2007. The key issues in this article are represented in my own museum session

findings including: spending too much time online, lack of community/socialization, and not finding museums interesting for them. This article is in partnership with Youth250, which is a roadmap for engaging with youth in your institutions. This toolkit is a recommendation of mine for museums on assessing their journey in serving teens. It asks institutions to reflect on themselves and grades their current plans. It then provides tools for improving and moving forward to engage teen audiences. Though this Youth250 Toolkit is great for getting teens in the museum, it is just a general inclusion, and not related to playful experiences for those teens.

Click the Link to see the Youth250 Toolkit: <https://historymadebyus.org/youth250/toolkit>

Space and Permission to Play:

How are youth set up to succeed in museum spaces?

Before considering how teens can engage with play in a museum, it is important to assess comfortability and inclusion in museum environments. Besides barriers of actually getting teens in the doors of a museum, the next challenge is trying to get them to connect with the environment. When a teen is in a museum space, even if they are happy to be there, you are often battling their phone for their attention. Though I'd like to preface that not all teens are the same when it comes to screen time, especially as there seems to be a rebellion against the phone with concepts like "doomscrolling," and a resurgence in physical media and analog experiences, phones are also a source of comfort in unfamiliar or boring environments. So the museum has to create experiences worthy of catching their attention. Do this by creating content intentionally designed for teen audiences.

Museums may think that teen engagement is a "which came first, the chicken or the egg" scenario, but it is not. Museums that connected and retained a teen audience did so by **first** creating content intended for them, and **the next step** was to invite them to the museum in a welcoming way. It may seem obvious, but there is no point inviting teens to visit the museum if there is nothing intentionally made for them to engage with. They need to feel validated in the environment.

Existing in a museum space often means being in near silence, rule following, and having an expectation you are being watched, with little physical movement. This is not always conducive to a teenager as they wish to engage in socializing, tackle concepts of risk, and may need an outlet for physical activity— though teens do appreciate time to reflect, learn, and meditate on new things. A balance needs to be met between this "museum existence" and regular teenage existence.

Here are some recommendations for space and permission to play:

- Starting with the "White Box" style of museum design, typically found in modern art museums, it is a culprit to upholding a traditional museum existence, but it can be adapted successfully to connect with teens.
- Consider adding interactives, prompts, and questions within the gallery space.

- If this is not possible, create a separated alcove for activities intended for all visitors.
 - When creating these alcoves create visual cues of the transition between the quiet exhibit area and the activity space that encourages a new existence. Let visitors know that they can speak louder, touch what is in front of them, or reflect on what they saw in the gallery.
 - It is especially important to provide cues that tell all visitors that the activities are for all ages, not just a “children’s play area” tucked away in a corner.
- Use music and sound for cues to be curious and comfortable in the space.
 - By adding immersive elements to a space, it allows teens (and general visitors) to connect deeper with the content, feel curious, which is a key part of playful learning.
 - Expected SILENCE is the deadly killer of comfortability for teens.
 - Prompts that encourage visitors to talk to each other will help reduce the expectation of silence and being reserved.
- Create nooks for sitting besides general respite zones.
 - Act as a place to take a break without fully exiting the experience.
 - Beanbag chairs or seating that is themed to the exhibit allows for decompression and choice of whether they would like to engage or not.
- Do Not Touch signs may be necessary, but make an effort to have a touchable experience in each exhibit.
 - See section on **Props** to learn more about how teens connected with tactile experiences.

In both my museum session responses and interviews with Museum of Northwest Art (MoNA) and the Highline Heritage museum, space was discussed. In the interview, MoNA, which has a good relationship with their teens, acknowledged that a barrier for them is that their classroom space is at max capacity, and that their museum exhibit space does not warrant comfort for teens. It uses the previously mentioned, “White Box” interior design aligned with other modern art museums. This expected quietness and reserved energy has made it hard for teens to exist in that space, even when there is an exhibit installed by the teens themselves. This sentiment

was echoed in my interview with the Highline Heritage Museum where they reminded us that museums are the ones who set barriers in place. It is the responsibility of the museum to reduce these barriers and invite teens into these spaces, and provide them the space to learn and exist like we do any other part of the audience. I discussed this sentiment earlier, which is that content for teens has to be **in the museum** before you invite them in. Think of it like inviting somebody for a dinner party and then not cooking them anything— your house might look lovely but there’s nothing to actually enjoy.

I directly asked the teens how they felt in the spaces of the museums we visited:

Were there any moments when you felt included or excluded in the space?

“In the native ground exhibit I felt immersed in the space because it had art, designs and sounds that make me feel like I was actually there.” at MOHAI

“The rooms were very echoey which makes me want to be quiet. I am also not a big art person so I felt a little out of place.” at the Frye Art Museum

“The space was a little exclusive because there was a lot of signs that said “don't touch this” or “no pictures”” at The Wing Luke Museum

Many teens did answer that museums generally felt inclusive or neutral, but my purpose for sharing these responses is the descriptive aspects of the space. The environment played a crucial role in how they felt, despite the content of the museum. Teens pick up on cues that tell them to behave a certain way, which wrestles with their developmental stage.

Exploring risk is a key developmental milestone for teenagers, and museums should create outlets for teens to exist in the stage they are in. Here are a few ideas to start thinking about how to incorporate risk in a museum setting. For example, though we don’t want to encourage any damage to artifacts, create an intended touchable replica that has a secretiveness to it... Something that if you saw it, you might wonder if it’s allowed to be touched, or did a curator accidentally leave it out? It allows for a teen to explore that “rule breaking” possibility of

consequences without actually damaging any real artifacts. Another way is to create a risk regarding social behaviors. When creating interactives like games, allow for them to be slightly performative by either taking up space or making a decent amount of (non-annoying) noise. Draw attention, add stakes that allow a social pressure. In an exhibit space, reward curiosity. If you are able to have an immersive set design, hide secrets throughout the exhibit that would only be discovered if someone was looking “where they weren’t supposed to.” Perhaps they open a false unlabeled door that leads to an interpretive panel. This is also something unexpected in a museum experience, and encourages curiosity to focus on their surroundings as they wonder if anything around them could hold knowledge. And finally, allow for failure. Learning through experimentation, even when it fails, is a form of knowledge. Sterile white rooms, filled with glass and silence are not conducive to a comfortable environment, and certainly not a playful one. Little changes in these spaces can go a long way, and I recommend breaking the status quo if you’d like to connect with your teen audiences better.

Recommendations for Play:

Roleplaying:

Roleplaying is categorized under **Pretend Play**. One of my key recommendations for creating playful experiences that can be enjoyed by teens is providing roleplaying interactives. Teens enjoyed experiences where they could try something new, or explore a new perspective, and Examples of this in teens responses included:

- “Interviewer and Defender Mock Trial” at MOHAI
- “Sitting on a Motorcycle” at MOHAI
- “Pretending to be a captain on a ship” at MOHAI

These examples engaged the teens by asking them to step into the shoes of an exhibits' subject. Roleplaying also appears in other forms such as games, simulations, and working with props. For further detail see **Games** and **Props** sections. But, roleplaying games (known as RPGs) are an extremely popular form of both table-top and video game, and thus makes it an approachable form of museum engagement. Besides engagement, roleplaying can also be used for socializing in a museum. It allowed the teens to participate together, and seeing other participants creates an invitation to join.

Here are my recommendations for creating a successful roleplaying experience:

- Subject matter of the exhibit:
 - If an exhibit is on a serious subject matter regarding history, use it as a method of decompression for teens (and other visitors)
 - Teenagers care about serious subject matter, and do not shy away from challenging topics, but they can also get overwhelmed or exhausted. Their own form of *museum fatigue*. A goal of a roleplaying experience can be to let them decompress or take a break to support the larger learning goals of the exhibit.
 - Use roleplaying as a safe space for exploring unfamiliar or new topics.
 - Roleplaying experiences in exhibits can have goals related to outcomes and consequences in history and science
 - Examples (not from museum sessions, but common interactives)

- Flight simulator: Pilot responsibility and perspective during flight, physics of flight, purpose of equipment
 - Survival chances during a plague: probability, seriousness of a pandemic.
- Type of roles or imaginative scenario:
 - Fictional character: Provides perspectives, even multiple stories.
 - Real person: Provides an in depth narrative on a specific story.
 - Self-insert: Reflection on identity, grounding in reality.
- Participation and resources:
 - Foot traffic, location and time need to be considered.
 - If the roleplaying utilizes props or pieces both budget and reset time need to be tested.
 - Best practice would be to have an experience that multiple users can participate in, and visitors should be able to reset the experience easily.
 - IF an experience is for one visitor, consider making it a photo opportunity that results in a "souvenir"
 - Teens (and adults) enjoy photo opportunities for socializing and expression.

Social:

Socializing came up in several ways throughout the museum sessions. Teens acknowledged places where the museum prompted you to be social, but as they were visiting individually, had nobody to interact with. There were a few pairs of friends who visited the museums together, and did reflect that the experience was fun because they were with a friend. There were a few occasions, perhaps for the sake of the project, teens paired up with each other to participate in the museum experiences without being friends beforehand. But there were also many instances where teens felt there were no opportunities to socialize.

My recommendations for promoting activities for socializing are directed towards the institution as a whole, and not necessarily the exhibits or programs:

- See recommendations on **Space and Inclusion**

- Teen Nights are great options for promoting social experiences for teens.
 - Teen Nights can be dances, activities, getting to explore the museum with only their peers.
- Offering reduced memberships or tickets for teens. Even a “recommend a friend.” promotion could encourage teens to visit museums with friends.
- Utilize the museum’s social media to promote to teens. Create opportunities for them to take pictures or share on social media.
 - Teens will have individual opinions on social media, but it would be remiss to not mention it.

Props:

Props are categorized under **Play with objects**. When I directly asked teens what playful experiences they would like to see more of in museums a popular answer was what I defined as **props**. Props could be replicas, toys, placeholders, or anything tactile. Props support learning through play in a number of ways. Replicas can be of artifacts, clothing, tools, or pieces of art. Other tactile props or toys could include building blocks, or exhibit pieces that need to be touched to be experienced like picking up a phone to listen to audio, tuning a radio, opening a drawer or canister. Some museums utilize teaching collections which are real artifacts or objects that are deliberately set aside to be hand-held. Teens made it clear that they enjoy interacting with props. Having interesting tactile experiences evokes curiosity, and helps sooth the little voice in our heads that wishes we could touch everything in a museum.

Quotes from the teens’ responses surrounding props:

*“There was a place where there were pots, and apparently if you blow into them they make a cool sound, possibly could make **replicas** and people could try? There was a lot of cool texture, they could try to make art with texture you could **touch**”*

*I think it would be cool to have maybe like some art we could **touch** or interact with somehow. But I feel like it makes sense for an art museum to be maybe a bit less physically interactive just because I feel like emotionally / mentally you're interacting with the art instead. “*

*“IDK, I think it already did a pretty good job of incorporating play. I guess it would be nice to have more interactive **tactile prop things** not just a lot of screen.”*

*“More choose your own adventure interactive games rather than just one path games. More actually **interactive props** rather than just screens.”*

*“I would like more interactive experiences, like interactive screens or **props** instead of just videos. It would be nice to demonstrate or try out a cultural thing to learn about it more.”*

*“Yes, you were meant to have fun looking and touching the different **props** which let you have fun and made it so there was a lot of interactivity.”*

*“Yes, messing around with interactives and **props** was an imaginative (??) experience.”*

Props are a successful way to engage with teens in the museum. Here are recommendations on creating the most successful props:

- Realism: when possible and budget permitting, try and make the prop as realistic to its original.
 - Replicas were well liked by teens because of authenticity. Having an accurate texture and weight of an object is a great teaching tool.
 - Replicas are common teaching tools in science museums for fossils and other specimens, and I’d like to encourage other types of museums to utilize this type of tool.
- Reward: Use video game logic! Picking up or interacting with an object should result in a new piece of information.
 - Place informational text underneath where the object rests or on the object itself. It might seem counterintuitive but finding that “hidden message” will feel rewarding.
- Create: Using building blocks, drawing, or other craft materials
 - Opportunities to create allows teens and other visitors to make deeper connections as they get to reflect on what they’ve just learned.

- Example: An art exhibit on still life paintings, but for the activity you are asked to put together a cornucopia of items from a pile of props to be the subject of the still life. How do you select the right balance of items? What's the story? Do you take into consideration the colors and textures?

Games:

Games are categorized under **Games with rules**. Gaming is the most common and enjoyed form of play by teenagers. Even in this project, in our pre-project questionnaire, all 15 respondents answered that they play video games, and 11 out of 15 answered that they play board games. Games are amazing because they can combine other forms of play into one. Games with rules are already a great learning tool, but can be combined with roleplaying and are an opportunity for play with objects.

My recommendations for game playing in museums for teens are:

- If a game can be table-top or physical, try that first before a screen or digital version.
- Implement roleplaying games as a means of storytelling and engagement.
- Keep games simple and decently short (If possible, under 5-10 minutes)
- Use games as an opportunity to socialize.

As discussed before, an extremely popular form of game to try in the museum would be RPG's. A recommendation I have is if you are developing a game for a museum exhibit, try and make rogue-like RPG's that encourage choice and personalization. Rogue-like is defined as: "role-playing game traditionally characterized by a dungeon crawl through procedurally generated levels, turn-based gameplay, grid-based movement, and permanent death of the player character." (Wikipedia) These types of games would be useful in a museum setting, as they allow for quick turnover (as a turn can end quickly) and are highly engaging because of unpredictability and choice.

Anti-Screenager:

Screens were not fully disliked but were considered a bare minimum form of interaction. The teens put them as an expected experience, sort of a "better than nothing" description. Physical

real-life experiences were by far preferred. If screens were used in an exhibit, they needed to be a touch screen or a game to be received well. Conversely, screens were rarely considered fully passive. Teens made note to consider even simple screens with button pushing or controls a form of interaction.

Here are some descriptions from the teens, in reference to what they would like to see more of regarding playful experiences or mentions of screens:

*“I would like more interactive experiences, like interactive **screens** or props instead of just **videos**. It would be nice to demonstrate or try out a cultural thing to learn about it more.”*

*“More choose your own adventure interactive games rather than just one path games. More actual interactive props rather than just **screens**.”*

*“There were lots of **video screens** where you could just watch a **video** or listen to a recording, which were honestly kind of boring. Just a thought. Thank you!”*

*“I think there were a lot of missed opportunities, because there is no rule saying art cannot be interactive. You could maybe add a **screen** that allows you to click outlines and have it tell you about the art.”*

Teenagers today are usually called screenagers, but it is important to think about how much screen time they truly get. Typically throughout the day teens are on their phones, at school they are on their Chromebooks or computers, and at home they may watch YouTube, TV, or play video games. Museums serve as an outlet for stepping away from the screen, not increasing it. At the same time, screens in museums are useful. They can be reused for different exhibits, easily updatable, and can host digital interactives well.

My recommendations are to use screens sparingly and purposefully.

- When displaying videos or photos on screens consider making the screen itself visually interesting. Incorporate the exhibit design and immersion into the screen display.
 - Example: “Great Seattle Fire Song” at MOHAI: This experience tells the story of the Great Fire of Seattle from 1889 through a musical song told from the perspective of the artifacts. This was directly labeled fun by a number of the visiting teens. Though this exhibit is quite unique, it is a video screen under the

guise of “live theatre” with spotlights and curtains and anthropomorphic artifacts.

- If utilizing screens, try other forms of input besides text.
 - Try an interactive that asks you to draw digitally
 - Emoticons or emojis instead of text to express feelings
 - Emojis and Emoticons were a surprise finding, as many teens communicated to me in their questionnaires via emoticons. They drew out not only smiley faces but shrugs and other emotions.
- Another successful type of screen is one where you can input a comment and see it compared with other visitors. A screen like this was mentioned multiple times by teens to be fun, social, and highly interactive.
 - Example: “Future of Pop Culture” at MOPOP: It is well suited for teens as they can input a response, and see it compared with other visitors. It often gets filled up with trendy topics, memes, or Gen Z slang. Be warned, a good algorithm to catch people writing “bad words” is also needed.
 - Though at times it can end up being “cringe” because of the fast trend cycle, try incorporating memes or meme formats to fill out.
- If possible, when designing games for museum experiences, try and see if a table-top or non-digital version can be created first. Digitally created games do have many strengths, and refer to recommendations on **Games**.

The pattern here is that successful screens have an element of socialization, creativity, or gamification. They are used purposefully, and would not have the same impact if they were not digital. But overall, I recommend a move away from screen-based interactives when trying to support engagement for teens. Some of the recommendations I’ve given can be done on paper like drawing, emojis, and memes– but budget may play a factor here. Be purposeful!

Key Takeaways:

Based on a summary of the responses from teens, the landscape review, and my interviews with museum professionals, museums looking to improve playful learning for teens should focus on these ideas:

- Museums must create content for their teen audiences before inviting them. They will not connect with the museum if they are not included.
- Focus on tactile experiences. Teens want to touch things in museums.
- Teens are apathetic about screens. Use them purposefully, and sparingly. Consider taking the extra time to add design elements to a screen that is displaying a passive video.
- Games are a great way to engage teens in museums. Preference for digital or tabletop/physical is dependent on a museum's resources.
- Roleplaying is a great form of learning through explorative storytelling. Try creating simulations, games, or activities using replicas for teaching tools.
- Consider exhibition design cues that give permission to exist in the space. Use sound, color, and design to encourage trust between institutions and their teen visitors.
- Exhibition design for deeper immersion can also give permission to play. It can create a sense of curiosity, exploration, and awe that helps bring down barriers towards museum learning.
- Seek out funding opportunities through organizations such as LEGO Foundation and foundry10.

Unrelated to my recommendations on play, another Key Takeaway from this project from museums are:

- Teen Councils:
 - Teen Councils serve as an excellent way to create longevity with your local teen audience. Each generation of teens will have differing opinions, and not only getting opinions from them but co-designing projects, will have a lasting impact on how they enjoy the museum. A great starting place for any museum is to create a Teen Council that can inform the museum's future.
- Youth250 Toolkit
 - <https://historymadebyus.org/youth250/toolkit>
 - A great resource for museums to evaluate their engagement with teens, and improve their connection with their teen audience.

foundry10

As a separate list, I have created recommendations specific to foundry10, as these are topics brought up by both the teens and my work, and I believe is where they should put further research and funding into creating these kinds of experiences.

Overall, what I have found is that teens want to *learn by doing*. The most common ways teens engaged in play were with **Play with objects** and **Games with rules**. From my findings, I believe teens would like more opportunities to engage in **Pretend play**. Physical play and symbolic play did not appear as often, as teens did not comment on wanting these kinds of activities, and they did not notice many opportunities to engage with them. This does not mean teens do not engage in these kinds of play in general, as in my pre-project questionnaire 7 out of 15 teens mentioned some kind of physical play, and a few mentioned symbolic play such as music or drawing. Physical and Symbolic play may not feel as necessary in a museum space because these forms of play are structured hobbies in their daily lives— I would argue that what lacks in their daily life is Pretend play, which is perhaps why it appeared when asked what they wanted more of. I think that teens see the potential of museums as places where they can uniquely engage in instances of Pretend play. Museums are equipped to offer this, as they can provide a place where curiosity, immersion, and exploration all give teenagers permission to engage in Pretend play. After analyzing all components, I believe these recommendations can create the best playful learning experiences for teens in museums.

- Create roleplaying games in museum spaces both tabletop and digital.
- Support museums in making changes to their gallery and exhibits that create inviting and comfortable spaces for teens. Museums have to have content intended for the teens before they can invite them into the museum.
- Support museums in making replicas of artifacts and other materials for touchable experiences. An alternative option for this would be to encourage teaching collections, which may need funding for repeated conservation efforts.
- Support museums in creating immersive exhibit set pieces that evoke storytelling and allow teens to learn through roleplaying.
- Support museums who wish to remove screens or videos in favor of analog, tactile, or physical experiences.
- Support museums who want to create Teen Councils as a way of co-designing future experiences for teens.

Appendix A

MUSEUMS + TEENS + PLAY QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer these questions about your museum experience. The responses to this questionnaire will not be seen by anyone at this museum. Please fill out as much as you can, we want your opinions. Let Abigail know if you have any questions or need anything explained. Thanks again.



Overall, how was your experience in the museum today? Did you enjoy it?

Were there any moments when you felt included or excluded in the space?

Did you have any opportunities today that involved physical movement?

Did you have any opportunities today that involved games or gaming?

Were there any objects, props, or items that you interacted with today?

Did any experiences today involve roleplaying or pretending to be something or someone else?

Did you feel there was any opportunity to be imaginative or creative here today?

In reference to the previous questions, where do you think would be a good opportunity for any missing playful experiences?
Additionally, now that you have been thinking about play, what kind of playful experiences would you like to see in this kind of museum?

Were you invited to have fun while in the museum at any point?

What gave you the indication / invitation that fun was allowed? (Instructions, music, environmental factors, even vibes)

Were there any opportunities to socialize with other people?

Free space. Please let me know any further thoughts you have!


THANK YOU!

I asked teens to answer this questionnaire at the end of each of their museum visits. They were allowed a piece of scratch paper while exploring the museum for notes.

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