

Problem

Despite the importance of a comprehensive historical education, children's learning of history in traditional education settings has often left students with a poor understanding and negative outlook of the past. This poor conception of ancient cultures also leads to harmful and false viewpoints of these people being "less intelligent" because of their lack of technology or their ignorance.

One way to combat this poor understanding and negative outlook is by building positive experiences regarding history with children at a young age. Children's museums would then be the ideal environment for children to begin their understanding of ancient history, build a positive outlook towards the topic, and make connections to other disciplines that are interwoven with history.

Engineering and construction based activities are ideally suited for building a positive outlook and forming connections in children due to their hands-on nature. Many basic engineering principles in use today were pioneered by ancient societies, and many children will already be able to recognize some famous ancient monuments that use them. By knitting these topics together, we can help build a positive outlook towards historical education in children through fun and educational hands-on interactive exhibits.

Purpose & Impact

The purpose of this thesis project was to design an interactive exhibit that combines engineering and construction-based activities with historic themes to help children develop a more positive outlook towards ancient history and the connections it has with our modern world.

The goal of this exhibit is to plant a kernel of positivity towards history in children that will lead to a greater understanding and appreciation for history as adults. For families visiting the museum, this exhibit will show the interconnectedness of history with other disciplines and help parents realize the importance of a comprehensive history education for their child. For the museum itself, this exhibit has the goal of introducing new ways to share history materials that also incorporate a STEM focus in order to make the materials more fun and engaging for visitors.

Deliverable

This project provided four (4) designs for interactive activities to be placed next to the Cityscapes gallery at the KidsQuest Children's Museum. These interactives were designed with industry best practices for safety, education, age-appropriate material, and fun in mind. Three of the four interactive designs were ultimately chosen for the exhibit after deliberation and changes made to fit budgetary and space constraints.

Process

Collaborated with KidsQuest Children's Museum to find a space for the project. The ideal location was identified next to the existing Cityscapes exhibit, where this project would make sense thematically. Also toured the rest of the museum to understand the learning outlook of KidsQuest and their approach to informal education.

Conducted research into best practices for children's museum exhibits, historical education, and examples of other engineering/construction based activities. This research was used in tandem with the KidsQuest approach to informal education to design the interactives for this exhibit.

Met With KidsQuest staff to discuss exhibit designs. Designs were edited and three (3) were chosen to be built for the exhibit.

Collaborated and coordinated with the KidsQuest fabricator and graphic artist to edit the look and feel of the designs.

Next Steps

Opening in June 2022, this exhibit will be monitored to evaluate the level of visitor engagement and learning with the activities.

The designs for the interactives will be made available online so that other institutions can use them as inspiration to make other history based activities. The designs not chosen for the exhibit are available to be refined and developed should KidsQuest or another institution decide to use them at a later date.

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Resources

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