Interlocking Frameworks: Object-based Learning, Critical Thinking, and Questions

Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens
2019 Garden Docent Training

Questions	Object-based Learning (Visual Literacy)	Critical Thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy)
Closed questions		
Cognitive/Memory questions ask for what you already know or can see. Answers involve simple recall and are either right or wrong	Perception Use of the senses with links to memory, interests, and attitudes Description a systematic inventory of the object's physical attributes; use of a vocabulary that moves from simple to more complex concepts	Knowledge student collects information; recalls previously learned information; describes what she can see
Convergent questions ask you to do something with the information you already have or can see. Find similarities, differences, patterns, relationships. They ask you to categorize, to organize information, to find central theme. There are right and wrong answers.	Analysis finding relationships and patterns between the parts and the whole; similarities and differences when comparing two or more objects; probing to find links between objects and people.	Analysis student can break ideas down into component parts; understand relationships among parts; classify; categorize; sequence; get the main idea; draw conclusions
Open questions		
Divergent questions ask for new ideas, for inferences. They are open-ended, meaning there is no one right answer. To answer one must gather information from past experience, link it to information being explored in the museum and create new understandings and interpretations	Interpretation finding new understandings, new meanings; making connections among the past, the present and the future	Synthesis student can work with parts, combining them to form a new structure, new meanings; infer; predict; create

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How the Frameworks Interlock

Visitors, or learners, tend to retain more if they are more actively involved in their experiences. Activities from the lowest to highest level of involvement move from reading, hearing, seeing, doing, and, at the highest level of involvement, to seeing and doing.

How then can docents provide a more active experience for visitors? We can use object-based learning. Museums are perfect places to learn from objects, but most people have not been taught how to do it. **Object-based learning**, or learning from things, uses visual literacy. **Visual literacy** is the "reading" of things to help us learn from museum objects. Object-based learning is a series of steps—a process—that begins with perception and ends with interpretation.

These steps are what help visitors use their **critical thinking**, or higher level thinking and reasoning skills, to fully accomplish the "reading" of objects. Docents can facilitate a complete experience by choreographing and designing a conversation that moves visitor through the critical thinking steps of looking, thinking, exploring, listening, and reaching a heightened understanding of the museum, its objects, and their connections to people.

Docents choreograph, or design, the conversation on a tour by leading a flow of guided conversation using inquiry. **Inquiry** is a teaching method that uses a framework of questions, and other components, to foster active participation in the learning experiences. On a guided tour, inquiry drives the conversation forward. **Questions** help to stimulate curiosity, invite active participation, and create a community experience. There are different types of questions to ask, such as closed or open.

Inquiry, in the end, is also **more than asking questions**. Inquiry also uses other communication methods to fully engage visitors actively in learning. Some of the additional communication methods that docents can employ include wait time, probing, good listening, clearly stated questions, praise, and redirection.