

Families at Hillwood—A Cheat Sheet

2022-2023 Mansion Docent Training
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

Compiled by Rebecca Singer, Head of Youth Audiences

Not many families with young children visit Hillwood (research indicates about 14%), and fewer opt to go on tours. If you do find yourself touring families, here are some helpful hints to have at the ready.

Families at museums are visiting for recreation and leisure time. Their purpose in visiting the museum as a family group is to be with each other and to discuss together what they see and experience.

Tips for engaging families on tours at Hillwood:

- Encourage dialogue among family members by prompting them with open-ended questions that allow for multiple perspectives and can be answered at a variety of levels, depending on age and experience. Ask both children and adults to share their opinions, thoughts, and reactions.
- A great way to start a conversation about a piece of artwork with families is to first simply ask: *What do you see?* Then you can build on their answers. Encourage children to look closely, use descriptive words, and explain their responses. Ask follow up questions and draw attention to other details.
- Find out their interests, so you can relate information in the tour to things that are meaningful to them. *When you aren't at a museum what do you enjoy doing?*
- Give them problems to solve or things to do, to find, or to discover together. *Who can find for me the largest thing in this room? How many pink things can you find here?*
- Have them search for and identify familiar items they may recognize, such as: chairs, tables, cups, or pictures of animals. Give them a game to play, an activity to do, or a puzzle to solve. Ask them to look for clues to figure out how an object may have been used, or who might have used it.
- Relate to things they already know. Ask them to draw comparisons between the things they see at Hillwood and their life at home. *What do you eat your food on?*
- Use language everyone can understand.
- Be aware of what is at children's eye level—which objects they can see, and which are out of their view.
- Encourage the use of imagination. Ask children to make up a story what's happening in the scene on a painting; to pretend that they are the tsar and imagine how they would act; or to imagine what life would be like living at Hillwood.

Youth Audience Characteristics

Ages 3-5

- Learn by making observations using their senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste
- Can recognize and identify familiar items, like things they might have at home (chairs, bed, cups, plates) and pictures of familiar things, like animals.
- Can describe shapes, colors, and size. Can do simple counting activities.
- Short attention spans
- No sense of history or the past

Ages 5-8

- Like younger children, still learn through concrete observations using the senses. Still enjoy recognizing and identifying familiar objects.
- Have active imaginations
- No sense of history or the past

Ages 8-11

- Able to make comparisons, begin to draw connections, compare/ contrast things that have similarities and differences
- Can answer open-ended questions and share their opinions
- Are very industrious; like to solve puzzles, play games, figure things out, demonstrate knowledge, achievement, and accomplishments
- Starting to have a sense of the past

Ages 11-14

- Very self-conscious (especially concerned about reaction of peers, but may open up a bit more when not with peer group)
- Can begin to think more abstractly, start to analyze
- Like to be treated as adults (though they still need a lot of guidance)
- Can answer open-ended questions, engage in conversation/dialogue, and share their opinions

Ages 14-18

- Tend to be more interested in their peers than in adults, but respond best when they feel they are being respected and treated as adults
- May tend to be overly theoretical and idealistic
- Can be engaged in conversation/ discussion/ debate
- Should be encouraged to present and explain their points of view and to share their interests

Sources:

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