

**“The Best Possible Visitor Experience”  
2024 Garden Docent Training  
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens**

“Learning is a journey, not a destination.” Brooks and Brooks, *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*

**Goal Statement**

The “best possible visitor experience” engages visitors in a dialogue that helps them develop an understanding of three important ideas embodied at Hillwood: interest in and study of the art and garden collections; the role of Marjorie Merriweather Post as a collector, philanthropist, business executive, engaged citizen, and manager of large estates; the estate as an exemplar of a particular lifestyle within a residential setting. The training program will provide the knowledge, skills, and methods docents need to facilitate visitor experiences that are informative, participatory, and compelling.

**Rationale**

Educational research is clear about the importance of involving learners actively in their learning. Identifying a model of the “best possible experience” as a facilitated dialogue or conversation assures visitors’ active participation and fosters development of skills that will be useful in other settings.

**Objectives**

After completing this training program, docents will be better able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and methods required to facilitate an engaging museum visit;
2. Develop and facilitate meaningful experiences that are object-driven, visitor-centered, and knowledge-based for Hillwood’s visitors on guided tours.

**Agenda for January 8, 2024**

**Introduction to the Garden Docent Training Program**

- I. Welcome and Introductions
  - A. Your name; Why you are embarking upon this hard-work adventure; Something you would like us to know about you
- II. The Garden Docent Training Program
  - A. The overall plan: schedule, lectures, readings, workshops, assignments
  - B. The museum’s mission statement and vision statement
  - C. What kind of museum is this?
  - D. The vision of the docent program at Hillwood
  - E. The advance organizer—an introduction to what it is
- III. The Guided or Facilitated Tour
  - A. The changing approach to visitors’ experience: the usual approach versus Hillwood’s
  - B. The Venn Diagram framework--what do you have to know and be able to do to facilitate an accurate and compelling experience for visitors?
    - a. Knowledge
    - b. Skills
    - c. Methods
- IV. Introduce concept of object-based learning
- V. Demonstration of object-based learning with a can of Coca-Cola, then discussion
- VI. Step back—what do you take away from this session?
- VII. Assignment for next class on Tuesday, January 16 (via Zoom): readings