

## The Audiences and Activities of Museum Education

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Master's Thesis  
University of Georgia

This thesis identified and described two components of museum education: the audiences who use museums and key activities necessary for effective museum education. The study described six primary museum audiences and explored their educational abilities, behavior and experiences with museums. The audiences identified were: young people, adults, families, the elderly, the disabled and minorities.

The activities described in this study are in two parts. First explored are two examples of in-house (conducted within the confines of a museum environment) activities: writing interpretive labels and conducting museum tours. Explored secondly are two examples of museum out-reach (conducted outside the museum environment) activities: museum based loan programs and trips and travel.

Although this study is primarily based on the experiences of museums, it can be applied to botanical gardens, zoological parks, nature centers, historical homes, and other visitor-based facilities.

## An Analysis of the Verbal and Postural Communications of Family Visitors at the Zoo

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This was an ethnographic study of family groups conducted at the Japanese Snow Monkey

exhibit in the Minnesota Zoo. The method used was unobtrusive observations of families.

The results are summarized as follows:

- Family groups in this study were generally comprised of a father, mother, and children.
- Parents appeared to act the role of teachers at the exhibit.
- Children led the group to the exhibit, but parents tended to make the decision to leave the exhibit.
- Human bonding behavior (e.g., friendly and intimate physical contact) was common among family members.
- Pointing was common for both adults and children.
- Parents tended to initiate conversations and asked more questions than children.
- Questions were directed to fathers and female children most often. Questions were answered by fathers most often.
- Parents were more likely than children to give directives (both instructive and disciplinary).
- Elderly adults (grandmothers) were more likely than other family members to begin conversations (although there were only five grandmothers in this analysis).
- Family members talked about the animals and their behavior, but rarely discussed past knowledge of the animal.
- Attitudes toward the animals were inferred from visitor humor, friendliness, disrespect, and anthropomorphic behavior.
- Visitors often mimicked behavior of monkeys (e.g., grooming).
- Male children were most likely to "talk to the animals".

Consistent with other researchers, Hage concluded that visitors appear to be more interested in viewing active, attractive animals than learning about the natural history of animals.