Youth Popular Culture Exhibit at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis

By: Jeannie Regan

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Ray White 5-6-43
The museum field can be very competitive. It takes years of education and an equal amount of experience to get settled into a career, especially the career I wish to pursue, museum curator. I started my learning of museum workings by doing an internship at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. During this summer internship I developed educational activities using exhibits, interpreted activities, and installed a small ephemeral case. After this summer internship my immediate supervisor, Theresa Hutchinson, offered me a permanent position as a gallery interpreter. My duties include interacting with visitors to help them better understand and use exhibits and collections, nurture and mentor youth volunteers (MAPS) and adult volunteers, and set-up or take down activities. Along with this work I have volunteered with the curator of American Materials, Sheila Riley.

With these many past experiences, Sheila allowed me to do my thesis in the museum. Sheila knew that an area of the gallery ("Spoken Clues") did not work and needed to be changed. It was left up to me as how to change it. All my final work has to be approved by Sheila, but I have had to do the "leg" work, set up meetings with experts in different areas, and install the exhibit.

I wanted to do my thesis at the museum for a variety of reasons: the excellence that they demand, the excellent supervisors who would guide my work, relativity of the work to my future goals, and the enjoyment I receive when I do work at the museum. I wanted more experience in museum work, so that when I went into the work field I could say, "Yes, I've done that." Installing an exhibit would give me experience in many different aspects of museum work.

The first thing that happened was that Sheila gave me the guidelines that the museum has for major exhibits. The Children's Museum has a set of guidelines that each major exhibit must follow before implementation takes place. My proposed project has been deemed a major undertaking, so I had to go through the twelve step process. Each museum has a different number of steps, but almost all have similar guidelines as The Children's Museum. These guidelines are usually used in a team project. My thesis is
also seen as a team project because I had to consult experts in different departments of the museum.
Exhibit Development Process  The Children's Museum, Indianapolis

Step 1
The Assignment

Exhibits Committee
Sets
- Direction
- Goals
- Constraints

Step 2
Issues and Challenges

- Audience Analysis
- User Groups
- Research
- Advisors

Step 3
Various Approaches

Develop Alternative Approaches to the Challenge

- Working Design
- Working Script
- Operations Plan
- Budget Overview

Step 4
Desired Solutions

- Exhibit Concept
- Objectives
- Conceptual design
- Formative Testing

Step 5
Working Plan

- Final Design
- Final Script
- Operations Plan
- Projected Budget

Step 6
Final Plan

Exhibits Committee Approves
- Final Design
- Final Budget
- Time Frame

Step 7
Engineering, Costing

Engineering, Costing
- Opening Date Set

Step 8
Final Budget

Step 9
Update, Monitor

Exhibits Committee Monitors
- Expenditures
- Schedule

Step 10
Exhibit Complete

Exhibit is Complete Two Weeks Prior to Opening Date

Step 11
Written Report

Team Submits Written Report
- Evaluating
- Process
- Product
- Makes Recommendations

Step 12
Evaluation, Revisions

Team, Exhibit Planning Director Evaluate Exhibit, Plan Revisions

December 1987
Exhibit Development Process  The Children's Museum, Indianapolis

Project Organization/Coordination

Exhibits Committee
- Executive Director
- Deputy Director Museum Programs
- Education Director
- Exhibit Planning Director
- Exhibit Development Director
- Exhibit Production Manager
- Deputy Director Finance and Operations
- Building Services Manager
- Protection Manager
- Public Relations and Development Director

Exhibit Team
- Project Manager
- Subject Matter Specialist
- Educator
- Designer
- Others as Required

Exhibit Operations and Production
- Education Department
- Protection
- Finance
- PR and Development
- Exhibit Production Manager
- Building Services
- Exhibit Production Staff
- AV Services
- Outside Contractors
The first thing that I had to realize before undertaking the project, is the importance of excellence that the museum and its administration holds. Nothing is to be done halfway. The next three pages explains the museum, its strive for excellence, and the ideas that I had to remember while planning for the exhibit.

The modern museum cares not for a good display if no one learns from it. While The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis strives for excellent displays, the board of directors also expects excellent educational benefits. This modern belief in education makes the Children’s Museum one of the best museums in the nation.

The Children’s Museum's mission is extensive, but the most important ideal is to “enrich the lives of children...” by:

1. Creating excellent exhibits, programs, and experiences to share knowledge, stimulate imagination, kindle curiosity and affirm the joys of life-long learning.

2. Welcoming each visitor as a partner in discovery, and encourage people of all ages to explore, analyze, wonder, and grow.

3. Sharing our treasury of artifacts and the talents of our staff as we facilitate learning about our own culture, other cultures, the arts, science, and technology, seeking to animate the past, an understanding of the present, and prepare for the future.

PRINCIPLES FOR THE MISSION

1. To be challenged continually to be the best museum for children and their families.
2. To be known as a place that cares about and enriches the lives of children and helps prepare them for stewardship in the next generation.
3. To be a museum with children as well as a museum for children.
4. To be recognized and rewarded in Indianapolis as well as all the other communities it serves as a valuable resource for enriching and changing the lives of children.
5. To provide the resources that will permit us to fulfill our mission.
6. To maintain an environment that nourishes our staff and volunteers to fulfill the museum's mission.
7. To have our visitors actively participate with family and friends, with ideas and tangible things, and with a caring staff.
8. To have committed trustees whose skills, interests and attitudes help fulfill the museum's mission.
9. To anticipate and position ourselves to take advantage of change.
10. To lower our wall and raise our antennae.

THE VALUES OF THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

1. The Children's Museum is:
   - for children and families
   - an educational institution where learning is an advantage
   - place where we preserve and protect objects for what they can teach us (and future generations)

2. We value:
   - individual effort
   - hard work
   - meeting deadlines
   - teamwork
   - new ideas
   - flexibility

3. Every visitor is a VERY IMPORTANT PERSON
   - We try to meet the individual needs of a diverse audience
4. We are proud of:

- our 60 year history
- our neighborhood location
- our reputation as “the best”
- our ethical standards

A small history of the museum and its inter-workings. Excellence has been the most important ideal since its foundation in 1926. Since 1984, The Children’s Museum has been named the number one children’s museum in the country by some of the top newspapers in the nation—The Wall Street Journal, The Chicago Tribune, Smithsonian, and many others.

In 1924, Mrs. John Carey visited a Brooklyn children’s museum, she decided that the children of Indianapolis needed this same enrichment and culture incorporated into their lives. Children of the city were asked to give their toys and other artifacts to the museum to begin the collections department. From the very beginning children have been involved in the workings of the museum.

The Children’s Museum, the fourth oldest such museum in the world, grew rapidly as did the children it served. It grew from the small house it started in, to the huge building which has been its home since 1976.

The building consists of five levels. On each level there are two to three galleries which have different themes and programs. The life expectancy of each gallery is about ten years. Some of the artifacts remain in the gallery, but the curators try to change themes about every ten years. This change happens earlier if the gallery does not work or if it is a traveling exhibit.

In each gallery many volunteers work, with the majority of the volunteers being children. School children ranging from the age of 10-16 can join the Museum Apprentice Program (MAP). These volunteers pick a gallery in which they must commit two days per
month. After six months, the MAP can rotate to another gallery. The MAPS work alongside the staff members, and because of their efforts, the galleries actually work.
WE BELIEVE:

MUSEUMS ARE POTENTIALLY POWERFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS filled with stimuli that excite the imagination, arouse curiosity and invite exploration and discovery. Visitors are encouraged to become self-directed learners through opportunities which range from brief, cursory engagement to in-depth involvement. Objects used in exhibitions and programs are valued for their extrinsic worth – to communicate ideas, stimulate imaginations and provide children with firsthand, concrete learning experiences. Visitors come to the museum by choice and they are more responsive when they are provided opportunities to do what they want in the ways that work best for them.

WE MUST EXAMINE OUR ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CHANGE if they are to become successful adults in the 21st century. Both knowledge and the technologies for transmitting and applying knowledge are rapidly changing, fundamentally altering both the world and how children will interact and learn in it. By applying new knowledge and technologies to museum objects, exhibitions and programs, we can help children develop an awareness of the contemporary conditions and forces that are shaping their lives and expose them to new and productive ways of responding to those changes.

WE NEED TO PROVIDE YOUNG ADOLESCENTS WITH A FORUM TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES. Because we serve a broad, intergenerational audience, the museum provides a unique sounding board for youth concerns and helps to validate and draw adult attention to these concerns. Through exhibitions and programs, youth have opportunities to engage in dialogues with their peers and adults, exercise their critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills, to experience success as change agents and to frame values relating to issues they have identified as important to their lives.

PLAY IS THE NATURAL WAY THAT CHILDREN LEARN...focusing on the processes rather than the product...interesting them and allowing them to engage in activities at the skill level where they are most comfortable. We provide children with opportunities for free play as well as directed play. Free play is controlled by the child in both form and function and allows a child to engage repeatedly until the skills being developed are incorporated into their knowledge base or as long as their interest lasts. Directed play is more structured and encourages a child to build on his/her knowledge base through activities with particular content and specific outcomes.

CARING, NURTURING ADULTS MAXIMIZE A CHILDREN'S MUSEUM EXPERIENCE. We encourage adult providers to be actively involved with their children in the museum experience, where appropriate. Cooperative learning experiences afford children the opportunity to demonstrate competence and achievement while promoting intergenerational sharing and adult modeling of problem solving behaviors. Productive relationships between children, adult providers and staff are fostered by creating a climate for these kinds of positive social interactions.
WE NEED TO PROVIDE OUR VISITORS WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO EXTEND THEIR MUSEUM EXPERIENCE. When young people's curiosity is peaked and while their interest is at its highest, we need to provide the resources (books, objects, video, computer software, etc.) that allows them to continue learning beyond the walls of the museum.

WE MUST DEVELOP LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS WITH OUR AUDIENCES...not just for them. Knowledge of the visitors who come to the museum and, more importantly, why they come, is central to our success. We need to incorporate their interests and expectations in the development of exhibits and programs and encourage youth initiatives in these areas. We must value and honor their learning agenda as well as our own. We must always "keep our walls lowered and our antenna raised" if we are to remain "accessible" and provide equity to all of our audiences.

EXHIBITS AND PROGRAMS MUST BE PLANNED AND DESIGNED IN WAYS THAT WILL FACILITATE THE VISITOR'S LEARNING AGENDA AS WELL AS THE MUSEUM'S TEACHING AGENDA. Because most visitors are self-directed learners, information is only valuable if we provide them with opportunities to apply it and use it as a tool to aid their thought processes, encourage them to engage more effectively with objects and ideas and to find personal meaning in their museum experience.

UNDERSTANDING AND BEING ABLE TO APPLY RELEVANT LEARNING THEORY IS CENTRAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS. While there is no one appropriate theory that guides what we do, we remain developmentally based, committed to responding to a variety of learning style preferences, subscribe to the theory of multiple intelligences and believe strongly in mediated learning. When new exhibits and programs are planned, we ask "what advances have been made in understanding how children learn and how can this new knowledge be used to improve our visitor's museum experience?"

WE MUST HELP YOUNG PEOPLE MOVE FROM NOVICE TO EXPERIENCED MUSEUM LEARNERS. We must encourage them to engage with objects, ideas, phenomena and people and enable them to use museum resources in their lifelong pursuit of learning. While this can be actualized in many ways, we must include opportunities to apply the basic tools and skills of inquiry necessary for museum literacy. We must also provide opportunities for apprenticeships which facilitate learning by focusing on socially shared experiences, joint accomplishments, direct engagement with objects and ideas and the use of situation-specific skills. By matching novice learners with expert staff providers, we can encourage lifelong learning, foster stewardship and create learning climates that have the potential to make a significant difference in a young person's life.

February 26, 1991
Major Goals for Learning at The Children's Museum

In order to help our publics interact with our exhibits and programs:

...We should develop learning environments that help visitors:
    gain an understanding and appreciation of the natural world around us and our place in it.
    gain an understanding and appreciation of the past...the world's, our country's, our community's and our family's.
    gain an understanding of the impact of global interdependence.
    gain an understanding of the historical and contemporary lives of people in other cultures and an appreciation of cultural diversity.
    gain an understanding of the contemporary conditions and forces that shape our lives.
    explore the interrelationships between the arts, the sciences and the humanities.

...We should help visitors:
    find learning enjoyable and non-threatening...fostering feelings of accomplishment and help them develop a positive self-image.
    exercise the skills necessary to become independent learners and value lifelong learning.
    flourish and strengthen their critical and creative-thinking skills.

...We should develop exhibits and programs that:
    provide visitors with experiences that range from brief, cursory engagement to in-depth involvement.
    encourage repeat visitation.
    provide young people with a forum to express their feelings about the issues that effect their lives.
    share responsive to a variety of learning-style preferences.
    provide multiple entry points, conceptually and developmentally.
    incorporate visitor's interests and expectations during the development of exhibits and programs.
    integrate ideas and provide visitors with holistic learning opportunities.

...We should encourage adults to be actively involved with their children in the museum experience, to promote intergenerational sharing and to foster positive relationships between staff, adults, and children.
...We should utilize objects in the exhibits and programs for their extrinsic worth... to communicate ideas, stimulate imaginations and provide children with concrete, firsthand experiences.
My first meeting with Sheila resulted in her telling me that the Vietnam Veteran's room, an area of the Mysteries In History Gallery (MIH), needed to be changed. This area, "Spoken Clues" has five scenes that are suppose to spark visitors to talk about their own experiences or the rooms themselves. When Sheila started in 1990, she felt that only one room, the kitchen scene, worked. The other (a 1900s school room, a circus, a cemetery, and a veteran's room) did not spark much interest. She changed two of the rooms (the circus to a boy's closet and the cemetery to a Fourth of July celebration), but two still needed changing. Sheila asked for me to think up, present the idea to the museum administrators, and to install a possible exhibit.

I only had a few limitations: the small amount of space available (which would limit the ability to represent certain concepts), Sheila did want children's popular culture as the theme (display toys, movies, music, and other objects that represent youth ages 6-12), and all decisions had to be finalized by Sheila. First, Sheila gave me the following two pages; her observations in 1990 as to why the rooms needed to be altered.
MYSTERIES IN HISTORY GALLERY: OBSERVATIONS AND EVALUATIONS ON THE SPOKEN CLUES AREA with Alternative Suggestions

Prepared by Sheila Riley, December 7, 1990

When created in 1985, “Spoken Clues” section of the “Mysteries in History” gallery was designed to “emphasize using oral history as a way to learn about the past.” The specific stated goal of the exhibit was “to provide visitors with the opportunity to understand that valid historical information can be obtained through personal narratives about the past: and to give them the opportunity to think about their own experiences and to share their personal memories with other people.”

We may want to recognize that the oral history shared between and among generations viewing the Spoken Clues exhibit includes not only examples of personal experience narratives, but that the vignettes illicit examples of family stories, anecdotes, and traditional information of personal and/or traditional beliefs, rituals and celebrations. It is perhaps the concept of oral tradition--the storytelling that everyone does--that we should additionally attempt to emphasize in the Spoken Clues area.

The success of the 1936 kitchen area determined by the amount of visitor time spent viewing and discussing is perhaps due to it’s being (1) a familiar setting with (2) interesting artifacts affectively displayed that (3) suggest activities in the home that visitors of all ages can identify with or (4) that older generations remember and can readily share with younger generations. As oral historians and folklife researchers recognize, people tend to reminisce most about familiar surroundings (home, community, workplace, school); people (family, relatives, friends, local characters); significant rites of passage (birthdays, weddings, initiations, deaths, etc.); festive events (holidays and celebrations); and personal, family or community disasters. The Spoken Clues exhibit area should ideally present vignettes that will trigger such memories.

Given the physical constraints of the exhibit area, each “case” lends itself to a room-like setting as opposed to trying to impose and/or suggest a “slice” of an area like the outdoor cemetery, the circus ring or the 1890s schoolroom scenes. In other words, the kitchen seem to accomplish the initially stated goal of Spoken Clues and does not appear forced into its space.

The remaining four vignettes [Vietnam Veteran’s Room included in these four] do not readily or easily act as catalysts for oral sharing. They are not as eye-catching as they could be or as historically accurate as they should be.

The scene representing the black Vietnam Veteran’s bedroom seems to provide ample clues, but does not seem to trigger thoughts and memories that visitors want to share openly in a museum setting. The bedroom may cause people to think, but in this area we are searching for “spoken” clues. There is little if any sharing occurring at the veteran’s bedroom scene and what discussion is generated there usually involves the visitors
attempting to figure out what the exhibit is suppose to be.
Share your memories! One way to learn about the past is by talking with others. Can you guess the answers for these scenes you see things know about these stories you tell.
STEP ONE:

Step one involves setting a goal, direction, and constraints for the project. My goal is to make a more effective vignette in the “Spoken Clues” area of the Mysteries in History gallery. My supervisor told me that “Spoken Clues” did work, but one area did not, the Vietnam Veteran’s Room. This room, which was installed when the gallery was designed in 1985, is a 1970s room of a vet. The room is scattered with clothes and other “things” that one would find in a bedroom. Upon the bed are remembrances of the Vet’s time (and the time era) in Vietnam, pictures, magazines, and records. On the floor, amongst the clothes, is a glass of alcohol. Nothing in the room tells a child that this room belongs to a Veteran of the Vietnam war. The magazines and albums could have been owned by anyone, and the pictures do not “prove” this man was in Vietnam. Another thing about the room is that it is suppose to be of a black soldier, but nothing indicates this fact; even the pictures are of white soldiers. Because of it’s ambiguity in regards to the topic, and time era, not many children can stop and talk about it. Many feel that it is a “messy” bedroom while others have no idea at all of its significance. For the adults, they are upset about the topic, the alcohol, and the message the room sends off (as if the only thing the soldier has is his memories). While this may be an accurate portrayal of a soldier coming home from Vietnam, it is inappropriate for the museum and does not fulfill the requirements of the goals of “Spoken Clues”. The Museum knows of the adults’ reactions through comment cards received, observation done by Sheila, and personal remarks heard by staff members.

It was my job to analyze what would work, and to install a workable setting. My supervisor wanted something that would allow for the use of the popular culture artifacts that had recently been purchased for a time-capsule project. The time-capsule project allowed youth volunteers from the museum and visiting youth to help Sheila Riley, Curator for American Materials, to buy objects that represent youth of the 1990s. These objects were stored in the collections department of the museum, but storage space was limited.
By using some of the artifacts in the exhibit, they could be "stored" in the museum and put to use. I only had a few restrictions for the project: the size of the area in which I was working, I had to use children's popular culture, and clearing all ideas with my supervisor before implementation.
STEP TWO:

Step two involves the analysis of the audience, researching these groups, and seeking advice of advisors about the audience. The main visitors are children 6-12 years in age. All wording and topics are to be geared for these children. I used my knowledge from my internship, my job, and the youth with whom I work to gain an understanding of the audience. Since I work with the youth in the museum, I qualified as one of the “advisors”. I consulted my immediate supervisor, Theresa Hutchinson, as well as the youth volunteers in my particular gallery. All of these people helped me to understand popular culture, what was important to the youth, and what was popular. I knew that I had to use popular culture items, so I talked to the youth to find out what they felt represented them. I knew that while I was not old, I could not rely solely on myself as the only source, because I am no longer a youth or part of the youth culture. Until I got a definite theme for the room, I waited to talk to anyone else.
1. The need for physical activity as their body size increases and changes. The need to develop neuromuscular skills necessary for games. The need to experiment with the concrete objects of their environment.

2. The need to develop positive experiences with their peers both in and out of the classroom. The need to be accepted as a member of the group may seem more important than the acceptance of adults, although all age children benefit from positive interactions with adults.

3. The need to develop literacy skills in reading, writing, math and technology. The need to feel competent in developing concepts and acquiring information necessary for everyday living and as a foundation for future learning.

4. The need to try many different activities on their own and to feel good about their achievements. The need to accept themselves as they are and feel positive about who and what they can be. The need to achieve personal independence.

5. During these years the child's conscience emerges. They have a strong need to understand the "rules" we all live by and they insist on "fair" play. An environment that provides structure and sets clear limits and expectations is helpful to children as their value system begins to develop.

6. The need to connect and make sense of all the information and skills they are acquiring. The need to have many opportunities to see the relevance of these new skills and facts through activities and experiences that are interesting and important to them. The need to express themselves in many different ways, including art, music, language, sports and science.

7. The need to daydream, to think, to play and to laugh. To have time to themselves, to use as they wish, as they learn more about themselves as they grow and change.
STEP THREE:

Step three involves the development of alternative approaches to the challenge. Because all museum administrators might not agree with my favorite theme for the exhibit, I developed four alternate solutions to be placed in the exhibit. These four included a holiday setting, a department store, a birthday party, and The Children's Museum in 100 years. With each recommendation, I submitted possible problems that might be found if this particular setting were used. Along with the problems, I offered possible solutions. I submitted these ideas to my supervisor and from them she chose the one she felt would be most effective in regards to space limitations and appeal to the public. She chose the birthday party.
STEP FOUR:

Step four involves the exhibit concept: objective, conceptual design, and formative testing. From the birthday party idea, I recommended that the party be for a girl. The area already had a new vignette of a boy's closet, which represents boys and a male child's culture, but a "girl's" view was not present in any of the scenes. While we have a women's role present in the kitchen, this does not present a "girl's" view and does not represent a youth. My supervisor agreed.

From here it was also decided that the girl should be African-American; this orientation would encompass the community surrounding the museum. We were not trying to give the African-American community a token room, but Sheila and I agreed that this culture was lacking from our gallery.

It was now my job to develop an artifact list of objects to be bought or retrieved from collections to be put into the exhibit. I had to consult with the associate-curator of African-American Materials and African-American youth volunteers in the museum as to determine the characteristics of an African-American child's birthday party. I could not assume that what I felt was African-American would be or what would be popular with the youth. It is too common for white curators and designers to assume that because the African-American community lives in the America, that all white traditions and rituals are exactly the same in the African-American community. The museum tries to stress that all cultures are different, do not assume, and ask the experts about the topic.

I also consulted building services about of design of the project. Within the physical scene there is a pipe that runs through the current setting. It is ugly and would not fit into a recreation room for a family. Building services informed me that they could install a drop ceiling to cover the pipe. My supervisor liked the idea, and we were put on their schedule for maintenance. This is where I hit my first "snag". A major gallery, "Playscapes", was being remolded and expanded. The gallery date was set for June 17, 1993. As of
February 1, 1993 the building services were two months behind schedule. This gallery was being promoted and the date had been advertised, it had to open June 17. Because of this, all building service members were put on this gallery. All non-essential projects (my project) had to go on hold. This development means that until “Playscapes” opens in June, no other maintenance would happen. My supervisor does not want the new artifacts to go into this gallery until the pipe is fixed (the pipe has the possibility of leaking) and the ceiling is installed. While I could do other parts of the project, installation would have to go on hold. As of April 30, 1993 the director of building services told Sheila that they will start work on the pipe May 11, 1993. He stated that the repairs would only take one- two days. This means, if they stay on schedule, I will be installing the exhibit starting on May 13, 1993.

I also talked with Steve Sipps, the designer from Exhibits Department for the “Mysteries in History” gallery, about possible wallpaper for the room. Rita Organ of African-American Materials suggested that I find something “ethnic” for the walls. The best and easiest place to find this design was in a catalog that exhibits would have. I found nothing “ethnic” in any store and the catalog was not available, so I chose a brightly colored paper that would be suitable in the home and would brighten the area.

When it was explained to Steve what we were doing, he suggested that we have in the background of the exhibit a camcorder’s version of the birthday party playing. My supervisor liked the idea, so we decided to plan for a video taped birthday party.
Questions for Rita Organ, curator of African-American materials at the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis:

Are there dominant colors that a family would have?
Are there any differences in a birthday party?
Are any of the following toys inappropriate for this family?
It is winter time, are there special decorations that should be in the home?

Rita’s Answers to Questions

Dominant Colors- ethnic, brilliant, bold: no pastels!
No differences in parties
special decorations- sea quilt (shows warm home), nothing else at this time
List of possible objects*

"X" article of clothing
Roller blades
Nintendo with games
Polaroid pictures
b-day cards
small book case
TV cart
gift boxes
birthday decoration
framed photos
Game Boy
CDs: Boyz II Men
Cd Player
Posters: Boyz II Men
    Shai
    Kid-N-Play
    Malcolm X
    LL Cool J
    Shai
    High 5

Clothing: Cross Colours
    Damage
    Exhaust
B-Day cake and punch

VCR Tapes: Little Mermaid
Malcolm X Board Game

Beaded Necklaces
Rocking Chair
Photo album
Quilt
assorted coats
floor lamp
Lap top computer
wrapping paper
magazines/ books
certificates
clock
Sweatshirts (AACA)
VCR
Raiders hats
telephone
TV
stereo (CD player)
Black Barbie Doll
Batman figure
Leggos
Blocks
Barney the Dinosaur
Video Camera
Recycle bag/bin
Throw Rug
Wall Paper
Stuffed animals
Walkie Talkies

* Note- These objects were recommended and/or approved by Rita Organ, Educator/Curator of African-American Materials and the MAPS in the Mysteries in History gallery.
Possible Questions for Setting

How do your birthdays differ?
Do all people celebrate birthdays the same way?
What do you do to remember your birthday?
What do you do on your birthday?
STEP FIVE:

Step five involves creating a working design and sign to go into the scene. Each scene has a sign posing a thought provoking question to prompt visitors to talk about either the question or the scene. This question could not be a “yes” or “no” question since it had to be conversation stimulating. I developed several for my supervisor. She like best: “How do you remember your birthday?” This would complement the camcorder version of the party and Polaroids we also planned to display. This plan had to be sent to editing and then to exhibits for a sign to be printed up. I gave my supervisor an approximate plan of all that I wanted to buy and where everything would go. She had no major questions, only minors ones that could not really be resolved until the exhibit was put in place and we looked at the location of the objects through.

At this time I also started the development of the video. I had to write letters to the youth volunteers who I wanted in my video, seek permission from their parents, ask for “parents” of the birthday girl from museum employees, find someone to tape the party, reserve rooms, and develop a script. I decided that since almost all children had been to a birthday party some time in their life, only basic instructions were needed. Also no lines were needed since the sound on the video would not be heard from the visitors due to the case being enclosed. So all I really needed to do was decide who would be in the video, which could be developed from there.

I used youth volunteers whom I knew; the majority came from YEAH (a history club at the museum), but I asked other youth whom knew would be reliable and fun. As for the Adults, I tried to ask people I knew would not be camera shy.
List of possible people for birthday party

Masimba Rusununguko
GoGo Rusununguko
Josh Oldland
Adam Chappell
Ashleigh Chappell
Kate Crane
Lyndsey Grayson
Tanisha Towns
T.J. Meggs
Mike Hammes
Frances Kamieniecki
Chrisney Hull
Brandy Smith
Michelle Williams
Talayon Stocks
Jerome McMurray
Marcus McMurray
Jill Miller
February 3, 1993

Dear Parents:

My name is Jeannie Regan. I am a senior majoring in history at Ball State University. For my final senior thesis project, I am establishing a vignette of life in the "Mysteries in History" gallery. Within the gallery, there is a section called "Spoken Clues". In this area, segments of life are displayed to get visitors to think about life and the scenes, then talk about the scene among themselves.

One of the scenes, the Vietnam Veteran’s room, is being replaced by my project. This new vignette will be a birthday party. Within the scene, we plan to videotape the mock birthday party and run the video in the exhibit.

My supervisor, Theresa Hutchinson, has granted me permission to ask museum apprentices in the "Mysteries in History" gallery to volunteer to be the children at the mock birthday party. Your child has volunteered to be in this video.

A specific date or time has not yet been established, but as soon as one has been, another letter will be sent home. If you have any questions about the project please feel free to call me at my home (317) 287-8353.

After signing the attached permission slip, you may return it with your child to the museum or send it directly to me.

Jeannie Regan
103 N. Calvert
Muncie, IN 47303

Thank you for your cooperation, and I hope that when the exhibit is finally finished, you will be able to come in and see the scene as well as the video.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Regan
THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF INDIANAPOLIS, INC.

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Name of person(s) being photographed ________________________________

I give to The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Inc., its nominees, agents, and assigns unlimited permission to use, publish, and republish in the furtherance of its work, reproductions of my likeness, photographic or otherwise, and my voice or written words with or without use of my name. (If you object to use of your name strike out the words "with or" above.)

Consent of Parent or Legal Guardian if above individual is a minor:

I consent and agree, individually and as parent or legal guardian of the minor named above, to the foregoing terms and provisions.

SIGNATURE ___________________________________ DATE ____________________

ADDRESS __________________________________________

CITY ____________________________ STATE _______ ZIP _________
March 3, 1993

Dear MAP:

This letter will explain all the details for the birthday party video.

The video will possibly be placed in the birthday scene for continuous running.

Some important things to remember:

**Permission slips must be turned into me by April 18. If I do not receive your slip by then, you will not be allowed to participate.

**No friends are to be brought to the taping sessions or the rehearsal. If they were not asked to participate by me, they cannot attend.

**On the day of the taping (no matter the weather), wear winter clothing (including your winter coat). You can dress up as you would to a party, but no shorts or other summer-type cloths.

**We will be having a rehearsal session, to go over exactly what will happen on Thursday April 22. You must be there. If you cannot attend, you must okay it with me BEFORE Sunday, April 18, 1993.

**On the day of the taping, you must work the entire day (9-5). You’ll be taken off the schedule for the taping. It will not take all day.

**Taping will be Saturday April 24, 1993

Thanks again for your help.

Thanks,

Jeannie
March 3, 1993

Dear Parents:

Hello again!

This letter will just let you know what is happening and when for the video to be placed in the museum.

A rehearsal is set for Thursday April 22 from 7:00-7:30. The volunteers have been told about this and are required to attend, but if for some reason cannot, I need to be told by April 18, 1993.

The taping day is set for Saturday April 24, 1993.

The volunteers are asked to wear winter clothing, including winter coat, no matter the weather on that day. The birthday party is to take place in the winter time.

No friends or brother/sisters may attend the rehearsal or taping sessions.

The day of the taping, volunteers will just work a regular work day (9-5). I’ll get the kids off the schedule during the day to do the taping.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at home (317) 287-8353.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Regan
March 3, 1993

Dear

I am working for Sheila Riley in Mysteries in History in the development of a new exhibit. This exhibit will possibly replace the Vietnam Veteran’s Room in the "Spoken Clues" area of MIH. In exchange for the Vet’s room, we may be placing a 1990s African-American girl’s birthday party in the space. Within the scene will be a VCR playing the camcorder’s version of the party. I have asked MAPS in MIH to be my party goers, but now I need some parents.

I’m looking for a mother and father to be the birthday girl’s parents (to bring out the cake and help sing Happy Birthday), and then one or two other adults to play the parents of the other children (as the children are being dropped off or picked up).

Sheila and I were wondering if you’d volunteer. The entire time commitment would only be about one hour and would happen in the museum. We are planning a short rehearsal, where we’ll go over exactly what will happen on Thursday April 22, 1993 from 7:00-7:30. You need not attend this if you have other commitments on Thursday nights. It is mainly for the MAPS. We do not have a room yet. I’ll be in touch with you if you are able to attend. Then the taping will happen on Saturday April 24, 1993 from 2:00-3:00. The entire taping will take about one hour.

If you are interested and can make these two times please RSVP me through Theresa Hutchinson (3818). She will let me know that you are interested, and I will be calling you to confirm times and places.

Thanks for your help,

Jeannie Regan
April 16, 1993

Dear Party Goer:

Hello!

This is just a little reminder that the taping for the birthday party is on Saturday April 24, 1993. We will start taping at 1:30, but I need you in the Museum before that. If you work in MIH you will work in the morning and Theresa will let you off for lunch then the taping. If you work in another gallery, talk to your supervisor to see if you can work that morning.

If you have other plans that you must go to, I want you at the Museum NO LATER THAN 12:30. Everyone enter through the Education entrance and sign in there.

We will meet at 12:45. We will meet in activity room 302. This lets me know who's there. If you are not there, we will tape without you. We will be finished at 5:00 so have your parents pick you up at 5:00, just like a normal work day.

*Along with the taping, we have a practice session on Thursday April 22. Come in through the Education Entrance and state that you are here for YEAH. I'll be down there waiting for you. Meet me in the Education entrance at 7:00.

Any questions? If so call me at home (317) 287-8353. If not I'll see you on Thursday and Saturday.

Thanks,

Jeannie
## KIDS

- Alex Spearman
- Chrisney Hull
- Frances Kamieniecki
- Jill Miller
- Laura Blanford
- T.J. Meggs
- Josh Oldland
- Talayon Stocks
- Ashleigh Chappell
- Adam Chappell
- Masimba Rusununguko
- Will Dunlap
- Carmen Dunlap
- Mike Hammes
- Kate Walton
- Lyndsey Grayson

## Parents Slips

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STEP SIX:

Step six is a revision of step five. Here I finalize everything that would happen and went in front of G-6. This group is made up of the vice-presidents of the museum. It is their decisions as to whether or not major exhibits happen. If they did not like my ideas, then nothing could happen. My supervisor thought it best if I present the exhibit proposal on my own without her assistance. She also told me that two would definitely be on my side, two most likely against me, and two who were indifferent. I planned to convince the two who were indifferent to see why I felt the area had to change. The two on my side were: an African-American women who felt we needed more areas like the scene and since the old room could not be determined that it was African-American the change would be good; this man was in charge of collections and wanted the new objects out. The two against me: one had helped in the development of the gallery and the other was a Vietnam Vet. The two who were neutral had to be convinced that this room would enhance the gallery, better visitors, and not replace something that worked. I went in front of G-6 and got their approval. The majority felt that if the old exhibit did not work, as observation showed, then something new ought to be put in place.
MEMO

TO: G-6
FROM: Jeannie Regan, Gallery Assistant, MIH gallery
RE: Recommended Changes to MIH "Spoken Clues" Vietnam Veteran’s Room
DATE: February 6, 1993

BACKGROUND

As a senior in the Honors College at Ball State University it is a requirement that I do a thesis or project in order to graduate. While most history majors simply write papers, I wanted to do something that would give me experience in the museum field, especially working with artifacts and exhibits.

Sheila Riley allowed me to do this room because of my past work experience. In the summer of 1991, I did an internship in the Mysteries in History gallery. At the end of the summer, Theresa Hutchinson offered me a job as a gallery interpreter. While working here, I have also done some volunteer work with Sheila in collections.

Because of all these past experience, Sheila has been willing to supervise me in the development of the birthday vignette for the "Spoken Clues" area of MIH.

Justification for Change

Observation and analysis of visitor behavior over the past two years in MIH’s "Spoken Clues" section indicates that the Vietnam Veteran’s Bedroom does not fulfill the goal of the "Spoken Clues" section. The area’s intent is to show that oral history- spoken memories- is one way to learn about the past. Once visitors grasp the concept of the scenes emotions and thoughts are sparked enough so that intergenerational sharing can occur. The Veteran’s room does not do this for MIH’s targeted visitors, children between the ages of 6 to 12. Visitors often comment that the veterans room is "depressing", offensive (the glass of alcohol), and inappropriate, and they generally confuse the scene to be just a "messy bedroom". On average, visitors spend only about 5 to 10 seconds in front of the room before moving onto the familiar subjects like the Fourth of July celebration or the school room vignettes.

In exchange for the Veteran’s room, we suggest a more familiar and conversation inspiring vignette: a circa 1990s African-American girl’s birthday party. A birthday is a rite of passage that all ages and most cultures understand and understand. By making this child around the age of 12, and by using popular culture artifacts in this exhibit, both children and adults will engage in memory sharing. In addition to artifacts, we can span the generations by including family and birthday photographs and a videotape of the party playing as part of the vignette.

Description of the birthday setting

Visitors will experience the aftermath of the youth’s birthday party, which was held in the family’s recreation room.
There are still open presents lying around the floor. In the back of the room playing on the family television is the camcorder version of the party. This video (edited to approximately 10 minutes) shows the typical birthday rituals: African-American family decorating for the party; guests arrive; presents are opened; "Happy Birthday" is sung; candles blown out; cake distributed; and finally dancing and talking.

While this videotape plays in the background, visitors can see and react to other objects in the rec room. A toy box shows younger children's toys; winter clothing on a corner coat rack suggests the season. On the same entertainment center with the VCR and TV is a computer, a nintendo, CD player, and assorted videotapes. In the front of the room is a table with the family’s photo album. Open to a page are Polaroid pictures of that day's birthday party. Open packages are stacked among scattered wrapping paper, there is a small recycling bin with residue from the party- cans styrofoam, etc. Selected artifacts— clothing, jewelry, books, music— represent items a young African-American girl might receive as birthday gifts in the 1990s (see attached possible object list).

Possible questions for the label in the room are:
- How do your birthday's differ?
- What are some ways people celebrate birthdays?
- What do you do to remember your birthday?
- What do you do on your birthday?

Conceptual Objectives

1. Birthdays are rites of passage which are usually celebrated in America with parties, presents, cakes, and photographs.

2. Contemporary families spend time in the recreation room watching TV, playing with games and toys, and socializing.

Behavioral Objectives

1. Visitors will see the exhibit and talk about the objects, video, and photographs.

2. Visitors will read and discuss the label among themselves.

3. Visitors will reminisce with each other by relating family stories and other personal experiences about the artifacts and events in the video.

Interpretive Techniques
- artifacts
- label
- video
- photographs
- hands-on activity: The Remembering Box
STEP SEVEN:

Step seven is the look at costs of the design. The drop ceiling mentioned in step four would cost the gallery about $10,000. Then it would cost for the objects bought. My supervisor had no problems with the cost because of the benefits to the gallery and it was in the budget.

STEP EIGHT:

Step eight plans for the time frame of the exhibit. A display this small should take little time and cause no blocking off of any part of the gallery. It was decided that the instillation of the scene should take three days from start to finish.

STEP NINE:

At this stage my supervisor monitors my progress in the instillation of the scene.

STEP TEN:

This is the completion date.

STEP ELEVEN:

This stage includes a written report evaluating the success of the exhibit. The success is determined through analysis and evaluation. At this time recommendations are made as to what changes should be made to improve the exhibit. Because I work at the museum, the evaluation, along with installation would be of no difficulty. My immediate supervisor knows I will be needing about three days off sometime this summer, but this is not a problem.

STEP TWELVE:

At this step the revisions are made to hopefully better the exhibit. In a growing museum like the Children's Museum, no exhibit is "perfect". There is constant
monitoring and evaluating of exhibits.
Objects for Video out of Collections

Arrested Development CD
Kris Kross Cd
Mary J Bligh Cd
Yo MTV Raps
Black Commandments Picture Frame
Quilt 88.86.1
game TGABA
Naomi Doll 89.106.27
Ragged Ann Doll 12,341
X Clothing
AACA Sweatshirt
CD Player
Video Camera
TV Cart
Earrings
Malcolm X Book
TV with VCR
Poster of Malcolm X and MLK
Coat Rack
Nintendo game
Hat
Other Jewelry
Video preparations and scene:
- decorating the room for the party
- greeting people at the door
- family comes in with cake
- singing happy birthday  (Be creative in song)
- opening of presents
  - thanking people
  - receiving presents
  - showing off what was gotten
- child makes wish
- cutting up of cake
- kids standing around talking, eating, and dancing
- going out someplace (possibly skating rink)
- everyone leaving (have parents picking up kids)
I learned much more than I thought I would by doing this exhibit. I learned that when dealing with a large place like the museum, things do not always go as you plan. Much of what happens, depends upon other people and their taking up of some of the responsibility. Even though I had my part of the project done for months, I still had to wait for others, building services, to fit the project into their schedules. Things did not always go as I had planned.

I saw a new way of working with the youth volunteers. They basically directed much of my project. It was their opinions, thoughts, and beliefs that guided what I bought, how I directed the video, and what exactly would be appropriate in the exhibit. I soon found out that what I felt was appropriate for an African-American’s birthday party was not accurate. Learning that ones’ opinion is not necessarily the most appropriate for all situations, is vital for everyone to learn. This was re-emphasized during by project.

When the exhibit finally goes in, I will understand much better the idea of limited space and having to present a concept in that space. This is difficult to understand when developing alternatives. Soon I realized how difficult some of my ideas would be in the limited confines of “Spoken Clues”.

I greatly appreciate and thank my supervisors for allowing me to do my thesis in the Museum. I have learned a great deal about my further profession, the workings of any museum, and working with the experts to create the most accurate and appealing exhibit possible.