

Looking at art with your toddler

How to get the most out of your visit : A guide for the big people

Bringing children to museums opens their eyes to different ideas and perspectives in a unique, rich and educational environment. This kind of dynamic and immersive learning experience can help develop higher critical and creative thinking skills, and give young children an advantage in learning to read and write. Early exposure to art promotes neuron connections in the brain, especially when parents interact with their children to encourage art appreciation during this crucial stage of cognitive development.¹ Therefore, whilst looking at art is largely a visual experience, there are many ways YOU, as a thoughtful parent or adult, can help your toddler develop important skills such as critical thinking, language acquisition, and problem solving (all beneficial in preparation for formal education). Above all, we hope that this carefully-curated experience will help to nurture a lifelong love for art, and encourage your little one to look at the world in new ways.

What to keep in mind.

1. When looking at a piece of work encourage aesthetic awareness and critical thinking by getting your child to talk about what he sees. Ask open-ended questions such as, “What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? And what more can you find?”²
2. Don’t worry if you know nothing about art; look at it as a shared (intergenerational) learning experience in which you can grow alongside your child (much more valuable than knowing all the answers!)
3. Model a sense of wonder. Use descriptive language and communicate your own imaginative thoughts in order to spark their own.

I. Welcome: 5th Floor, Ilham Main Gallery (10AM)

What are we looking at? Picturing the Nation is an exhibition built around portrait paintings by the late Dato’ Hoessein Enas, one of Malaysia’s pioneer artists during the nation’s formative years. Also featured, are the works of contemporary artists Ahmad Zakii Anwar, Dain Iskandar, Vincent Leong and Yee I-Lann, coming together to create a dialogue about what it means to represent Malaysia’s plural society and racial categories, both historically as well as in the present.

What happens? Registration, warm up and welcome song.

- Go over the 3 Tour Rules with your child: No touching the art. No running away from parent/adult. No eating or drinking outside of designated areas.
- Allow your child to warm up to the new environment by getting him to doodle a face (based on the “portrait” theme of the day) and promote social skills by introducing him to at least one other child during this activity.

¹ Dr. Kathy Danko-McGhee, Director of Education, Toledo Museum of Art.

² Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) <http://www.vtshome.org/>

II. Public Sculptures: In Front of Building (10:30AM)

What are we looking at?

BREAST STUPA TOPIARY, Pinaree Sanpitak, 2013. Created by one of Southeast Asia's most admired artists, the eight freestanding objects are designed to support the growth of plants, and is an invitation to play.

DIVINA PROPORZIONE, Ai Weiwei, 2015. An expression of mathematical elegance and beauty, the polished bronze and stainless steel construction forms an industrial aesthetic; perfectly positioned in the high-tech architectural landscape of Kuala Lumpur.

What happens? Children are invited to walk in and around the sculptures to explore the structures up close.

What your child learns.

- Shapes help children identify, organise and make visual connections. When shapes are being explored, your child is observing same and different, a basic process which will carry forth into all that he sees around him.³
- Shapes are also symbols, so the ability to recognize them is a pre-reading and writing skill, as letters of the alphabet are essentially complex shapes.
- Shape-sorting is a pre-cursor to analytical, problem-solving skills in children, and sharpens their ability to grasp mathematical concepts as they get older.
- Using physical objects to learn about shapes gives children a new perspective of the world - one where shapes do not only exist on paper (in "cartoon" form), but as real things around them.

III. Art-Making Activity: 3rd Floor, Ilham Gallery Lounge (11AM)

What are we looking at? The hexagon (used in the Ai Weiwei sculpture) will be shown in various everyday forms, items, objects and patterns. A video titled, "Why do honeybees love hexagons?"⁴(TED-Ed) will be played for further learning.

What happens? Children get to make their own three-dimensional beehive sculpture (complete with bee!) using hexagons.

What your child learns.

- When experimenting with sculpture, children are working all the math, physics and visual-spatial centres in the brain, making connections physically and mentally about things such as mass, space, balance and gravity (academically useful in courses such as physics and geometry in the future).⁵
- The opportunity to create gives children the chance to express their ideas and demonstrate their personal interpretation of what they have seen.
- The creative process can challenge children to find immersive involvement in tasks, take on problem-solving, develop self-motivation, and tolerate ambiguity and anxiety.⁶

³ Church, Ellen Booth. Parents, Scholastic.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEzlsjAqADA>

⁵ Lisa Schumaier, Torpedo Factory Art Center.

⁶ Deering, Julia. "The Playful Parent."

- The use of materials and tools for creating help to develop gross and fine motor skills, as well as hand-eye coordination (practical skills of three-dimensional assemblage, fixing and sticking).
- Improves child's understanding of dimensions, textures, scale and balance.
- Fosters independence in children in making choices and attempting to do something their own way, while at the same time teaching children when to ask for help.
- As one of the most accessible forms of art for children, the process of creating something relieves stress and relaxes the mind.

IV. Photo Installation: 3rd Floor, General Exhibition Area (11:20AM)

What are we looking at? THROUGH ROSE-COLOURED GLASSES, Yee I-Lann, 2015. A series of found portrait photographs highlighted to show different families, celebrating similar events in the past, to point out how all Malaysians are a product of shared historical experience.

What happens? A walk-through of the photo installation and discussion about how photographs can be portraits. Families are then invited to take their own "portrait" at our Polaroid photo booth.

What your child learns.

- Increased awareness about how there are all kinds of families, and teaches them to open to differences.
- Being in a (photo) portrait of their own helps them to create new meaning, builds self-confidence and self-expression.
- Children will get to practice turn taking: one of the fundamental skills needed for successful communication with others. Good turn-takers have been shown to have an easier time talking to and playing with others.⁷

V. Artist's Studio: 5th Floor, Ilham Main Gallery (11:30AM)

What are we looking at?

A core selection of sketches and paintings by Dato' Hossein Enas commissioned by Shell Ltd. in 1963 give a 'face' to what was then (at the formation of Malaysia), a new country, and a recreation of Dato' Hossein Enas's art studio - to better understand the artist behind the vast collection of work on display.

What happens? A walk-through and brief discussion about the collection. At the re-created studio set, children are asked to spot various items that appear in the studio scene. Children will be given the image of a painting to find and match in the gallery.

What your child learns.

- Observational skills are an important first step in science education (the ability to predict an outcome begins with first looking closely at the details). A child's visual skills are sharpened when encouraged to look beyond the obvious.
- Walking around a formal gallery environment helps children practice their social etiquette and teaches them how to conduct themselves in a controlled setting, whilst still enjoying themselves.

⁷ "My Turn, Your Turn." Centre for Early Literacy Learning.

- The process of encountering art up close will naturally nurture an interest in art and the desire to be able to communicate verbally about it; language systems and a child's vocabulary therefore are stimulated.

VI. Portrait of Daughters: 5th Floor, Ilham Main Gallery (11:40AM)

What are we looking at? TUTIE, LAS AND JUN, Dato' Hoessein Enas, 1971.

What happens? Children are asked to look closely at the painting and are asked to interpret and think.

What your child learns.

- By matching postcard reproductions, children are able to look more closely and interact with art work.
- Describing artwork to children builds important pre-literacy skills; a strong narrative helps children "read" what they see in a picture.
- If your child appears to enjoy a particular piece of art snap a photo of it to view and discuss later at home to build visual perception skills and art criticism.

VII. Self-Portrait Activity: 5th Floor, Ilham Main Gallery (11:50AM)

What are we looking at? SELF-PORTRAIT, Dato Hoessein Enas, 1966.

What happens? An introduction to the concept of a self portrait is given: a self-portrait is a representation of an artist that is drawn, painted, photographed or sculpted. A blank face is then presented to children as a self-portrait to be collectively fill with features.

Song: "My Eyes Nose Mouth Ears"⁸

My eyes, my nose my mouth my ears
my eyes my nose my mouth my ears
my eyes my nose my mouth my ears
We all clap our hands together

My eyes, my nose my mouth my ears
my eyes my nose my mouth my ears
my eyes my nose my mouth my ears
We all clap our hands together

What your child learns.

- Toddlers thrive when they are allowed to exercise their creative freedom and leave their original mark on something.
- Arranging facial features not only lets children practice placement of features, but also exercises their ability to decipher emotions and expressions - a key element for social intelligence.
- Being able to make authentic choices helps children build a sense of confidence, control and independence.
- Collaborative artwork gives children the opportunity to experience the joy of creating something truly original with the help of others.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVINkMHoBUA&app=desktop>

After your visit...

Thank you for bringing your child to our Tours for Tots! We loved having you, and hope to see you again at another exhibition. Until then however, we'd like to encourage you to keep the conversation going at home, and continue to expose your child to art as we believe you don't need to be in gallery for art to have a profound effect on development and one's understanding of the world. Therefore, we wanted to leave you with a few ideas and tips child we personally think are great for getting children to appreciate art from wherever you are. (If you have any of your own you'd like to share with us, please write to us at lihsian@gmail.com/mhimchua@gmail.com).

What to keep in mind.

1. Let go of the notion that you need to have a degree in art history to study art with your child. When you look closely at artwork together, whether it is in a book or on an iPad, it is less about what you know, and more about what you discover WITH your child.
2. Questions are a great place to start. You can use the VTS questions (pg1) or try questions such as, "What do you like about this picture?" or, "Do you think you can create something like that artwork we saw the other day?"
3. Set up invitations to create for your child at home (temporary or permanent) where your child can play at making something. You can use a low bench or table, or a wipe-clean floor surface as a creative station and stock it with a few tools and art supplies.

Things you can do at home

You don't need overpriced craft-kits to deliver creative experiences your child, in fact making your own art activities can be even more effective than anything pre-packaged - and more fun!

- Inside your Tours for Tots gift bag you'll find a puzzle made from a reproduction of "Tutie, Las and Jun," to be put together by your child using the numbers at the bottom of the pieces. Reconstruct the painting together, and use descriptive language as you recall viewing the painting in real life.
- Use the set of stickers to fill a blank face (just draw an oval on a piece of paper to start) and let your child play and make a portrait of someone you know.
- Look in art books or online for artwork you can show your child. A list of 20 Great Artworks to Look at with Young Kids⁹ can be found online at The Art Curator for Kids (artcuratorforkids.com).
- Start a collection of artwork your child likes at home. Print them out and make a wordless art book, and get your child to tell stories about what happens next in the pictures.
- Provide creative material for art-making. You don't need to be 'Pinterest mom' and make insanely perfect things, just follow your child's lead on what to make. Some great websites with super-simple projects you can try:

Deepspaceparkle.com

Redtedart.com

[Kid Blogger Network Activities and Crafts Board¹⁰](http://KidBloggerNetwork.com)

⁹ <http://artcuratorforkids.com/20-great-artworks-to-look-at-with-young-kids/>

¹⁰ <https://www.pinterest.com/playdrmom/kid-blogger-network-activities-crafts/>