

Tips for Using Props

Why Use Props?

Touching a material similar to the work of art, seeing the technique used to create it, or looking at a photograph in which the object is being used adds another dimension to the work of art. The use of props also helps engage learners who prefer hands-on learning styles, and reinforces the understanding of all learners.

What are the Challenges of Props?

Be aware that without careful planning, props may only distract your group. Consideration of the following points can prevent group management challenges from undermining the benefits of props:

- **What understanding about the work of art does the prop best illustrate?**
Present the prop in conjunction with information about a work of art or to help answer a question about the work of art.
- **How will you structure the group's interactions with the prop?**
There are a number of ways to use the prop. Among the variations:
 - Pass the prop around to each person. If you do it this way, give the group a question to consider while they are waiting for the prop and one to consider after they have held the prop.
 - Encourage the group to be ready for discussion when the prop finishes circulating.
 - Ask a single visitor to come forward and describe how it feels to the whole group.
 - Hold the prop yourself and walk it around for the group to touch or look at closely.
 - Hold the prop yourself to illustrate relevant parts of the discussion. Then give everyone a chance to examine it more closely at the end of your presentation.
- **How will you explain to the group what you expect them to do with the prop? (with student groups)**
Clear communication of your expectations is essential to getting the students to stay focused on the activity. Will they all get to touch the prop? How should they take turns? What should they do when it's not their turn? How should they treat the prop?
- **How will you link the experience with the prop to the rest of the discussion?**
After the group has explored the prop in some fashion, refer to the experience as you continue the discussion.
- **How will you get the prop back?**
Don't forget to plan how you'll get the props back! You may want to use them on subsequent tours.
- **Where can I find props?**
Museum Guide Programs staff maintains a series of "prop bins" in the docent/guide study area. Props may be borrowed (on your honor) for tours. Props cannot leave the museum.

Docent Program Handbook

Touring Techniques

- **Can I bring my own props from home?**

The museum security staff strongly discourages the practice of using tour props other than those supplied by the museum. Because they often resemble works of art in the collection, it can be difficult to distinguish props from the “real thing.” If you would like to request a prop be added to the collection supplied by the museum, or if you want to donate a prop, please let us know.