

Successful Tours for Teen Audiences

T **Talk** to adolescent students at the level at which you want them to behave. Since you want the most mature behavior possible, address them as young adults not as children, e.g. “Ladies and gentlemen let’s move into the next gallery to see an example of Egyptian art.” “I am curious to know what you, as young adults, see in this picture.”

E **Engage** your students in your tour. Do not lecture or talk **at** them but rather dialog **with** them; most of them will open up and share if you choose a theme that engages their interest. Teens are concerned about personal appearance, issues of friendship and love, the environment, gender roles, sports, preparation for adulthood, etc. Arrange your tour around these topics.

With junior high students, engage them physically by having them pose like Kuan Yin, or the Japanese Guardian Figures.

E **Estimate** that the time spent at each piece will probably be less than you spend with an adult audience. Your pace will be faster because their attention spans are shorter.....have 8-10 items chosen and maybe a back-up.

N **Notice** audience behavior constantly and **adjust** your tour as needed You may very well need to modify your choice of tour selections, the tone of your talk, or the time you spend on a particular item if you notice that your audience is getting restless. You need to watch their faces and body language for feedback to know if they are engaged. Do your homework and prepare for your tour well but be flexible and make adjustments when necessary. **FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY TO WORKING WITH TEENS!**

T **Talk** to your group before you start your tour. Let them know a bit about your background. Be **brief** but say a few words to establish credibility with them. They will trust you more and be more open in their dialog with you when you let them know about your background as a docent, a parent, a teacher, an art lover, etc. Ask them about their school, their bus ride, their interest in art before you start the tour.

I **Insist** that they follow the few guide lines that you give them about museum behavior. Follow the docent, keep several feet away from the art object, do not run. Explain briefly why the institute has these rules.

P Prepare many open-ended questions which prompt teens to make associations with their own lives. For example, you might ask them how the Coronation of the Virgin resembles a current high school homecoming or after viewing the Chimu Earspools, ask them what do we in our society wear as jewelry or clothing to enhance our status? How does a football uniform resemble a knight’s armor? This type of question brings the art piece into their own time and into their own lives.

S **SMILE AND STAY SANE.** Teen tours are fun, uplifting, exciting tours that give you a chance to touch young lives, to touch the future as it were. Do not take their behavior too seriously. Remember their frontal lobes are not finished developing, and they often do act silly, or shy, or both.

