

Trade routes tour and participatory activity: Susan Arndt, Docent.

My April 13th tour was a Highlights tour for 4th grade with a teacher twist - please include art from the Middle Ages incorporating art from China, India, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. I used the theme of trade routes and specifically the Silk Road, Mediterranean and Hanseatic League routes, Indian Ocean routes, and Trans-Saharan routes. The objects I used are listed below. I decided to include a participatory activity at the beginning as an ice-breaker and part of my intro and to help define my theme.

After bringing the group to the second floor atrium in a single file line, I had them spread out at arm's length from one another. I gave the necessities of my intro, a brief description of what we would see - middle age art from vastly diverse cultures that were not isolated but connected through trade and trade routes. Then I asked if they had ever played a game of telephone, would they like to play the game with me?

My version of the game:

Use two different messages - My cat is yellow - My dog is brown. Start the different messages at opposite ends of the line. (Goods traveled both directions).

Jumbled messages, aside from being funny, lets you talk about how ideas, technology, religion, philosophy, etc. traveled up and down trade routes and were influenced by exposure to different cultures. A message that arrives intact lets you talk about the flow of trade goods.* (1 of the four messages sent (2 groups) came through intact.)

Before we went to the first object I asked the group to keep an eye out for the color blue and the use of gold. I also asked them to look for things that are similar from one culture to the next.

*The children cannot use the "operator" -i.e. they cannot ask to hear the message a second time. Why not? Keeps things brief, limits their interaction with one another. Helps keep the focus on you. My game, my rules...

Objects:

Japan

- Daiitoku Myoo, the Wisdom King of Awe-Inspiring Power 2013.291A-G. (If you don't have special effects, how do you show the power of a god?)

China

- Pair of Earthenware Camels 2004.205.1.1 - used as a drive-by to help frame...Tomb Retinue 49.1.1-10 (Blue! Technology that was not native to China)(checkout those innovative camel saddles that allowed camels to carry 500-1500lbs) Lots to compare and contrast with this one. Don't forget the Lokapalas are standing on bulls. Where have we seen something similar?

India

- Shiva Nataraja, 20.2. Another multitasking God!

Persia (Iran)

- Bowl, 12th-13th century Minai ware earthenware 32.32.7. Started by asking the class to look at all the pottery in the cases - what jumps out at you - BLUE! Use of Cobalt in pottery was an important innovation that traveled to China. Then zeroed in on the bowl(s). We did look at all three. It was easier with the group.

Africa - Mali

- Equestrian Figure 83.168. Fun Fact 2/3 of the gold moving on all trade routes came from Mali.

Europe - Italy

- Standing Madonna and Child -Nardo Di Cione. GOLD! and BLUE! Two types in this painting Lapis holds its color; the other turns black over time (crests). And plague, it traveled the trade routes too! Yick!!

The participatory activity worked because it broke the ice, put the focus on me, i.e. the tour in a fun way (allowing me to be a conduit to fun and info). It allowed me to give them answers (blue and gold) to questions we would cover.

It was easy to do - no props or extras required.