

Icebreakers

These “icebreakers” are ideas, suggested by experienced Docents, for approaching Museum visitors who are NOT on an organized tour. Engaging people in informal conversations, or otherwise enhancing their enjoyment of the Museum, can be very rewarding for everyone involved. You should, of course, rephrase questions into language that works for the particular situation and for your own personality and style.

When approaching visitors casually, try to ask questions that engage or arouse curiosity. Avoid putting people on the spot or making them uncomfortable. On occasion, visitors will not be receptive to your attempts to talk with them. That happens. Don’t take it personally!

“Is this your first time at Bowers Museum?”

“What brings you to the Museum today? Did you come to see something specific?”

“Are you enjoying your visit to the Museum today?”

“Are you from California? Orange County? Santa Ana?”

Give handouts of Museum events that day. Give visitors a map and mention highlights. Give out family guides. Offer help to anyone looking at a map.

“Are you here for a tour? Would you like to see a few highlights of this gallery? Would you like a short tour?”

“Have you seen any of the other exhibits here at Bowers?”

For students: “What grade are you in? Are you here for a school project? Can I help you? Are you looking for something in particular?”

With families, it is often easier to approach the children first. Mention the Kidseum to parents.

“Do you know anything about the history of Bowers Museum? Do you know how it got its name?”

“There is a lot of activity/noise here today, isn’t there? Cultural museums like this are different from fine art museums!”

“How did you hear about this exhibit?”

Carry an artifact that will open a conversation or entice visitors into a gallery.

Try to tie questions to the age, interests, or background of the visitors.

Icebreakers... continued

“Is this your first time in this gallery? Would you like a quick overview of the objects?”

“I can tell you ten interesting things about this gallery.”

“I am a Docent. I can give you five minutes, fifteen minutes, or leave you alone.”

“Do you have any questions? I would be more than happy to answer them.”

“Have you seen the oldest artifact in this gallery?”

“Would you like to visit _____ without the hassle of travel? This gallery can take you there!”

“Have you traveled to _____?”

If the visitor is from the culture of the exhibit, ask them if they know something about a particular object. Ask them questions.

“What have you seen today? What is your favorite item?”

“Isn't that an interesting/beautiful object? I can tell you something about that.”

Offer an unusual piece of information about an object.

“Did you see _____? That is my favorite.”

“Did you notice _____?”

“Which of these pieces would you take home if you could? Where would you put it in your home?”

“Do you know what I love about this piece?”

“Would you like to know more about _____ (this time period, this kind of artifact, this type of material, how this item was used)?”

Try to use current language to help people relate objects to their lives today.

“Would you like me to tell you a story about _____?”

If someone has a camera, offer to take his or her photo with an object. Then talk about the object or exhibit.

As Docents here, we hear some interesting stories from visitors/curators. “I was told that this piece _____.”