

SUMMER GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Digital Field Trips: Museum Adventures Abound for Kids

Cultural institutions are finding creative ways to engage young visitors virtually this summer, and many of the offerings are free.

By Laurel Graeber

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Museums have become extraordinarily creative in throwing open their virtual doors to young people still on lockdown. Educators are providing at-home opportunities to emulate renowned artists, go on odysseys to the stars, collaboratively create a picture book on women’s history and even chill out with a skink. Here’s a selection of offerings, many of them free.

Children’s Museums



Students working on art projects at the Children’s Museum of the Arts before it shuttered. The museum’s virtual offerings include free video art lessons, craft projects and storybook readings. Children’s Museum of the Arts

Almost as soon as quarantine began, the **Children’s Museum of Manhattan** instituted CMOM at Home, a daily series with themes — from Magical Monday to Surprise Sunday — and related projects and videos. The over 80 selections now online include instructions for doing a dinosaur march with the musician Laurie Berkner and saying hello in multiple languages with the organization Callaloo Kids.

“We’re showing the world to children every day — different ways of cooking or dancing or talking,” said Leslie Bushara, the museum’s deputy director for education and exhibitions. The CMOM at Home on June 28 will celebrate Pride with the band Queer Kids and a rainbow-wand art project. A later episode will focus on the artist Delano Dunn. “It will be an

activity where children can explore racial identity,” Ms. Bushara said.

The Sugar Hill Children’s Museum of Art & Storytelling also plans to raise young people’s social consciousness. On July 28, this Manhattan institution will commemorate the anniversary of one of the earliest civil rights marches, the Silent Protest Parade of 1917 (in response to deadly attacks on black residents by white mobs in Illinois), with the virtual “Children’s Art Exhibition for Justice.” The event will incorporate a video history of the march, works by children, spoken-word pieces and art collaborations by preteens, teenagers and the artist Dionis Ortiz.

Parents can find more ways to help their children understand the efforts to end inequality in the Online Resources for Families Regarding Racial Injustice, posted by the **Children’s Museum of the Arts**. This New York museum, which still has spaces in its weeklong Online Summer Art Colony Camps, also offers free video art lessons, craft projects and storybook readings. Next Thursday it will host a low-cost virtual tour of the artist Rico Gatson’s studio.

And don’t forget web pages of activities like Recipes for Play at Home, from the **Chicago Children’s Museum**; At Home With SICM, from the **Staten Island Children’s Museum**; and BCM + You, from the **Brooklyn Children’s Museum**.

Art Museums

An installation view of “Liberty (Liberté),” by Puppies Puppies. The performance piece, featured in the 2017 Whitney Biennial, is among the works children can engage with in the Whitney Kids Art Challenge. Matthew Carasella

However old the art fan, virtual galleries await. On June 29, **the Museum of Modern Art** will initiate the Samuel and Ronnie Heyman Family Art Lab at Home, a series of creative videos and prompts based on MoMA’s collection. The **Whitney Museum of American Art’s** Kids Art Challenge, which began in April, continues to add six projects every two weeks: Click on a Whitney work and discover ways to explore its themes.

“We tried for a mix of old favorites, like Calder’s ‘Circus,’ as well as newer works,” like “Liberty (Liberté),” a Statue of Liberty riff by the performance artist Puppies Puppies, said Heather Maxson, the Whitney’s director of school, youth and family programs. The museum also offers downloadable images of Edward Hopper’s art to color; his “Early Sunday Morning” (1930) has inspired both an art challenge and a coloring page.

On July 6, Ms. Maxson will introduce Whitney Summer Studio, a six-week program of free 40-minute Zoom art classes, with a family session on Saturdays. “We’re going to work on ways to connect families that are separated by distance,” she said, “so you can work with your grandma in Florida.”

The Guggenheim Museum created its interactive Family Tours at Home, on select summer Saturdays, with a similar goal in mind. It has also turned “A Year With Children 2020,” its annual show of New York City student artwork, into an e-book.

Little bookworms will especially appreciate virtual visits to the **Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art** in Amherst, Mass. Fans of Carle’s titles like “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” will devour this museum’s offerings, among them a virtual exhibition featuring 21 children’s book illustrators.

Finicky adolescents will find programs, too, including collage workshops next month at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, followed by a Career Lab. And the **Museum of the Moving Image** in Queens offers a summer-long bonanza: media camps, Town Halls for Teen Media Makers and a Teen Film Festival. Both tweens and teens will enjoy the museum’s continuing series “Jim Henson’s World,” which presents an online conversation with four puppeteer-filmmakers on Saturday.

History and Culture Museums

The Museum of Jewish Heritage — a Living Memorial to the Holocaust has online materials that include the HBO documentary “The Number on Great-Grandpa’s Arm,” about the relationship between a child and a Holocaust survivor. HBO

The Smithsonian’s **National Museum of African American History and Culture**, in Washington, and its **National Museum of the American Indian**, in Manhattan and Washington, offer multimedia digital materials illuminating the country’s reckoning with racism. The African-American museum’s new web portal, Talking About Race, is especially helpful in starting difficult conversations. “We talk a lot about the danger of silence,” said Candra Flanagan, the museum’s director of teaching and learning. “When we’re silent, it forces kids to figure things out on their own.”

This museum's online programs include a Juneteenth celebration, marking the end of slavery in the United States, on Friday and Saturday, and a virtual student documentary showcase, which runs through Wednesday. From Aug. 3 to 7, the museum will host Young Historians Institute: The Virtual Remix. A selective program for high school students that requires applications and tuition, it will explore the African-American experience in the Revolutionary era.

In New York, **the Museum of Jewish Heritage — a Living Memorial to the Holocaust** presents its own online resources to introduce children gently to a devastating history. One highlight, the HBO documentary “The Number on Great-Grandpa’s Arm,” offers an uplifting look at a relationship between a child and a Holocaust survivor.

More virtual avenues beckon at the **New-York Historical Society**, whose free Reading Into History @ Home book club on June 28 hosts Phil Bildner, author of “A High Five for Glenn Burke,” about the first professional baseball player to come out as gay. The society, which will continue its Living History Zoom sessions with costumed interpreters, also offers Camp History @ Home from July 20 to Aug. 13. It will center on the suffragist exhibition “Women March” and the book “Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History,” by Vashti Harrison. Participants will collaborate on a picture e-book of women’s rights activists (and receive a physical copy later).

The Tenement Museum offers another window onto New York history. Known for using actors to portray real immigrants on its historical properties, it is continuing the practice virtually. Twice this summer, children can visit 1916 with Victoria Confino, a teenage Italian immigrant. Another program, Building a Community, uses video and oral history to introduce the Puerto Rican Saez Velez family in the 1950s and later.

Science Museums

Green and orange Sharpshooters included in the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's online exhibition “Spiky, Hairy, Shiny: Insects of L.A.” Lisa Gonzalez/BioSCAN, via Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County

A Torymid wasp is also included in the online exhibition, which has 360-degree views. Lisa Gonzalez/BioSCAN, via Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County

“I truly believe one silver lining that will come out of this crisis will be an entire generation of children with an increased interest in science and innovation,” Crystal Bowyer, the president and chief executive of the new science-oriented **National Children’s Museum** in Washington, said about the Covid-19 pandemic in an email. “Children are home right now thinking about what they can do.”

This museum has just started STEAM Daydream, a monthly podcast whose first episode, “Health Science Heroes,” focuses on global disease and the anxiety it causes. Viruses and Us, from the **Exploratorium** in San Francisco, is a compilation of online videos and activities. The **New York Hall of Science’s** many web resources include a virtual coronavirus exhibition in English and Spanish, as well as “Transmissions: Gone Viral,” an engrossing interactive graphic novel inspired by the 1999 West Nile outbreak.

Although not virus-related, the “Live From Surgery” Facebook streams from the **Liberty Science Center** in Jersey City are just as compelling. Those who aren’t squeamish can check the center’s website for archived videos of a heart transplant and a robotic procedure on a kidney.

Have outer space or wildlife enthusiasts at home? The **Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum** presents Virtual Astronomy Live every month — with opportunities to meet astronauts — and multiple aviation- and space-themed programs. At the **American Museum of Natural History**, virtual adventures include live YouTube watch parties like Field Trip: Mapping the Universe, on Friday, and an exploration of bat biodiversity on June 26. The museum’s website and app for children, OLogy, also has enough games, projects and videos to keep the young and the restless busy all summer. Check out its zoology section to play the role of a queen wasp or learn what a tardigrade is.

Speaking of funky creatures, on Monday the **Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County** will begin offering a 360-degree tour of its online show “Spiky, Hairy, Shiny: Insects of L.A.,” whose bugs appear in colorful close-ups. And don’t miss the museum’s “Walk on the Wild Side” videos, in which children can meet that skink. Her name is Tallulah, and she’s surprisingly sociable.