

Promoting MOMS Educational Opportunities in Your Community Or, If you build it, they may not come

The tour of a Museum on Main Street (MOMS) exhibition offers exciting educational opportunities for students and teachers in your community, as well as a chance to strengthen your museum's connections with educators. Students will be able to tour the MOMS exhibition and accompanying local exhibition, create products to be displayed in the exhibitions, engage in lessons activities that explore the exhibition themes and your community, and participate in the local programs you host.

However, given teachers' busy schedules and the many curriculum requirements they must address in their classrooms, simply offering these valuable educational experiences does not guarantee that teachers will take advantage of them. To effectively engage teachers and students in the MOMS exhibition, you will need to actively promote the educational opportunities and their educational value to teachers. Following are a few suggestions for maximizing the participation of students and teachers in the MOMS exhibition in your community.

ACTIVELY PROMOTE THE EXHIBITION AND TEACHER'S GUIDE TO EDUCATORS

1. Invite an educator to participate on your local exhibition committee.
Someone familiar with the ins and outs of your local education community can help you decide on the most effective strategies for promoting the exhibition and associated educational opportunities to teachers.
2. Contact teachers well in advance of the exhibition's arrival in your community.
Teachers plan their curriculum months in advance. The sooner teachers know about the exhibition and the educational opportunities it affords, the more likely they will be to include them in their curriculum. Advance notice is especially important if you would like to feature students' work in the local exhibition.
3. Use of variety of strategies for promoting the exhibition and teacher's guide lesson activities.
Possibilities include:
 - Send a catchy postcard or poster to all teachers in your community;
 - Get on the agenda of school staff meetings and PTA/PTO meetings;
 - Lead a session or host a booth at an education conference;
 - Ask district officials to send an e-mail or flyer to all teachers and/or include an article in the district newsletter;
 - Contact your state council of social studies teachers to find out how you can promote the exhibition and lesson activities to its members. (Contact information for your state council is available on the National Council for the Social Studies website at www.socialstudies.org.)
 - Host a workshop for teachers to acquaint them with the exhibition and demonstrate the lesson activities.
 - Host a reception for educators at the exhibition once it opens.

4. Offer to assist educators in their classroom activities.

Your museum's staff and/or volunteers have valuable resources and expertise to offer teachers. Teachers will welcome your assistance in locating research sources, identifying guest speakers, and relating the themes of the exhibition to your community. Review the lesson activities in the teacher's guide and identify ways that your museum could assist teachers. Let teachers know you are ready to help.

DEMONSTRATE THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF THE LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Emphasize that the lessons meet objectives in the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies.

There is a major emphasis nationwide on standards-based education. Basically, teachers are supposed to insure that everything they do in their classrooms helps students attain competency in the skills and knowledge specified in their state curriculum standards. These state standards are derived from national curriculum standards. Because MOMS is a national program, the lesson activities in the teacher's guide are keyed to national standards.

2. Enlist an educator to key the lessons to the curriculum standards in your state.

This will make it easier to demonstrate how the lessons will assist teachers in meeting their state-mandated curriculum goals. Teachers are unlikely to use the lessons if they see them as "add-on" activities that do not meet curriculum goals.

3. Ask a curriculum specialist at the state department of education or local district office to endorse use of the lesson activities.

An official "seal of approval" from state or local education experts will lend additional credibility to the lessons, but can be difficult to obtain. Don't be discouraged if education officials decline to endorse the lessons.

4. Emphasize that the lessons help students develop critical thinking skills.

Developing students' critical thinking skills is a focus of many education programs nationwide. The MOMS lesson activities promote critical thinking by engaging students in examining real issues in your community and analyzing primary historic documents.

5. Focus on the opportunity for students to create products for a community audience.

Current educational theory stresses the value of students creating products for a "real world" audience. The MOMS exhibition offers students the chance to share their work with the entire community. Displaying a student's work is also a great way to lure an entire student's family to the exhibition.

Don't forget, you can find teacher lesson plans for each MoMS exhibition on the website: www.museumonmainstreet.org.