

## Ramage Family

*ArtQuest provided an easy way to visit with my daughter and do something that I feel is good for her and her mind to build her appreciation and beauty. I think that beauty and the appreciation of beauty is an essential part of being happy. – James Ramage*

James and Jane Ramage made their first visit to the Frist Center in November 2005 when their daughter, Mary, was still under one year old. Mary, now five years old, and her parents, and often her grandmother, Pamela, visit both Martin ArtQuest and the Frist galleries frequently. Both James and Jane say that for them visiting the Frist Center is a way to “shed anxiety” and “relax.” They were members of the Frist Center at the time of the study.



Ramage Family: (back from left) Jane, Pamela, (front from left) Mary, and James.

Both James and Jane enjoy visiting art museums and other cultural centers as part of their leisure and learning agenda. James is a college lecturer and researcher and Jane is a stay-at-home mother. Other than visiting art museums, James also enjoys creating art for fun, attending art lectures at local museums and universities, and listening to and playing music. In addition to visiting museums and other cultural institutions with her parents, Mary also plays the piano. Other leisure activities that the Ramages enjoy doing together as a family include camping, taking long walks, visiting the library, and meeting with other Thai-speaking friends and family. On several occasions, James and Jane emphasized that they do not want Mary to watch TV.

The Ramages made three visits to the Frist Center and three visits to like sites. Their first like-site visit started with a piano lesson in their home followed by a walk. The second and third visits took place at the Nashville Public Library. Each of the three visits to the Frist Center were slightly different. On the first visit, James and Mary visited alone, viewing an exhibition first then heading to Martin ArtQuest. On the second visit, Jane, Mary, and Pamela visited together; during this visit, the family only spent time in Martin ArtQuest. On the third and final visit, all of the Ramages, including Pamela, visited together. They saw two exhibitions but did not visit Martin ArtQuest due to prior engagements they needed to attend elsewhere.

For the family's first like-site visit, the Ramages explained how taking frequent walks in their local wooded area is a tradition. Their motivation for taking these walks is to provide “something good for Mary's mind and build her appreciation of beauty.” Piano playing was viewed as an important opportunity for Mary to express herself and continue the theme of beauty (make beautiful music). Visiting the library is also important to the family as it facilitates Mary's appreciation of books and reading and encourages calmness. During the family's visits to the library, they visited the children's book area and read stories. They also dropped off and picked up books. Jane, Mary, and James attended the first visit; James and Mary the second visit; and the whole family, including Pamela, attended the third visit. James said they are “regular” visitors to Nashville Public Library as well as their neighborhood library.

### **Visits to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts Galleries**

While in the galleries on the first visit, James initiated and led discussions about the artwork by encouraging Mary to observe a work of art and then describe and/or explain what she was seeing. At times, Mary was not focused on the discussion taking place, as she would find new things to look at. James encouraged Mary by asking her to focus and concentrate and/or to expand upon one-word answers. During the visit to the galleries, James and Mary stayed very close and viewed the art together. During the third visit, the group split more often, although they rejoined at different times. Similar to the first visit, James made sure to stay with Mary, while Jane and Pamela split off and conversed in Thai. Also similar to the first visit, James encouraged Mary to engage with the art by asking her to read the labels and sound out the words, describe and interpret what she was seeing, and discuss her likes and dislikes. The focus was on learning and James was very keen that Mary be given every opportunity to learn.

### **Visits to Martin ArtQuest**

While in Martin ArtQuest on the first visit, James and Mary worked together on several different activities. The pattern was for James to observe first and then join in the activity. Overall, James's approach to creating artwork was more meticulous, whereas Mary's was a little more random in style and approach. At one point, James emphasized the importance of following directions and made explicit his desire for Mary to read the instructions and follow the models. At times they would observe each other's work, but little conversation took place, each preferring to work quietly. During the second visit, Mary worked on artwork on her own while Jane conversed with other parents and the researcher. At times, Mary joined other children at different activities; however, little interaction took place among the children, with Mary preferring to work in silence. From time to time, Jane asked Mary if she needed help and/or suggested different ways that Mary could approach/create/improve her artwork; sometimes Mary accepted the help/suggestions and other times she asserted her independence and set out or continued on her own path.

### **Visits to Like Sites**

During their like-site visits, James tended to lead the activity or discussion. He encouraged Mary to observe her environment, whether exploring the natural environment or looking at a detail in a book. He achieved this by asking questions and identifying areas of interest to generate conversation. In any space that encouraged Mary's creativity, such as making something, participating, or observing, Mary demonstrated a high level of imagination that appeared to come naturally and with ease. Mary also enjoyed the more technical parts of visiting the library, such as checking out and returning the books. John took the view that because it was something adults usually did, it gave Mary a sense of being grown up. While Mary's energy was high there were times when her attention span would wane; James then spent time encouraging her to participate in the activity or talk more about what she was seeing. He stated:

*I think that this is real important for her development, being able to keep her mind focused when she is tired and distracted.... The key is to get her interested in what it is we are trying to get her to focus on and naturally she will block out all the other distractions like being tired.*

Toward the end of each visit, James sat Mary down and implemented an evaluation session, asking her what she enjoyed and why. This was an important part of the process for James, as he wanted the emphasis to be on learning and reflection as an important aspect of learning.

### **Motivation & Values**

In talking about their motivation for visiting the Frist Center and Martin ArtQuest, James and Jane stated that they perceive visiting the museum as a way to unwind and relax and to “stimulate Mary’s mind” and to encourage her appreciation of art and beauty. James said that Martin ArtQuest offers many activities that allow Mary to practice her art-making skills and “entertain herself.” Reflecting his own interest in engaging in arts and crafts activities, James adds that he enjoys creating his own artwork in Martin ArtQuest and that adult art-making spaces are needed so that adults can “remember and develop creatively too.” Jane says that Martin ArtQuest allows Mary to engage in art-making activities that they do not do regularly at home due to the mess and time needed to prepare for and clean up after such experiences. Both James and Jane say they enjoy looking at art in the galleries.

In talking about the values the family holds, Jane said she wanted to encourage Mary to face challenges with optimism. Jane believed the off-site and on-site visits furthered this value, as she explains:

*When we first went to ArtQuest, Mary would splash paint everywhere, similar to playing the piano—she just pressed any note. Now she can paint and play tunes on the piano.*

James also feels that piano playing helps him relieve tension after a long day at work and says playing piano with Mary is a great way to unwind from the day. James also explained how he and his family experience “great joy in playing music” and that by learning an instrument, Mary will be better able to “express herself as she gets older.” Overall, the family places high value on beauty and aesthetics, serene environments, and limitations on technology. Says Jane:

*I want her to be able to make beautiful things and beautiful music. I don't want her to play video games or watch TV. To get to know yourself you need to be calm and remove yourself from all the technology and hustle-bustle of day-to-day stuff. My grandmother taught me the piano and she is important in our lives, kind of a tradition in our family. We don't allow a lot of TV watching at home.*

Both James and Jane place a high value on the family walks. They see walking “as an opportunity to remove oneself from the everyday, creating opportunities to entertain each other and explore the environment—be it visually, through sound, colors or mood, you can see the cycle of life.” In addition, the family feels that taking walks “gets us not to use technology and spend time together as a family.” James also feels that the library setting encourages calmness and states that he sees this as being similar to the Frist Center, in that the library and the Frist “are places one goes to contemplate and consider.” He also likes the cleanliness and orderliness of the library and feels it is a “center of creativity, oriented towards everyone, and art is not necessarily something for everyone.”

When asked what they enjoyed most about their visits to the Frist Center, James and Jane felt that their daughter liked participating in art activities and playing with her friends. The benefits of engaging in these activities, according to James and Jane, are changes in perceptions and the enjoyment of doing something together. As mentioned, James and Jane enjoy the peacefulness of visits to the art museum as well as socializing with other like-minded art-museum goers. Jane explained: "Visiting the art museum makes me calm and happy." In addition to those core benefits, the Ramages say they also enjoy making and viewing art and watching their child have fun while learning and improving her art-making skills.

When asked what they enjoyed most about the like sites, James and Jane perceived that Mary enjoyed the puppet show and sing-along at the library. James and Jane said they enjoyed doing something with their daughter that was educational and fun. Jane explained: "I enjoyed watching her make that snake. I like to see how my child's mind is growing in the environment that I never had the opportunities to have when I was her age."

### **Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like Sites**

In thinking about the similarities and differences between the like-site visits and the Frist Center, James explained how visiting the library provides opportunities for Mary to gain an appreciation for books and reading, just as visits to the Frist Center encourage an appreciation of art and culture. In addition, Jane and James say that they enjoy socializing with like-minded people at both venues. Another similarity James and Jane made between the two venues is that both are "calm" and allow for contemplation and consideration. Similarly, the family also found this sense of calm and peace during their nature walk. James explained:

*Nature is peaceful because there are not distractions. When you go into the exhibits it is very peaceful to look at a painting and even if you are not in nature, it is the same sense of relaxation and slowing everything down to look at what is in front of you.*

All of the venues, both the like sites and the Frist Center, are places where the Ramages feel Mary has opportunities to express herself, learn about the world, and "think." In considering the differences, James explained how libraries are "not centers of creativity" and how most of their programming is not geared towards both children and adults as it is in Martin ArtQuest.

### **Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study**

In thinking about the connections between visits to the Frist and the family's larger learning agenda, the Ramages said that on trips to and from the museum they tend to extend their experiences by discussing their favorite activities and works of art, imagining what they will do with the artwork they created, and reminiscing about the people they met and friends they made. As other points of extension and connection, James explained how, as a result of a visit to the Frist Center, Mary created artwork using sand that featured facial patterns influenced by the Chuck Close exhibit. He explained how the activity reinforced other skills she has been developing using colors and crayons. Integrating experiences had at the Frist Center with the learning they do at home, Jane and James explained how they try to "think about what [they] saw at the Frist and draw them" using the "painting station" they have at their home.

When asked what they learned as a result of participating in the study, the Ramages said:

*I think that people at the Frist Center are trying very hard to make the museum valuable to the local people and to the visitors who come to visit Nashville. I really appreciated very much all of your hard work.*

## VISIT PATTERNS

	<b>Frist Center for the Visual Arts</b>	<b>Like Sites</b>
<b>Average time spent</b>	95 minutes (Entire visit) 37 minutes (Martin ArtQuest)	87 minutes
<b>Timing of visits</b>	Family visits on weekdays. Each visit was different and there didn't seem to be a pattern in terms of time of visit—some visits were in the morning and some in the afternoon.	The first visit took place on a Saturday morning through to the afternoon. The second and third visits took place on weekdays—Tuesday, late morning, and Friday, early evening. The random pattern of visits probably had something to do with the fact that partway through the study Mary started school and the family were in the process of working out visiting patterns that did not overfire Mary.
<b>Order of visits</b>	Random visit patterns. On the first visit, they viewed an exhibition first, followed by Martin ArtQuest. On the following visit, they only spent time in Martin ArtQuest, and on the third visit, they viewed two exhibitions but did not visit Martin ArtQuest.	The first off-site visit started with a piano lesson in their house that was followed by a walk. The second and third visits took place at Nashville Public Library; the first to predominately be part of a storytelling event and the second to see an art exhibition. On both occasions in the library, the family visited the children's book area and read stories. They also dropped off and picked up books. Jane, Mary, and James attended the first visit, James and Mary only attended the second visit, and all the family, including the grandmother, attended the third visit.



## Snapshot

### THREE VISITS TO THE FRIST CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

#### Visit 1



July 2009  
1 hour 55 min.  
*Chuck Close*

#### Visit 2



July 2009  
50 min.

#### Visit 3



December 2009  
55 min.  
*Georgia O'Keeffe*  
*Oliver Herring: Common Threads*

### THREE VISITS TO LIKE SITES

#### Piano Practice & Backyard Nature Walk



February 2009  
1 hour 40 min.

#### Nashville Public Library



July 2009  
1 hour 15 min.

#### Nashville Public Library



December 2009  
1 hour 10 min.