

Watson Family

As a mom you are always socializing your children... it means that they understand etiquette, behavior, what's appropriate, what's not appropriate, and how to act in different situations. Other than playing basketball and soccer, they need to learn etiquette and behavior at other places. The art museum gives them that. – Susan Watson

The Watson family made their first visit to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in 2006. The two children, Josheua and Francesca were six and nine years old, respectively. Now eleven and fourteen, Josheua and Francesca frequently visit the Frist Center and Martin ArtQuest with their mother, Susan, as part of their home school experience. Since their first visit, the Watsons have gradually increased the frequency of their visitation as well as the amount of time they spend in the galleries. This increase is directly related to the children's developmental stages as well as to their increased interest in art and their patience in the galleries. Most commonly, Susan visits the Frist Center with her children alone, although recently the Watsons have been meeting up with other home school families to share the experience. Susan's husband and the children's father, Joseph, was not able to join his family during the observed visits.



(From left) Susan, Francesca, and Josheua Watson at the Heroes exhibition.

Susan is a stay-at-home mother with a background in interior design. She professes to enjoy arts and crafts and sharing that interest with her children. In terms of other art influences, the children have a great-aunt who is a painter and teaches art. During the time of the study, the aunt was teaching Josheua watercolor and Francesca acrylic. In addition to creating art in Martin ArtQuest and with their great-aunt, Josheua also spends time drawing on his own. Outside of the arts, both children play basketball and soccer. Francesca is also interested in science and takes advanced classes outside of her regular homeschooling. Things the Watsons enjoy doing as a family includes spending time with their extended family, hiking, and attending church and church-related events. Other cultural sites the Watsons frequently visit include the Nashville Zoo and local parks and recreation centers.

The Watson family made three visits to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts and one like-site visit to a bowling alley. Because the family engaged in different types of experiences during each visit to the Frist Center, few overall patterns were observed. On all of the visits to the Frist Center, Susan accompanied her children alone. In explaining their like-site choice, Susan said that they are frequent participants at the bowling alley, visiting every couple of months. On this particular visit, the family was joined by a group of seven teenagers from a homeschooling group, a friend of Susan's, and the friend's son. Susan explained their motivation for visiting the bowling alley was to bring the children together, because as homeschooled children there is little opportunity to mix socially with other children of the same age. Coming together once a month, she explained, encourages her children to have a good time and socialize with other

teens. The choice of the bowling alley was made by the entire group. At the beginning of the year, the children were asked what they would like to do, a list was created, and they participate in one activity a month.

Visits to the Frist Center for the Visual Arts Galleries

During the first visit, the family appeared to move free-flowing around the galleries, not really following the pattern of the exhibition but rather just following their own interests. During the final visit (the family did not visit the galleries on their second visit), the Watsons joined a docent-led tour of the exhibition *Heroes*. While on the tour, the family listened intently to the docent and sometimes participated in guided discussions. At one point, Josheua broke away from the tour to engage with some of the interactive activities provided throughout the exhibition. He later rejoined the group tour. Francesca and Susan stayed with the tour, listening intently. Susan also took notes, explaining that she often takes notes to spark her memory later when they have discussions about what they saw. She also noted that their reason for taking the tour was that Francesca was learning about Greek mythology and the exhibition paralleled nicely with the topic. Susan later explained that when she visits the galleries alone with her children (without the presence of other families or children from the home school groups) it is mostly because she “wants the kids to learn something from an exhibit.” When alone, she explained, she and children can “look at the exhibit and talk to each other about it.”

Visits to Martin ArtQuest

While in Martin ArtQuest, the children engaged in a range of activities, often working at several stations during the course of a visit. In general, Francesca and Josheua worked together, with Susan observing one or the other and only sometimes participating. On a few occasions the three worked together on an activity, but this happened less often. During the first visit, both children met and worked with their respective friends. The overall trend was for the girls to stay together and the boys to stay together—there was little interaction between the groups. During this same visit, Susan worked on a sculpture of her own and then spent most of the remaining time socializing with the parents of the other children. Susan explained that while in Martin ArtQuest she “tries to keep out of the way of the children” and that while in the past she spent more time “nurturing their creativity,” now she “just lets them be what they want.” She also mentioned that when the children were younger she always stayed with Josheua, but now that they are older and often come with friends she either stays to herself or joins the child who did not come with a friend. “If it is just the three of us,” Susan said, “I will paint and Francesca will survey the area and then decide, but she generally does not do what Josheua and I do.” Susan also noted that when the children are in Martin ArtQuest without their friends they “work closely together and nurture each other.”

On all of the visits, the children displayed two very different styles of approaching an art project. While Francesca often spent a lot of time reading the instructions and meticulously planning her project, Josheua tended to jump right in and start creating. Once fully engaged in art making, both children focused on their tasks, the only difference being that Francesca worked silently while Josheua often hummed or spoke aloud to himself. Susan noted that both children are very meticulous in all they do and often will start over on a project if they are unsatisfied with the result. One other noted difference in the children's learning styles was that

Josheua was much more likely than his sister to follow the advice or instructions of others. He was also more likely to observe others as a way of getting ideas for or enhancing his own artwork.

Overall, the Watsons enjoyed meeting with and reconnecting with Martin ArtQuest staff, who greet the family like long-lost friends. During each visit, Susan spent time talking with staff while they presented the new activities for the children. In addition, Susan made clear that without Martin ArtQuest she and her children would visit the Frist much less frequently—the reason being that the children require a “release” or “reward” for spending longer amounts of time in the galleries.

Visits to Like Site

During the Watsons' only like-site visit to the bowling alley, Susan and her friend spent most of the time having conversations while Josheua and his friend and Francesca and her friends bowled. Josheua and his friend were very supportive of each other and were often overheard congratulating each other when they did well. The two teenage boys played in an aisle on their own with Francesca and her female friend in the next aisle. Francesca and her friend played quietly, checking their mobile phones in between bowling. Initially there was limited interaction with the teen boy and girl groups, but eventually the teen boys initiated a conversation with the girls. Midway through the visit, Susan walked over to watch the teenagers play and offered support and advice when it was needed and congratulated the teenagers when they did well. At that point Josheua and his friend started to experiment, rolling the ball with their backs to the alley and bowling in between their legs. There was a general air of relaxation and sense of fun, with minimum input from the adults.

Motivation & Values

One of Susan and Joseph's primary motivations for bringing Josheua and Francesca to the Frist Center is to nurture their understanding of and appreciation for art. Specifically, the Watsons want to ensure that their children, whether they like a particular artwork or not, will at least appreciate the great variety of artists and art forms and will appreciate “other people's art.” The appreciation of other people's time, efforts, and artistic abilities is a value on which the Watsons place great importance. In addition to fostering understanding and awareness, the Watsons also emphasize the importance of “socializing,” or “understanding etiquette, behavior, and what is appropriate and not appropriate and how to act in different situations.” According to Susan, the Frist Center is an environment where the children can learn and refine their social and behavioral skills.

When asked what they enjoyed most about their visits to the Frist Center, Susan perceived that the children most liked meeting their friends and making art in Martin ArtQuest. She emphasized that as teens, Josheua and Francesca focus a lot on socializing. Whereas Josheua enjoys Martin ArtQuest more, Francesca likes to look around the galleries first to get inspiration and ideas for what she will create in Martin ArtQuest. Both children, Susan said, enjoy when new stations and activities are installed in the family gallery space. As a parent, Susan says she enjoys watching her children having fun and being creative. She also likes interacting with her children and having the opportunity to do things together. In addition, a benefit to making art

in Martin ArtQuest is that she does not have to “drag out all the art supplies and clean up the mess.”

Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like Sites

While Susan noted a stark contrast between the visit to the bowling alley—more for socializing and having fun—and the Frist Center—more for learning, developing art skills, and nurturing the cultural side of the children’s experiences—when discussing what the children enjoy most about the Frist Center and their motivation for visiting, she often referred to the importance of socializing and having fun.

Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study

During the interviews, Susan described how visits to the Frist Center fit within the family’s larger learning agenda and how they make connections between the things they see and do at the Frist Center with other aspects of their lives. For example, she discussed how the children often do art-making activities at home that are similar to those at the Frist Center, like watercolors, finger painting, and printing. Susan and the children also discuss with their father the things they did and show him the artwork that they created following a visit to the museum. One specific example of how an experience at Martin ArtQuest influenced discussions and additional art making activities includes the following story, related by Susan:

The printing process reminds me of sculpture and it led us to talking about sculpture. Josheua is into making sculptures out of trash. I have just thrown a load of trash out because he is a pack rat and every time we find some trash he takes it to keep for the next sculpture.

Overall, visits to the Frist Center seem to fit naturally into the lives of the Watsons, who could be labeled as art enthusiasts or aficionados. Self-described artists and photographers, the Watsons emphasize that “art is a way of life... not just a subject in our house, but a part of who we are.” Art is also intricately woven into the children’s homeschooling. According to Susan, every subject they learn “has some art” involved, like drawing a plant and then labeling it.

VISIT PATTERNS

	Frist Center for the Visual Arts	Like Sites
Average time spent	157 minutes (Entire visit) 102 minutes (Frist Center for the Visual Arts)	75 minutes
Timing of visits	The family tends to visit on weekdays as part of their homeschooling. There doesn't seem to be a pattern in regards to timing, as one visit took place in the morning and the others in the afternoon. However, during the pre-interview, Susan mentioned that they prefer to come after 1 pm, because at that time of the day all of the school groups and children who "need naps" have left and the place is quieter, less crowded, and more pleasant to visit.	Monday afternoon
Order of visits	There did not appear to be a set visit pattern. On the first visit, the family viewed an exhibition and then went to Martin ArtQuest. On the second visit, they only went to Martin ArtQuest, and on the third visit they went to an exhibition, then Martin ArtQuest, and then another exhibition.	No pattern emerged, as there was only one off-site visit.

Snapshot

THREE VISITS TO THE FRIST CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

Visit 1



August 2009
2 hours
Chuck Close

Visit 2



September 2009
2 hours 20 min.

Visit 3



February 2010
3 hours 30 min.
Heroes
U-Ram Choe

ONE VISIT TO A LIKE SITE

Franklin Bowling Alley



February 2010
1 hour 15 min.