

Christian Family

I am not going to expect my four-year-old daughter to appreciate American art and this statue or the sculptures and some of the paintings. I don't expect her to have an appreciation but as far as the Greene Family Learning Gallery even though you are not necessarily looking at a sculpture she has her own ability to create and explore in there using the blocks or the magnetic wall or using her imagination by using the fabrics to pretend. – Kenya Christian

Kenya Christian first visited the High Museum of Art twelve years ago when she was visiting Atlanta to see a friend. Now living in Atlanta, Kenya says she and her children began visiting the High Museum of Art frequently around six years ago, when the older children, Huey, Louise, and Riley were just seven, four, and three years old respectively. The youngest child, Jasmine, now five years old, was not born yet. At the time of their first visit, Kenya said she was homeschooling the children and wanted them to have an “outlet.” Currently, the older children are 14, 12, and 11 years old.

On most trips to the High, Kenya says it is mostly just she and her children, although sometimes they are joined by her husband on Friday nights when there is jazz. The Christian family also knows other families who frequently visit the High Museum of Art and often interact with those families when they are there at the same time. During several of the visits, the children spent time with a close friend of theirs, Bernice, who frequently visits the museum with her mother, a friend of Kenya's. As a full-time working mother, Kenya spends a lot of her time as a nurse in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Because of her job, she is also often called to duty, spending weeks or months at a time away from her family. During this study, Kenya was called to duty. Before her deployment, she and the children made several visits to the High and other cultural sites to spend additional time together before her extended departure.

For this study, the Christian family made three accompanied visits to the High Museum of Art and three like-site visits to the World of Coca-Cola, the Fernbank Museum of Natural History and Stone Mountain Park. Kenya says each visit to the High Museum of Art is “very different,” explaining how each time they explore different areas of the museum and engage in a variety of available art-making activities. It was the first time the family had visited The World of Coca-Cola and the Fernbank Museum of Natural History. Kenya described the family as regular visitors to the third off-site venue, Stone Mountain Park. The children's father was not able to attend any of the off-site visits. Kenya explained that the motivation for visiting the World of Coca-Cola was because it looked interesting and kid friendly. Fernbank was a place they had never been but always wanted to visit, and being people who enjoy the outdoors, Stone Mountain Park was an obvious place for them to go, especially during the summer months.



Christian Family (from left), Riley, a family friend, Louise, Kenya, Huey, and Jasmine.

Visits to the High Museum of Art Galleries

During the visits the family always spent time in the galleries first. In general, everyone stayed together as a group looking at and talking about the art. Kenya and Riley tended to read the labels out loud for others to listen. Everyone was generally attentive and asked a lot of questions with Kenya encouraging the children to further explore the answers they were giving. At one point during their third visit, the boys walked off on their own while in the galleries but eventually rejoined the whole group. While in Toddler Thursday studios, everyone sat at a table together and created their own artwork. Throughout these guided activities, Kenya supported the children by using encouraging words and offering suggestions. The children always seemed proud of what they created.

Visits to the Greene Family Learning Gallery

The family spent time in the Greene Family Learning Gallery on two of the three museum visits. The girls tended to play together while the boys played together in other areas. Kenya spent a lot of her time helping her youngest child, Jasmine; however, she actively engaged with the older children when needed. On one occasion the family came together to tell the story of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which they had been watching on a DVD at home before the visit. Kenya looked on while the children acted out the various parts of the musical, with each child taking on a different role. Overall, the Christian family seemed to be a musically oriented family that enjoys theater, music, and other types of performance art. While in the Green Family Learning Gallery, the family was generally high spirited as they walked around the space and participated in the interactive activities. During an interview, Kenya explained that while they always visit the galleries, they tend to do so in short bursts to ensure that the younger children do not "get bored." Kenya describes her parenting style while in Greene Family Learning Gallery as "hands-off," indicating that the space functions similar to a "playground" in that the children can run around and interact without restrictions from touching, while she can "just sit, watch, and maybe read a book."

Visits to Like Sites

Overall, the family tended to stay together during their off-site visits. Riley or Kenya usually read labels or instructions, but they always read aloud so the rest of the family could be involved. At all of the sites, the family interacted with staff/volunteers and appeared to enjoy asking questions and listening to responses. Jasmine also enjoyed singing and dancing in whatever space she was in, adding an air of fun and liveliness. This behavior often translated to the rest of the family as there was always a fun quality to their visits. Perhaps the one exception was when the family was on the Sky Hike walk at Stone Mountain Park where their focus and concentration was very high. When the Christians happened upon interactives, they almost always participated as a group, either watching one another or interacting together. In most cases, the two boys would collaborate at one interactive station and the two girls at another. Kenya always offered thoughtful guidance, tending to listen before adding her comments or taking a view on whatever it was the family was discussing.

Motivation & Values

In talking about their motivation for visiting the High Museum of Art and the Greene Family Learning Gallery, Kenya said they enjoy having the opportunity to create art in the studios on

Toddler Thursday and that the Greene Family Learning Gallery in particular, is a place where her children (especially the youngest) can freely explore, use their imaginations, and engage in pretending. Kenya also said that the children enjoyed painting and interacting with their friend, Bernice and her mother, Alyssa, most when they are at the High Museum of Art. Thinking of herself, Kenya said she enjoys the fact that her children have the opportunities to engage with art, adding “it’s about the children—it’s really not for me to go.”

Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like Sites

Kenya indicated that the World of Coca-Cola was similar to the High Museum of Art in that there were a lot of history and opportunities to engage in creativity. Kenya noted that the creative aspect was different at the Coca-Cola site because, in her view, the creative focus was more on marketing and publicity rather than the art itself. Kenya noted that the Coca-Cola exhibits were static as opposed to the High Museum of Art with its “constantly changing exhibits.” The High Museum was also described as being a place that offers opportunities for multiple visits since it is impossible to see everything in one day. There was a direct correlation made between the Greene Family Learning Gallery and Fernbank’s interactive spaces as Kenya felt that both encouraged the children to use their imaginations. She also enjoyed that both sites encouraged learning. No similarities were drawn between the High Museum of Art and Stone Mountain Park. Kenya said the Stone Mountain trip was mostly about addressing her family’s identity as “outdoorsy people” and for having opportunities to “enjoy the open and natural environments.”

Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study

No connections between the visits to the High and/or the like sites were made by the parents or children. At the time of the interviews, Kenya said that they had not talked about their experiences after the visits. The family chose not to comment on any effects of their participation in this study.

VISIT PATTERNS

	High Museum of Art	Like Sites
Average time spent	126 minutes (Entire visit) 30 minutes (Greene Family Learning Gallery)	192 minutes
Timing of visits	Two visits were made on Fridays and another on a Thursday. The family always visits around lunchtime (roughly 12:30–2:30 pm).	All visits took place on weekdays with visits one and two on Wednesday and visit three a Monday. Visit one took place late afternoon, visit two mid-afternoon, and visit three mid-morning into mid-afternoon. Kenya was going on a tour of duty and wanted to commit to all the off-site visits hence they all took place in July 2009.
Order of visits	The family visited the galleries first then went to Toddler Thursday followed by a visit to the Greene Family Learning Gallery. On the third visit the family did not go into the Greene Family Learning Gallery.	The Christian Family had two offsite visits that were firsts—The World of Coca-Cola and Fernbank Museum of Natural History. Kenya described the family as regular visitors to the third off-site venue, Stone Mountain Park. The children’s father was not able to attend any of the off-site visits.

Snapshot

THREE VISITS TO THE HIGH

Visit 1



March 2009
1 hour and 47 min.

Visit 2



July 2009
2 hours and 48 min.
*Anthony Ames, Architect:
Residential Landscapes*

Visit 3



July 2009
1 hour and 42 min.

THREE VISITS TO LIKE SITES

World of Coca-Cola



July 2009

Fernbank Museum of Natural History



July 2009

Stone Mountain Park



July 2009