

Gnome Family

I think the thing that would really make the experience perfect would be if we could, as grownups, let the children stay in Art Sparks by themselves so that we could enjoy the museum a little bit as adults. –
Mama Gnome

Mama and Papa Gnome started taking their children, Garden (now 13) and Ephine (now 9) to museums at a very young age. When the family lived in Chicago, Papa frequently visited the Museum of Science and Industry with Garden. When the family relocated from Chicago to Louisville in 2005, they moved very close to The Speed Art Museum, which made it a “natural fit.” Impressed by Art Sparks and the hands-on opportunities for young children, Mama started taking her children to The Speed and Art Sparks on a regular basis.



Gnome Family: Mama, Papa, Ephine and Garden.

Both Mama and Papa Gnome have +arts-related background. Mama is an art student and Papa is a chief strategist and marketing officer. The children have a variety of interests, ranging from art to sports. Garden tends to gravitate toward history and is involved in history-related clubs through school. Ephine expresses interest in Greek mythology and says in terms of art she prefers “large, older paintings.” Both children participate in soccer and cross-country sports. In addition to visiting art and science museums, the Gnome family also enjoys engaging in nature-related activities, such as hiking and camping. When smaller venues around Louisville, like the Louisville Visual Art Association, host smaller events and programs, the Gnomes try to attend.

For this study, the Gnome family made three accompanied visits to The Speed Art Museum, and three visits to like sites including the Frazier International History Museum, Falls of the Ohio State Park, and the 21C Museum Hotel. The Gnomes did not follow a regular visitation pattern while visiting The Speed. On the first visit, the family visited the permanent collection and nothing else. On the second visit, they attended a special hands-on art-making workshop, and on the final visit, they only spent time in Art Sparks. In looking at the like-site visits, Mama described all three as “education-based.” One motivation for visiting the Frazier International History Museum was to encourage the children to consider different questions about and stimulate interest or curiosity in dueling. She also wanted the children to observe re-enactments of history as a way of learning. Another motivation for visiting the Frazier was to bring the family together away from day-to-day distractions. During another off-site visit to Arcadia National Park, Mama pointed out the reason for attending was to visit family and its importance to her husband for reflecting on his childhood memories.

Visits to The Speed Art Museum

While in the galleries, the Gnome family tended to wander and observe the artwork at their own, individual paces. The family’s movement through the galleries seemed to naturally evolve throughout the visit, with each person charting his or her own course. All of the Gnomes

appeared to be comfortable with such free-forming movements, each preferring to attend to their own interests. At certain times the family would join together to point out and discuss artworks of shared interest. When that happened, all of the family members joined in the conversation. Overall, Mama tended to read labels more often than others in the family and was also more likely explain the context and history of an artwork to others in the group. When Mama visited the galleries with only Ephine and Ephine's friend, the three spent time together discussing which sculptures they liked and disliked and why.

Visits to Art Sparks

The Gnomes only visited Art Sparks during one of the three visits. While there, Mama, Ephine, and Ephine's friend spent close to three hours creating "monster" projects, tracing each other, and painting. While creating their artworks, the three worked well together, often collaborating and supporting each other when needed. While each person created artworks of their own, they often helped each other by providing suggestions, collecting supplies, or providing positive feedback. On their second visit, the family participated in an art-making program held in the auditorium (not in Art Sparks). While the children worked on creating their architectural pieces, Mama and Papa observed from the auditorium seats.

Visits to Like Sites

No clear pattern emerged in relation to the family's movements in each like-site space. In most cases, the group split into two: Papa and Garden together and Mama and Ephine together. This was not consistent but happened enough that the pattern was observable. During the third visit there was an interesting moment when one or two family members left a gallery space to enter the next gallery, leaving someone behind. Another interesting moment occurred during the end of the third visit, when the family was looking at works by James Baker Hall: Garden started to cling onto his father, which he did for the remainder of the visit. He explained later that the artworks were "terrifying." Also during the third visit, Ephine spent time looking for exhibits that Mama had encouraged her to view. Although Mama was not present during that visit, her influence was felt.

In terms of learning behaviors, the family's engagements were often analytical in nature. Papa and Mama encouraged the children's inquisitiveness by asking probing questions and going into a great deal of detail when necessary to explain a particular point they were making. The children were focused and able to work and observe independently, coming together with the family to point out an interesting fact or observation. Papa prompted his children to offer more detailed answers by asking, "I'm sorry?" —the children appeared to instinctively know they needed to add to their explanations or comments when hearing this phrase. Such was the encouragement of the parents that during one visit Ephine was able to reflect that she did not know that much about American Civil War history.

Motivation & Values

Mama describes The Speed Art Museum as a "stimulating destination." The two main factors that bring the Gnomes to the museum include the convenience of living in close proximity to the museum, and Mama's "personal bias" in really enjoying art. Art Sparks is valuable because the children have a "limited attention span and reticence to spend extended amounts of time

in the permanent collection.” Art Sparks creates a nice balance in Mama’s opinion because it is a place where there is art but also a place where the children can interact.

When asked what they enjoyed most about their visits to The Speed, Mama perceived that both children liked the second visit, which revolved around the theme of architecture and artmaking. Mama explained how the children enjoy making things and engaging in hands-on activities, as otherwise they tend toward “museum fatigue.” In thinking about themselves as parents, Mama perceived that her husband most enjoyed “just sitting back and watching the children do their own thing and enjoying the fact that they are self-sufficient.” She further explained that as parents, having a space to bring the children where they can let loose and just “have fun” allows the parents time to “chill” as well.

Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like-Sites

There was no data about shared characteristics captured through the interviews.

Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study

Following their visits to The Speed, the Gnomes often incorporated the things they saw and did into new discussions. Mama explained how the photographs they viewed during one visit prompted her and the children to talk about changes to familiar environments:

I think we talked about how things have changed in some of the places that were familiar or have main streets that look a little bit different now. We were making those kinds of recognitions from the photographs.

Mama also provided another example of this type of extended discussion when she explained how, following a visit to The Speed, Ephine talked about her preference for really large paintings and “the ones where the people are dressed in some sort of period costume.” Mama linked Ephine’s preference for this type of art with her daughter’s love for history and reading. She explained how Ephine reads many books about historic people, including U.S. presidents and first ladies, Henry the VIII, and historical queens and how she enjoys playing with historical paper dolls because she can arrange and design them on her own. Mama suggested that the ideas Ephine generated for designing the paper dolls stemmed directly from the things she saw while visiting The Speed.

VISIT PATTERNS

	The Speed Art Museum	Like Sites
Average time spent	116 minutes (Entire visit) N/A— only visited Art Sparks once	110 minutes
Timing of visits	The Gnomes visited The Speed during the weekend (two Sundays and a Saturday). On two visits the family arrived in the afternoon, and once they arrived in the morning.	All visits took place on weekends, with the first and second visits starting late morning and the third early afternoon.

<p>Order of visits</p>	<p>The Gnomes did not follow a regular visitation pattern. On the first visit, the family only visited the permanent collection. On the second visit, they attended a special hands-on, art-making workshop in the auditorium, and on the final visit, they spent their entire time in Art Sparks.</p>	<p>Parents were present at the first and second visits and Mama attended the first few minutes of the third visit. Ephine's friend and a mother and son, a friend of Garden, attended the second visit. The first and third visits took place inside. The second was an outdoor visit and more interactive than visits one and three.</p>
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Snapshot

THREE VISITS TO THE SPEED ART MUSEUM

Visit 1

No photograph available

June 2009
1 hour 15 min.

Visit 2



September 2009
1 hour 35 min.

Visit 3

No photograph available

October 2009
2 hours 57 min.

THREE VISITS TO LIKE SITES

Frazier International History Museum

No photograph available

August 2009
2 hours 45 min.

Falls of the Ohio State Park



September 2009
2 hours

21C Museum Hotel



November 2009
45 min.