

Sheridan Family

[One of the values] is definitely increased communication. I think when we're at home it is really easy for us to separate into our different areas of the house and do our own thing. So I really like being able to dialogue with her more than I normally do. – Emery Sheridan

Emery Sheridan says she and her husband, Martin started visiting The Speed Art Museum a few years ago, around the same time Emery decided to leave her nursing program and pursue an art degree. She remembers wanting to visit “just for personal interest,” adding that she and Martin both love museums. The Sheridans started visiting The Speed more frequently after Fiona’s paternal grandmother came to live with the family. The grandmother purchased a family membership to The Speed that included entry into Art Sparks, and from then on the Sheridans became frequent visitors. On the first visit with Fiona, Emery recalls being nervous that Fiona would “squawk and make noise.” She also recalls that when Fiona was young, they would almost always go directly to Art Sparks and then go home. Only recently have the Sheridans started bringing Fiona (now nine years old) into the galleries.



Sheridan Family (from left): Fiona and Emery.

Emery describes her family as a “funny group” that “doesn't get too uptight.” A stay-at-home mother, homeschool parent, and former art school student, Emery says she and her husband, a retail store manager, both love museums and art and hope that interest passes to their daughter. Currently, Fiona’s greatest interest and love is for collecting Breyer horse figurines. In addition to visiting The Speed, the Sheridans (mostly Fiona and Emery) also engage in other art and museum related field trips, including ones to the Louisville Stoneware facility, the Louisville Slugger Museum, and the Frazier International History Museum. Fiona and Emery also visit the zoo, which Emery says is similar to Art Sparks in that it encourages conversations and Fiona can draw and sketch there. Martin enjoys visiting all types of museums; his family teases him often for the length of time he spends reading informational panels and labels. While Martin did not attend any of the family outings observed for this study, Emery says that when he is not working he and Fiona have “date days” where they spend the day together doing things like visiting museums. Other activities the Sheridans enjoy doing together include visiting farmer’s markets and having “big, loud family dinners” with extended families.

For this study, the Sheridan family made three accompanied visits to The Speed Art Museum, and three like-site visits to the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, the Frazier International History Museum, and the Louisville Science Center. Emery and Fiona visited all three off-site venues together. The first off-site visit to the Kentucky Museum of Arts and Crafts was chosen

because it was arts and crafts related. The second and third visits were selected because of their interactive spaces.

Visits to The Speed Art Museum

While in the galleries, Emery encouraged Fiona to guide the visit by asking her daughter what she would like to see. Despite this encouragement to follow her interests, Fiona did not seem overly engaged with the artwork and tended to quickly glance at pieces before moving on. On one visit to the galleries, Fiona expressed her disinterest by saying: “if I look at this for an hour, I’ll just go to sleep.” During the observed visits, Fiona rarely posed questions about the artwork and when Emery attempted to explain a piece or stimulate a conversation around a work of art there was little reciprocity from Fiona. An example is when Emery asked Fiona if she prefers color or black and white photographs, to which Fiona replies, “Colored. Come on. Keep going. Keep going.” Overall, Emery tried to take her time in the galleries, looking carefully at individual pieces and reading labels. Several times she asked Fiona to slow down and to stop rushing her.

Despite the push-back from Fiona, Emery says that visiting The Speed Art Museum helps open communication between her and her daughter and helps stimulate interest and discussion around works of art. Emery explains that more and more, as they visit the galleries, Fiona asks questions about objects, which allows them to explore a topic in greater depth. Emery explains: “If she is not engaged I cannot force the questions or the information, but the art museum does help her ask questions to trigger the discussion.”

Visits to Art Sparks

In contrast to their dynamic while in the galleries, Fiona and Emery spend a lot of time working directly together while in Art Sparks. They actively engage in numerous activities—spending time doing rubbings, dancing, playing, and creating art together. During each visit, the family creates art in the studio. On occasion, Fiona ventures off on her own, which Emery says is an indication that her daughter feels comfortable in Art Sparks. While making art in the studio, Fiona and Emery work very collaboratively, sharing ideas, materials, and often adding to or modifying each other’s works. Each encourages the other and offers positive feedback and suggestions. They seem to enjoy working together and do so very fluidly. They also incorporate a lot of humor and playfulness into their interactions. Their relationship appears very natural and relaxed. While Emery sometimes offers support or suggestions to her daughter, Fiona often explains very thoughtfully that she has her own ideas and/or thinks she would like to try something on her own. At the same time, Fiona seems to enjoy receiving suggestions by observing what her mother creates and how. During one visit, Fiona tells her mother that she is “the best idea maker.” Emery seems pleased when Fiona asserts her independence and continues to support her when she asks for it.

Visits to Like Site

Fiona and Emery’s behavior in the gallery-style spaces closely reflected their observed behavior while at The Speed, with the pair splitting and observing the environment independently. Like at The Speed, Emery reads most of the information available about an exhibit, while Fiona is more fluid and moves from exhibit to exhibit, spending more time looking and glancing, and only stopping to focus on one or two artworks that appear to be of interest.

At some point, the two reunite to seemingly “touch base” before moving back into their own methods of exploring the spaces. During the second off-site visit, Fiona carries a notebook that she spends time working on but is reticent to share with Emery.

Similar to their behavior in Art Sparks, Fiona and Emery work closely together in interactive spaces. Toward the beginning of these visits, Fiona appears less interested in some of the interactive spaces but gradually opens up as she acclimatizes and becomes comfortable with the interactive space. Once this happens, she works closely with Emery to manipulate the interactive element and participate in the activity identified. This period of adjustment was consistent in all the like-site visits that included an interactive element.

Motivation & Values

Emery says a primary reason she takes Fiona to The Speed Art Museum and Art Sparks is a desire to “expose” her daughter to art, which she believes will hopefully lead to Fiona developing her own interest in art. Additionally, Emery says Art Sparks is a place where she can take her daughter to “run around,” “see new things,” and “get her hands on things she doesn’t normally get to have her hands on.” While Emery says her daughter has plenty of access to different types of materials and mediums at their home, at The Speed Fiona can expand her interests and “be involved” with activities that help expand her “personal discovery.” In addition, Emery highlights the benefit of not having to clean up messes created while working on art projects at home, saying:

I don't always want to take out the art materials in the house and it is great to go somewhere else to make a mess and not worry about paint on the walls or whatever, or have to clean up at home on top of everything else I have to do.

Emery says the greatest value of visiting The Speed and Art Sparks is that it increases the communication between them. While at home, Emery explains that the two of them often separate into different areas of the house and “do their own thing” while at The Speed they tend to engage in more dialogue. Additionally, Emery indicates that Art Sparks also opens up opportunities for her daughter to talk with other adults.

Emery says that while at The Speed she enjoys taking her daughter to view artworks in the galleries and then following up with a visit to Art Sparks. Having the opportunity to go to Art Sparks following a visit to the galleries is beneficial, Emery says, because Fiona can make comparisons between what they saw in the galleries and the objects found in Art Sparks. She says being able to make those connections makes it “more real,” adding, “Instead of you thinking about what was going on hundreds of years ago in this painting, she can make it up for herself.” While Emery says she and Fiona would still visit The Speed if Art Sparks did not exist, she says it would have “taken longer” for them to become frequent visitors since at the beginning they used Art Sparks almost exclusively.

When asked what they enjoyed the most during their visits to The Speed during the study, Emery said Fiona's favorite part was the technology, especially the video wall:

It was so novel that she could use her body to create a picture without having to have any real specialized skills and she could jump in and create something different every time and was fascinated by it.

As for herself, Emery said she enjoyed spending time in Art Sparks the most because it provided a space where her Fiona could just sit down and relax and read and “have fun while learning.”

Thinking about their visits to like sites, Emery explains that as a homeschool parent she finds it easier to teach Fiona when she follows her daughter’s interests. She also says that if she did not take her to visit new places and have new experiences, it would be impossible to identify what those interests are. She explains:

I cannot guess what her interests may be. Rather than coming up with the things myself it is better to take her out and about and expose her to different things and see what takes her fancy.

Similar to the way she values The Speed and Art Sparks, Emery says one reason for visiting the like sites was to increase communication among her and her daughter. Emery reinforced that, at home, it is very easy for the family to fall into doing their own thing and the off-site visits help bring the family together.

When asked what they enjoyed most about their visits to the like sites, Emery said that while she enjoyed all the visits, the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft was less targeted at child or family audiences. The Frazier International History Museum and the Louisville Science Center, on the other hand, were perceived as being similar to Art Sparks in that both were “kid-friendly, creative environments that accommodated short attention spans.”

Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like Sites

As discussed, Emery was able to identify similarities between The Speed and the like sites in that each help foster greater communication among the family and provide opportunities to see and do new things. During all of the visits (like sites and The Speed), Emery also noted that she and her daughter focused on discovering new things and engaging in experiences that they can’t necessarily do at home. One noted difference between The Speed and the like sites was the idea of “making things,” which the family said they did more of at The Speed.

Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study

Visits to The Speed appear to fit within the Sheridans’ larger learning agenda. As a homeschool parent, Emery utilizes visits to The Speed to connect their museum experience with Fiona’s more “formal education,” for example, linking the art to history and language lessons. Other connections to the family’s overall learning were also cited. Emery explained how after doing an art activity in Art Sparks with the research assistant, Fiona extended the experience at home and how since then she and her daughter have reproduced the activity several times. She added, “we laughed a lot when we did it the first time and it is a good memory.”

When asked about the effect of participating in the study, Emery said that she started to be more cognizant of her and daughter's "anti-social tendencies." Emery described Fiona as being "reserved" and "non-talkative." Since the study, Emery said she has taken more opportunities to encourage Fiona's interpersonal relationships and "get her more comfortable with unusual situations." As an added benefit of the study, Emery said they valued receiving the complimentary membership and being included in the activities at The Speed: "We felt valued by The Speed and knowing what was going on and being part of it made us appreciate our relationship with The Speed a lot more."

VISIT PATTERNS

	The Speed Art Museum	Like-Sites
Average time spent	94 minutes (Entire visit) 64 minutes (Art Sparks)	122 minutes
Timing of visits	Fiona and Emery always visit on the weekdays from roughly 11:30 am to 1 pm. Day of the week seems to fluctuate, as they visited on a Wednesday, a Thursday, and a Friday.	Fiona and Emery always visit on the weekdays from late morning to lunchtime.
Order of visits	The Sheridans always visit Art Sparks first. During the first visit, the family spent the majority of their time in the family gallery and the art studio, although they also made brief stops at a few galleries and the gift shop. On the second visit, the family only visited the family gallery and the studio arts, and on the third visit, they visited the family gallery, a special exhibition, and the gift shop.	Emery and Fiona visited together on all occasions. The first visit was more observation in style, with the second and third visits including interactive activities.

Snapshot

THREE VISITS TO THE SPEED ART MUSEUM

Visit 1



February 2010
1 hour 30 min.

Visit 2



March 2010
1 hour 38 min.

Visit 3



March 2010
1 hour 31 min.

THREE VISITS TO LIKE SITES

Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft



March 2009

Frazier International History Museum



August 2009

Louisville Science Center



January 2010