

The Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum, St. Louis, MO

“Star-Spangled Center Interpretive Exhibits, Educational Programming and Assessment”

Running time: 7:47

[children talking at once]

VERY FEW PEOPLE REALLY GET TO SEE THE OVAL OFFICE.

CAN I BE THE PRESIDENT?

AND KIDS JUST SEEM TO BECOME EMPOWERED WHEN THEY ENTER THERE AND SIT BEHIND THE PRESIDENT'S DESK. YOU KNOW, I THINK IT REALLY GIVES KIDS THE NOTION THAT ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE AND THAT THEY, TOO, COULD BE PRESIDENT. I MEAN, IT SOUNDS REALLY CORNY, BUT IT'S TRUE.

THREE, FOUR, FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT.

THERE'S AN AWFUL LOT OF FAMILIES WHO DON'T GET TO WASHINGTON, D.C., AND MAY NEVER VISIT CONGRESS, THE WHITE HOUSE.

SO WE REALLY WANTED KIDS TO FEEL LIKE THEY WERE THERE IN THE SPACE.

OUR FIRST BILL IS HOUSE BILL 235. SO, CONGRESSMAN, IF YOU WOULD STEP FORWARD, PLEASE, AND INTRODUCE YOUR BILL TO THE HOUSE.

I, RAYFIELD, A MEMBER OF THE MAGIC HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES...

WE DECIDED TO CREATE THE STAR-SPANGLED CENTER AS KIND OF A LIVING EXHIBIT FOR CHILDREN WHERE THEY CAN COME IN AND TAKE ON THE ROLES OF LEGISLATORS, TAKE ON THE ROLE OF MEMBERS OF OUR JUDICIARY, AND EVEN KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BECOME PRESIDENT.

A GOOD THING ABOUT RECYCLING IS, YOU GET TO CLEAN UP YOUR CITY.

YOU DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TRASH TO TAKE OUT OVER THE YEARS, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO PAY FOR TRASH TO GET PICKED UP.

OKAY, WE'RE PASSING IT. AND WHAT'S YOUR REASON?

THE MAGIC HOUSE WAS IN THE MIDST OF A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN, AND THE STAR-SPANGLED CENTER WAS PART OF THAT WHOLE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT. THE MUSEUMS FOR AMERICA GRANT FUNDED THE EXHIBITS, THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, AND AN ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR THE WHOLE PROJECT.

ALL RISE FOR JUDGE SUMNER.

PLEASE BE SEATED.

IN ORDER TO ENTICE A TEACHER TO COME HERE, IT HAS TO BE SOMETHING DIFFERENT THAT SHE CAN'T DO IN HER CLASS, OR WHY WOULD SHE LEAVE HER CLASSROOM?

WE PROMISE... all: WE PROMISE...

TO LISTEN CLOSELY... all: TO LISTEN CLOSELY...

TO EVERYTHING THAT'S SAID IN COURT. all: TO EVERYTHING THAT'S SAID IN COURT.

WE NEVER GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO KIND OF DEVELOP A HOLISTIC PROJECT THAT FUNDS EXHIBITS AND PROGRAMS AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS ALL AT THE SAME TIME. SO, REALLY, IN THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT, EVERYTHING DOVETAILED, AND WE WERE ABLE TO COORDINATE EVERYTHING AT THE SAME TIME.

WE PASSED IT BECAUSE... IT IS GOOD TO REUSE AND...

THE GRANT REALLY MADE FOR A MORE COHESIVE PROJECT, BECAUSE WE KNEW OUR OUTCOMES FROM THE BEGINNING AND WERE ABLE TO KIND OF STREAMLINE AND COORDINATE ALL THE COMPONENTS OF THE GRANT SO THAT THEY ALL TIED TOGETHER.

WHAT IS THIS?

THANK YOU.

IS THIS HOW YOU DO IT?

[bell ringing]

OKAY, YOU MAY VOTE. THIS BILL PASSES. [children cheering] THESE BILLS WILL BE SENT TO THE PRESIDENT.

WE STARTED WITH THE STATE STANDARDS ON--PER EACH GRADE LEVEL, CREATED MODEL PROGRAMMING AROUND THE STATE STANDARDS, AND THEN DEVELOPED THE EXHIBITS TO MEET THOSE STANDARDS.

AS THE PRESIDENT, I AM GOING TO PASS THE RECYCLING BILL. [cheers and applause]

I WENT TO DIFFERENT SCHOOL DISTRICT WEBSITES TO SEE WHAT THEIR INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM CALLED FOR. WE HAD TO BE INVENTIVE WITH THE INFORMATION THAT WE GOT AND SAY, "HOW CAN WE MAKE THIS HANDS-ON? HOW CAN WE INVITE KIDS TO ENGAGE?"

YOU TWO COME UP AND BE THE PLAINTIFF'S LAWYERS. WE NEED ONE MORE CHAIR. NOW, THE PLAINTIFF, THAT WORD SOUNDS LIKE "COMPLAINING" TO ME, SO THEY'RE ALWAYS THE ONES WHO ARE COMPLAINING ABOUT SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS, THE PLAINTIFFS. AND THIS GROUP, THE DOLLARS, ARE DEFENDING THEMSELVES, SO THEY'RE ON THE DEFENSE TEAM. NOW, THEY ALSO NEED SOME LAWYERS.

AND THE WHOLE ROLE-PLAYING THING, IT JUST GETS THEM TO BE ACTIVE MEMBERS. WE WANTED THEM TO REALLY PRACTICE AND PARTICIPATE IN ALL THESE GOVERNMENT PROCESSES.

AND COME HAVE A SEAT IN THE JURY BOX.

THE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AT THE STAR-SPANGLED CENTER ARE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE THEM WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO REALLY DISCUSS, DEBATE, AND LOOK DEEPLY AT QUESTIONS THAT ARE NOT ALWAYS SO BLACK-AND-WHITE.

SO WE'RE GONNA HAVE YOU JUST TURN TO EACH OTHER AND TALK BRIEFLY WHO YOU THINK SHOULD WIN. [all talking at once]

WHAT WE'RE HOPING IN A BROAD SENSE IS THAT THEY ALL LEAVE HERE FEELING MORE ENGAGED AND WANTING TO BE BETTER CITIZENS IN OUR DEMOCRACY. [gavel banging]

OKAY. NOW IT'S TIME TO VOTE.

MY RECOLLECTION OF LEARNING CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIPS IS READING A BOOK, WRITING IT DOWN, BUT TO ACTUALLY STAND UP, PHYSICALLY BE PART OF IT, TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO READ THROUGH THE INFORMATION IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND GET TO A POINT WHERE THIS SCREEN POPS UP AND SAYS, "YOUR LIFE COULD BE IN DANGER. ARE YOU STILL GONNA SIGN?" I DIDN'T HAVE ANYBODY ASK ME THAT WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL.

[speaking indistinctly]

WE SERVE CHILDREN KINDERGARTEN UP THROUGH EIGHTH GRADE, AND THE MIDDLE GROUP IS REAL EASY. YOU KNOW, THE YOUNGER END WAS MORE OF A STRUGGLE, BUT THEY HAVE LATCHED ON GREAT.

JELLY BEANS?

WE HAVE THE LITTLE SCAVENGER HUNT WHERE THEY MAKE THEIR SYMBOLS BOOKLET, AND THEY LOVE THAT.

WE DEFINITELY WANTED TO INCORPORATE SOME OF THE NEWER TECHNOLOGIES, TOUCH SCREEN, AND THAT'S WHAT KIDS ARE STARTING TO KNOW MORE AND MORE.

THERE WAS A HUGE INTEREST FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN THIS SPACE, SO WE KIND OF QUICKLY HAD TO ADAPT WHAT WE WERE DOING AND ADD IN MORE EXHIBITS THAT COULD APPEAL TO FAMILIES.

WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO FUNCTION AS A CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT. WE HOST ELECTION WATCH PARTIES AND MOCK TRIALS FOR STUDENTS. WE'VE HOSTED TOWN HALL MEETINGS. WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO INVITE PUBLIC SERVANTS TO SPEAK TO KIDS ABOUT THE ROLE IN GOVERNMENT. SO IT'S BEEN JUST SUCH A PLEASANT SURPRISE IN THE VERY MANY WAYS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY.

HAVE A SEAT IN THE CHAIR. AND SAY, "ORDER IN THE COURT."

ORDER IN THE COURT.

THE BIG PICTURE FOR THE MAGIC HOUSE WAS TO TEACH KIDS HOW TO BE ACTIVE AND ENGAGED CITIZENS AND TO REALLY EXPERIENCE DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES BEFORE THEY REACH ADULTHOOD SO THEY REALLY KNOW WHAT THEY CAN LOOK FORWARD TO AND HOW EVEN KIDS CAN HAVE A ROLE IN GOVERNANCE OF SOME KIND, WHETHER IT'S ON THE SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL OR IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

IT'S BEEN EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL. I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO TRY TO FILL THESE APPOINTMENTS. I JUST--THEY JUST CALL ME AND SAY THEY WANT TO COME. "I CAME LAST YEAR. IT WAS GREAT. WE WANT TO COME BACK."

A FIELD TRIP TO A MUSEUM CAN HAVE A LIFELONG IMPACT ON CHILDREN, AND IT CAN BE THROUGH INTELLECTUAL GROWTH, BUT IT ALSO CAN BE THROUGH AFFECTIVE GROWTH. WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DO IS INSTILL A LIFELONG LOVE OF LEARNING. WE'RE HOPING THAT CHILDREN'S MUSEUM IS A BEGINNING AND THAT THEY WILL THEN GROW TO LOVE HISTORY MUSEUMS AND ART MUSEUMS.

YOU HAVE OVERRIDDEN THE PRESIDENTIAL VETO. SO YOU GET P.E. CLASS FIVE DAYS A WEEK. [cheers and applause]