

**Exploring the Museum at Night:
Young people's Agency and Citizenship in
Museum-Related Children's Literature and Programming**

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In children's literature and media, museums act as significant sites for stories of children's agency, adventure, and independence. The popularity of these fictional narratives reveals how adult authors and child readers fantasise about children's agency as active citizens in social and cultural life through museum spaces. The museum acts as an apt stage for this fantasy; museums become refuges for both adults and children alike in children's texts, as places of mystery and delight. Thus museums act as stand ins for all human knowledge, from the prehistoric dinosaurs to the art of great global masters to the diverse customs and costumes of a range of places historically and geographically. The representations of museums we see in some fictional texts stand in stark contrast to children's lived experiences in contemporary museums, where their presence is monitored, their actions curtailed, and their participation limited by rigid pedagogic agendas geared towards young visitors. Activist movements of decolonising and queering the museum (Coombes and Phillips 2020; Sullivan and Middleton 2019) highlight the challenges that people of colour and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities have brought to existing museum narratives, but often omit or downplay the potential role of young people as curators and active citizens in these spaces. Critical children's museology (Patterson 2021) has emerged to address some of these gaps in integrating children's perspectives into critical museum research, and we situate our work within this framework and broader ones seeking participatory approaches to children's engagement in public life (see Murphy and Kulkarni and Owens in this volume).

This chapter will explore the spaces between the fantastical representations of museums in children's literature and museum programming inspired by these literary representations, and how these spaces hold the potential for critical interventions. We particularly draw attention to the fantasies of nighttime at the museum and the museum sleepover to unpack questions and contradictions of child agency and citizenship both inside and outside of these texts. Through a discussion of Elaine Lobl Konigsberg's *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (1967), and Milan Trenc's *The Night at the Museum* picture book (1993) in addition to recent texts such as Karen LeFrak's picture book *Sleepover at the Museum* (2019), we explore how children's agency and citizenship are both absent and present in these texts, and what this means for child readers and museum programmers. We discuss the associated programming around these texts in their own museums and beyond to highlight how children's citizenship is both imagined and enacted. Despite the promise of the inspiring texts and fictional narratives, the programming occurs within the constraints of museum rules and regulations, and critical interventions are limited. We argue that museums are significant sites for analyses of children's citizenship as they represent both the past of national heritages and as potentially liberatory venues for imagined futures (Mai and Gibson 2011), and we highlight some questions to encourage a more critical citizenship for young people. This space of critical reimagination holds promise for children to engage their own experiences and knowledge with the broader society in a more participatory and active form. Patterson (2021: 331) argues that critical children's museology is distinctive as an approach in its "upending the patronising view of children as merely passive recipients of museum content and programming, and focusing instead on their capacities for cultural production, critical interpretation, and curatorial innovation." While many fields have argued for participatory, decolonized, and queered museums, they have not taken children's perspectives and contributions seriously, and our approach aims to challenge that perspective by mining the fantastical texts for their glimmers of critical thought.

Citizens in Training: The Museum in Children's Texts

Children's citizenship is a fraught concept, it is assumed and expected, something that needs to be learned, and not equivalent to adult citizenship with its voting rights and legal privileges (Jans 2004). As a characteristic that is imbued by birth in a region by documented citizens, children's citizenship is often a given. Citizenship, in the guise of civics, is a common set of courses in the middle years of education, where lessons about politics, laws, and social responsibilities highlight the knowledge that citizens are expected to have. In Canada, for example, civics and citizenship are taught as part of both primary and secondary school required curricula (Ontario Ministry of Education 2022). The citizenship test that many countries require adults to take to obtain citizenship supposedly contains the breadth of knowledge around geography, history, and politics that a young person would learn in their primary and secondary years. At the same time, children cannot vote, engage in legal wage labour, or own property in most western democracies, and are expected to belong as a dependent to a family unit, which will provide for their needs and training.

Delanty (2000) argues that contemporary citizenship can be broken down into rules, responsibilities, identity, and participation. Children are thus trained as citizens through school, family, and cultural institutions like museums. Alongside the child saving movement of the twentieth century, much of the earliest children's programming in museums had the notion of good citizenship at its core (McCreary and Murnaghan 2019), where good citizens were moral, cooperative, and educated. Since the adoption of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), children's participation in society at large has been foregrounded, and children's participation in museums increasingly valued (Mai and Gibson 2011), yet the importance of regulating children's behaviour in museums is still seen as paramount (Hamer, 2019). Agency has thus arisen as a counterpoint to citizenship: it is not enough to be a passive citizen, following rules and regulations in one's day-to-day life. Active citizenship implies taking a role in working together to build a stronger social fabric (Isin and Turner 2002). Children's agency, their choices, viewpoints, and contributions, are increasingly being valued, as participatory endeavours attempt to integrate multiple stakeholders in

rewriting national narratives (Phillips 2011) and contributing to public discourse (Harris and Manatakis 2013).

Many children's texts, particularly picture books, explore the first set of citizenship elements of rules and responsibilities in museums, where these unique para-public spaces act as sites for education between the home and school (Serafini and Rylak 2021). Consequently, many picture books set in museums model social lessons of behaviour and learning in public spaces. In the *Maisy Goes to the Museum* picture book (Cousins 2009), Maisy is taught how to act in a museum with limited highlights of museum collections. In *Curious George Museum Mystery* (Rey 2017) based on the PBS show of the same name, Curious George and the Man with the Yellow Hat engage in an educational game at the museum through following clues to solve a mystery of a missing bone. *Arthur Lost in the Museum* (Brown 2005) and *Peppa Pig and the Day at the Museum* (Astley and Baker 2015), among many other picture books set in museums, highlight the importance of following museum rules such as not eating in the gallery. Nodelman (2018) describes how engaging with the art museum is different from engaging with picture books: you can touch, play with, bite/rip picture books while museums have an intended mediated distance between the patron and the art and artefacts. Dinc and Alaca (2021) build on Nodelman to examine how non-fiction picture books on art museums and artists may supplement and support young people's learning in art museums through guided play in picture book form. However, while these non-fiction texts extend the embodied experience of artwork at the museum, they continue to maintain a controlled distance from the artefacts. Even Grover, in *Grover and the Everything in the Whole Wide World Museum* (Stiles and Wilcox, 1974), who is on an immersive itinerary through the museum of the whole wide world — is still a model for a relatively passive yet participatory patron—immersed yes, but not free to explore at his own pace or interest—he doesn't have agency over his engagement. Like Grover, young people are encouraged to consume, fantasise about immersion and explore some hands-on interaction with objects in educational programs — but their interactivity is disciplined and confined. Comparatively, in a 1983 (American) Public Broadcasting System special *Sesame Street at the Met Don't Eat the Pictures*, Cookie

Monster does indeed try to eat some of the pictures in the gallery but is repetitively, musically reminded not to in the reprised theme song “Don’t Eat the Pictures”. However, the most disruptive moment is when he sings about his fantasy of consumption of a Modigliani painting of a nude which is described in the language of delicious food and he is almost drooling to eat it. The disruption here is the articulation of the hyperbolic fantasy that pushes boundaries of acceptable social behaviour but ultimately Cookie Monster is a rule-abider.

These rules and responsibilities are seen to enable the second set of citizenship practices, those of knowledge acquisition of national and global histories, and artistic and scientific knowledge. Children are taught how to behave as ideal museum patrons who are good middle-class consumers of knowledge and heritage. These texts geared at young people also assume readers and patrons where children from diverse backgrounds are often not represented (or only superficially) unless related to the contents of the exhibits themselves that may focus on Black Indigenous or other People of Colour in terms of colonial histories and cultures. The specific subject matter varies by museum, but often art, science, as well as national and global heritage are the main areas of study, couched in global frames of the classics and canons. In colonial contexts, histories prefer the narratives and perspectives of the colonizing culture, writing the exoticised other into dependent and subordinate roles (Murnaghan and McCreary 2016), and often as relics of the past instead of citizens of their own nations and cultures. However, as discussed above, museums increasingly incorporate silenced knowledge and topics that had been pushed aside. As alluded to above, the children’s picture book genre has replicated this topical focus in terms of Grover’s everything in the whole wide world museum, and other books that highlight how children’s museum visits can encourage them to be enlightened and well situated for global citizenships.

Agency and Citizenship in *The Mixed-up Files...* and *The Night at the Museum*

In order to explore these questions of agency and citizenship in museum-related children’s literature, we have chosen two important North American cultural texts in *The*

Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsburg 1967) and *The Night at the Museum* (Trenc 1993). These two focus texts extend beyond the models of citizenship and education in the museum picture books to pose wider questions about agency in these contexts. These texts offer different plots, narrative structures, and critical receptions, and point more to the extremes of this literature than its general character. On the one hand, *The Mixed-up Files...* is a Newbery Medal-winning mystery book of children's literature and beloved by librarians has continued to be included on best books for children lists for over fifty years. Its film adaptations have featured award-winning actors Ingrid Bergman (1973) and Lauren Bacall (1995) in the role of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, the narrator whose gravitas acts as a foil for the youthful insouciance of the runaways. This tale offers suspense and a child-oriented perspective on a runaway adventure fantasy, where the sibling protagonists are portrayed as capable, independent, and resourceful in their weeklong visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Comparatively, *The Night at the Museum* is a short picture book that follows one night in the life of Larry, a newly-hired night guard at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Not particularly well-known, or well-received, the title is more recognisable by its adaptations, both as a best-selling eponymous novelisation by Leslie Goldman (2006), and the live action-computer animated fantasy-comedy film franchise that includes *Night at the Museum* (2006), *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* (2009), *Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb* (2014), and *Night at the Museum: Kahmunrah Rises Again* (2022), that expands and alters the tale, where the story and the characters get the Hollywood treatment. *The Night at the Museum* (1993) in its original picture book form is void of children's agency. The eight children that appear in the drawings appear only as observers, relegated to contently looking at dinosaur bones and the sleeping night guard. While children are encouraged to identify with the child-like night guard, they are imagined as citizens in training, and their current existence as obedient children holding the hands of their adult companions.

The Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler presents agency in the behaviour and language of Claudia and Jamie Kincaid who leave their Greenwich, Connecticut home by train, scheming to travel, gather food, find sleeping arrangements, wash their clothes and bodies, and most of all elude the adult gaze inside the Metropolitan Museum that would send them home. While they attempt to get away from their parents and have fun, they find themselves entangled in a mystery to solve, finding clues and using their research resources. This novel is a fantasy of the museum at night as both a protective, safe space for two children who need a place to hide in Manhattan, but also one of excitement, evasion, mystery, and rule bending antics. The young protagonists have a moderate level of agency and freedom to explore but the protective space of the museum is underlined by pedagogic imperatives of museums as educational sites for young people. While the young people have agency without parental authority or supervision, they practice self-discipline following other social rules of the space. Moreover, the text is a fantasy of idealised child patrons who learn about the artefacts, follow tours, sit quietly in galleries, and try to research artefacts like real life curators. *The Mixed-up Files...* invites readers to imagine running away from home and sleeping in the exhibits while also engaging in a relatively educational archival mystery. Zimmerman observes:

The children are not so much running away from home as they are running toward a richer sense of self in context, and they choose museums as the best places to find what they seek. These child protagonists come to know themselves in relation to objects and displays they find in museums. They are observers and would-be curators, but they are also objects themselves (2015: 45) .

But how would this fantasy text be different if Claudia and her brother were represented as visible minorities, not wealthy, white, well-educated suburbanites with New York upper crust cultural knowledge and behaviour modelled at school and home? What if they were young people who were not fully physically mobile and would not be able to hide or access the exhibits in a particular way or young people who were adolescents

(often coded as more dangerous or labelled 'at risk' youth)? Even young people who did not have the same curatorial, archival and academic curiosity or social currency and ingenuity would not have been able to blend in at the museum or to understand why to prioritise certain objects or artefacts in the central mystery around the fabled Michelangelo's Angel.

The experience of running away is focused through the young siblings; however, the narrator is an adult Mrs. Basil Frankweiler—reinforcing this fantasy of agency as an adult one. Claudia says:

'But, Mrs. Frankweiler, you should want to learn one new thing every day. We did even at the museum.' 'No.' I answered, 'I don't agree with that. I think you should learn, of course, and some days you must learn a great deal. But you should also have days when you allow what is already in you to swell up inside of you until it touches everything. And you can feel it inside you. If you never take time out to let that happen, then you just accumulated facts, and they begin to rattle around inside of you. You can make noise with them, but never really feel anything with them. It's hollow.' (Konigsburg 1967: 153).

This exchange illustrates a contradiction between the adult's fetishisation of a slower experiential immersive learning that is often idealised as child-like, while Claudia, the child wants to follow the adult structure of didactic, fact-based learning even in her runaway experience. Mrs. Frankweiler, the omnipotent narrator of the book, instructs the children in an embodied form of knowledge, one that they feel, and chooses to overlook their own feelings of insecurity in the museum that may lead them to have more pressing concerns.

The opening page of *The Night at the Museum* shows Larry the night guard's pleasure looking up in the mirror as he dresses in his "wonderful new uniform with shiny brass buttons," opened boxes with tissue paper on the floor, and his arms spread as he delights in the image, that of "a general, or a policeman, or a pilot" (Trenc 1993: 1). The

masculine, protective identities presented in the text contrast with the childlike image of the guard dressing up, with his scrolly, mauve oval mirror, socked feet, arms spread and fingers raised, with a delighted smile and closed eyes conjuring make-believe or a dress-up moment of glee. The oblique angle of the mirror in the drawing does not reflect the character in the book back to himself, but the angle brings the reader into a triangular formation where they act as the mirror reflecting Larry and his image alike. This explicit reflection invites the reader to see what it would be like to be a museum guard, the notion gesturing to the idea that, unlike a curator with specialised knowledge and training, anyone (even a child!) could be a museum guard. As a blue-collar job, this text points to a less rarified employment with the museum for one who has not necessarily gained all the knowledge that the museum deigns to teach.

As Larry arrives at the museum's main hall, he is greeted by the chief guard, a man with a bushy grey moustache, standing taller and stouter than Larry. The chief guard refers to Larry as "my boy," and gives him an "easy task" to watch over the dinosaur skeletons for the night. Larry is reassured by the chief, as a parent might put their child to sleep, that "everything will be okay. I'll check on you in the morning." (Trenc 1993: 4). Larry's small stature is again emphasised, having to reach above his head for the large door's handle as he closes the door. On the facing page, Larry falls asleep with a smile on his face, slumped in his chair beneath the museum's emblematic Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton in the entry hall.

When Larry wakes up the dinosaurs appear to be gone, and he sets on a quest to find them: their location a mystery to solve. On his tour through the museum's various exhibit halls, the other guards smile at him and ask for his help with "little jobs", which Larry completes dutifully, finding large bones in every exhibit and learning that sometimes the dinosaurs "wander off if you're not careful" (Trenc 1993: 5). Larry's childlike carelessness is emphasised, and his newness to the job reinforced. After learning that all the exhibits come out for the night to stretch their legs, Larry is shocked to observe the feeding and care of all the animals coming to life. William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark exhibit (whose adult figures are sepia toned, playing cards and drinking

coffee in the staff room), refers to Larry as “little fellah” and reveals the joke: that the dinosaurs were playing hide and seek with Larry as an initiation ritual.

At the end of the night, Larry calls “Olly-olly-ox-in-free [sic],” and the dinosaurs return to their places in exhibits for the day, just in time for the museum’s visitors, including six of the eight children featured in the book, to arrive. The chief guard returns and asks Larry to cover the job of a day guard out sick since he (sarcastically) “had a tough job napping among the dinosaurs” (Trenc 1993: 24). The story ends with the adage aimed at the child readers of the text: “So if you see a guard asleep when you visit the museum, don’t wake him up. He might be recovering from a very difficult night,” facing an image of two children smiling at Larry sleeping in his guard’s chair, while the exhibit gorilla in the background shushes the reader to keep the secret about what really happens at night in the museum.

The utility of this text in understanding agency is how Larry’s child-like character demonstrates common adult relations to children: being chided to be careful, being teased when facing new situations, being belittled in their use of diminutive language, being tricked and deceived by the dinosaurs, and being asked to keep secrets when faced with unusual knowledges like the whole museum coming alive at night. While children’s agency is absent in this text unlike *The Mixed-up Files*, the notion that children, as outsiders to museum professions, could provide the museum with a useful contribution through their subject positions lies in wait. Can their unfamiliarity with museum protocol allow them to see, or shine a flashlight on, ways that museums could become more open to critical inquiry? Could their good faith approach to searching for answers lead to new analyses for old puzzles of interpretation? Could their willingness to believe that there are some inherent qualities in artefacts that lead them to emotionally informed readings, or more participatory understandings of the interplay between artefact and action?

Following the popular and profitable success of the first *Night at the Museum* film based on Trenc’s text, with its box office gross of half a billion dollars worldwide, “*A Night at*

the Museum” events and programming spread from New York’s American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) around the world¹. Many of these events follow the same format, with flash lighted self-tours invoking both the notion of an illicit night visit (or the night guard’s preferred tool for their nightly rounds), and the uncovering of a mystery or other collection of clues. Some museums have events that run all night, knowing that children’s excitement around being in the museum exceeds their ability to sleep. Often known as museum sleepovers, these events are generally expensive, with prices around \$150 per person for the family sleepover events, and \$350 per person for the adults-only version at the American Museum of Natural History (2023), whereas smaller regional museums have costs as low as \$60 per person. Some museums have a one-on-one policy for adults and children and others allow up to five children per parent, for example the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada. The age ranges for these programs are also prescribed, with the AMNH allowing ages six to thirteen, and on Scout nights, six to sixteen-year-olds are welcome. Reviews of these programs generally remark that the museums are cold, yet the children enjoy the experience of staying up late and snacking, the search and find activities, and the films that are shown in the galleries where the patrons sleep. Apart from the museum being dark and the time being night, children are not allowed to transgress the museum’s rules, enter many of the galleries, or see the museum exhibits come to life despite the programs’ titles (and the fictional texts they are all familiar with). The sleepover rules are extensive, and registration is required, and dinner and breakfast are often provided. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the sleepover events (including at the AMNH) have been cancelled, while the adult evening museum programming has recently resumed although many museums have reopened these events as lucrative attractions for their growing memberships.

¹ Helsinki’s Night of the Arts in 1989, Berlin’s The Long Night of Museums in 1997, and Paris’s Nuit Blanche in 2001 were some of the precursors to these types of night events although these focussed on a visit (not a stay) and a network of museums and other cultural venues open at night, and less family-oriented programming.

On the 50th anniversary of *The Mixed-up Files...*, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York hosted a programme where young museum visitors were invited to superficially consume the museum and elements of the book in multiple and heavily structured ways including: a classic educational activity of collection–finding objects and exhibits mentioned in the book followed by the remediation of the same activity through a social media scavenger hunt and a selfie station to re-enact the “iconic” book cover. The program concluded with the literal consumption of a book cookie inspired by Konigsberg’s novel (bringing us full circle back to Cookie Monster from *Don’t Eat the Pictures* described above but following the rules of appropriate consumption). Nina Simon in *Participatory Museum* (2010) discusses different modes of participation designed by curators and offered to museum patrons. Following Simon’s framework, the 50th anniversary events offer a superficial level of participation primarily focused on collection or consumption rather than a contributory or critical engagement with the museum exhibits or the narrative of the novel. As observed by Hamer, there is:

a gap between critical work in children’s literature scholarship and the curatorial decisions made in the planning of children’s book exhibits. This is doubly true for those exhibits that prioritize creative hands-on engagement and immersive experiences of the story worlds over critical engagement with discursive representations. (2019: 397)

This is particularly true of texts and programs around the museum at night where fantasies about the museum space and collections are at the centre of the activities.

Karen LeFrak, an author and composer, wrote *Sleepover at the Museum* (2019), a picture book and orchestral accompaniment which exemplifies the line walked between didacticism and fantasy in museum sleepover programs. Since so many children could no longer experience the night at the museum programming, they can through Mason, the lead character in this tale who celebrates his birthday at the sleepover program at the American Museum of Natural History with his two friends for the children readers (and listeners). The dreamy illustrations by David Bucs highlight some of the beloved

sites in the museum, like the blue whale and the long, dark hallways filled with cases. Alongside the story about the children solving riddles in a scavenger hunt and following the map of the museum included in the book, are corny trivia quips about exhibits provided by the children as they contemplate which hall they should sleep in if they win the scavenger hunt. The children's headlamps and bedrolls on their backs in the illustrations point to the real-life encounter in the museum sleepover, which echoed the fantastical encounter in the film, which was based on the picture book! The New York Philharmonic debuted the orchestral piece, introduced on YouTube by Grammy winning producer David Foster (New York Philharmonic 2020), as a part of the "Fun at the Phil" family programming. The dramatic music highlights the imaginative fantasies that come to life in the children's experience of their night at the museum, eventually settling on sleeping beneath the blue whale, although in their dreamscapes they rest on the whales' head as he swims in a pod.

How Children's Citizenship Can Transform Museum Programming through Truth Telling and Reclamation

Inside our chosen texts, children and museums are presented both realistically and fantastically reinforcing assumptions about child learning, participation and curiosity but also representing child protagonists with varying levels of agency in their engagement. However, outside the texts, children's programming at museums has cultivated a more domestic relationship between children and museums through the museum sleepover but intentionally establishes a distance between young people and their direct engagement as active contributors to the museum knowledge and cultures. While museums inside the texts tend to be more fantastical, where children get to sleep, play, and hide their belongings in the exhibits (in Konigsburg's text), or see the museum come to life in the adaptation of Trenc's text, the fantasies of their active citizenship in participating in museum programming and curation have been limited. We argue that we can use the fantastical representations of children's nights at the museum to enhance the experience of children's museum programming. One of the central aims of critical children's museology (Patterson 2021) is to take children's perspectives and

contributions seriously, and our approach aims to mine the fantastical texts for their examples of critical thought as a way to return to the museum programming with an emphasis on young people's agency in the museum space

While museum studies has begun to re-imagine the museum with a focus on civic engagement and dialogue in the public sphere, in Nina Simon's (2010) words as "participatory," very few programmes for young people invite rigorous participation or critique. Young people are not encouraged to challenge or question the museum as an institution through the disruptions proposed by the decolonising or queering the museum movements. Sullivan and Middleton discuss how historically museum curation exemplified "An attempt to create a grand narrative which was at once didactic, encyclopaedic, objective, ethnographic, and intended to educate a 'genuinely interested' liberal, bourgeois audience" (Sullivan and Middleton 2011: 46). The texts and programs discussed in this chapter show how museums continue to sustain the educational elements of creating a grand narrative. There are a few textual examples in the genre, such as the picture book *How the Sphinx got to the Museum* (Hartland 2010), that illustrate how artefacts are created, collected and brought to the museum millennia later, but this text does not delve directly into the political issues around the recent rise in repatriation of objects that were gathered through specious methods during colonial acquisitions.

The National Film Board of Canada animated film, *This is Your Museum Speaking* (Smith 1979), presents an early example of how a filmic text used the museum at night to show some of the ways objects may voice untold histories. Perhaps one of the first children's films to feature the museum's dinosaur skeleton coming to life, this "soft-sell educational piece" (Maltin 1980: 78) invited children to accompany a night guard and his dog to work and experience the exhibits coming to life, guided by Muse, the goddess of the museum. The puzzled night guard does not see the value in the artefacts before his tour guide encourages him to "take what you do know and use your imagination." As an antidote to the adage that "technology is the future," paintings, costumes and artefacts speak to the guard, and let him know that the artefacts belonged to real people. A pair

of moccasins transport him to a precontact moment before European settlers began to settle and trade in North America (bringing disease and violence to these communities), noting that the museum itself is located on Indigenous land. Breaking the fourth wall and looking directly at the viewer, the night guard begins to see how history is embedded in his own city. And the museum's cartographic icon marks it as common to all cities, instead of a specified location as in the texts described above.

More recent multi-platform performance work has taken acts of language and cultural reclamation far beyond this. An album by Jeremy Ducher, a Wolastoqiyik member of the Tobique First Nation, draws upon archival recordings of traditional Maliseet songs at the Canadian Museum of History-not known by young community members (Brocklehurst 2018). The Museum of Vancouver's exhibit "There is Truth Here: Creativity and Resilience in Children's Art from Indian Residential and Day Schools" curated by Andrea Walsh drew upon children's artwork created at residential schools as a form of truth telling:

'There is Truth Here' brings a new line to bear on the role of art as part of children's knowledge, identity, and experiences of Indian Residential and Day Schools. Through paintings, drawings, sewing, beading, drumming, singing, and drama produced by children and youth who attended schools in British Columbia and Manitoba the exhibition seeks to contribute in vital and new ways to dialogues and initiative about truth telling, reconciliation, and redress in Canada" (*Museum of Vancouver* 2019)

The exhibit included audio and video testimonies by the child artists as adults and in some cases their own children to respond to this work decades later, particularly in terms of the role of art as therapeutic, reflective and critical engagement during a period of trauma. Here we can see real engagement with serious issues of critical importance to a more realistic perspective on Canadian heritage. By incorporating children as agentic actors, who created art, who interpret art, and who contribute to contemporary culture, these museum programs are highlighting the best of participatory approaches.

By working with adults, instead of having to evade them (*The Mixed-up Files...*) or pretend to be them (*Night at the Museum*), children's points of view can contribute to the museum, to make richer exhibits that reckon with reality.

Ways Forward: Children as Active Curators and Citizens

Yates and colleagues (2022) have offered that museums can indeed incorporate children's perspectives into museums by focussing on the notion that children are "experiencers" instead of patrons. As both Murphy and Kulkarni and Owens in this volume argue, youth's presence and participation in the public sphere, both in the physical archive and in the virtual world of BookTok, is vital to their sense of agency and citizenship. The fictional texts we have discussed here seem to support this proposition, where children's fantasies about the spaces blur the boundaries between (sleepover) dreams and realities. But what would museum programming that does challenge museum narratives and narratives about children's passive citizenship look like? Patterson (2021) has pointed to the "Anything Goes" exhibit at the National Museum in Warsaw, Poland a superb example where museum curators supported children's lead in designing and executing new technology to make children's fantasies come to life. Children's interest in spooky lighting and violent themes were represented in many of the galleries, with animations bringing new immersive techniques and non-traditional layouts to the display of artefacts. Children's imaginative labels, replete with spelling errors and their handwriting accompanied traditional didactic labels beside artefacts. From activity-based installations like huge crossword puzzles to simple stairs to allow smaller bodies to view artefacts more closely, the exhibit manipulated the traditional notions of citizenship: there were indeed new rules and new ways of educating in this child-directed exhibit. At the same time some of the children's suggestions were limited by adult safety concerns about suspending furniture from the ceiling, or concern about propriety over children's desire to make bedsheets with prints from a painting of a decaying female body. Patterson (2021: 341) points to the importance of "sharing institutional authority with children," and engaging young people in the process of curation, not just assuming they all want dinosaurs to come to life, pharaohs to talk to

them, and to swim alongside the blue whale in their dreams. These realistic contributions help to move the work forward, highlighting how considering children's agency requires working with, instead of on.

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