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Analyzing the Winnie the Pooh Exploring a Classic Exhibit

This review will analyze the digital version of the 2017 & 2020 ROM exhibit, *Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic* looking at curatorial strengths, and challenges.

To begin with I enjoyed how the ROM decided to include this picture-book to be featured as an exhibit. As we had spoken of in class children's picture books are often seen as being juvenile, and not appropriate for academic institutions and conversations. As Simon had mentioned in her 2012 Ted Talk, *Opening up the Museum*, museums are often seen as these "elite institutions" (*Opening Up the Museum...*, 00:00:43). Adding onto this Nobleman in, *The Art Museum as a Picture Book, and the Picture Book as Art*, states how even the art in museums has this preconceived notion of being "complete" (10), and not touchable (9).

Relating this to the exhibit, through emulating the space of the exhibit to be a life-sized recreation of the books, where everything is illustrated in Shepard's drawings, from the bridge visitors walk along (*Inside the Winnie the Pooh...*, 1), to table with drawn on cups and plates

(*Ask ROM Anything...*, 1), it directly contrasts these preconceived notions about museum interaction with art. It challenges the aspect of touching art (Nodleman, 9), but also the idea of Milkis 2

art as “complete” (10), as the exhibit showed Shepard’s rough sketches of Pooh (*Experts and Objects...*,1).

Adding onto this, through directly placing visitors into the setting of the book, and using the setting for interaction and participation, it can relate to Simon’s discussions on using the layout as “invitations for visitors to participate” (*Opening Up the Museum...*,00:00:23). As well, the exhibit being “multi sensory and playful” (*Inside Winnie the Pooh Exploring a Classic Exhibit*, 1), having activities based on the fictional stories, like read-alouds (*In Which Piglet...*,1), and “dress up” (*Teacher’s Resource...*, 1), contributes to this idea of visitor engagement Simon stresses. Although, I think she would question the personal contributions of visitors, as the exhibit seemed to focus a lot on the connection of visitors to the story, but not the interaction between themselves and others.

Another aspect I enjoyed was how this exhibit seemed to focus on a child’s agenda. The exhibit featured a lot of activities related to child learning, such as the competition to design a book character (*Winnie The Pooh Storybook Character Competition*, 1), or how the audio tour incorporated Christopher Robin, as he served as the mediator and asked questions a child might have on the tour (*Winnie the Pooh Exploring a Classic*, Stop 01:*Where it all Begins...*, 1). In Unrath and Luhrmann's article, *Bringing Children to Art and Art to Children*, their agenda for children was strict, as they wanted children to develop these “socratic” ways of thinking by the end of the trip (43). Saying this, having more relaxed attitudes of learning, like this exhibit

does, not only lets younger visitors have an experience of the exhibit, but could as Zimmerman Milkis 3

mentions in, *The Curating Child: Runaways and Museums in Children's Fiction*, create a connection a feeling of belonging to the exhibit (45)

Ending off, the transformation of the exhibit online was not successful because there was no *real* digital exhibit, just links to videos, and activities included in the physical exhibit, and the creation of the exhibit. Although there were some interactive gifs, like bees following your cursor on the *Victoria and Albert Museum* website (*Exploring a Classic...*,1), the websites were hard to navigate. Overall, I feel like there was a loss of opportunity, as there could have been a fun interactive map Pooh could have taken visitors through, and taught about his story.

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*Using Animal Crossing New Horizons In Re-imagining and Critic of The
Boston Children's Museum*

This paper will focus on a museum that lacks participatory methods, *The Boston Children's Museum* in Boston, Massachusetts. The paper will propose gaps within the exhibit and possible solutions inspired by Japanese Nintendo's 2020 game update of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. The paper will be divided into three sections focussing on three gaps found within the museum that hinder its ability to become more participatory. First, the paper will argue a gap in the museum could be the heavy emphasis on learning and preparing child visitors for academic success. The paper will then argue how the museum should adhere more to the causal learning styles players get in *Animal Crossing* and the benefits of this way of learning. Moving along the next gap the paper proposes is how there is a lack of child curation and personalization within the museum. In return the paper will argue how the museum should be more like the gameplay and give each visitor more invitations to curate the exhibits and artifacts and a greater sense of agency. Finally, the last gap of the exhibit this paper will discuss is the lack of community. To solve the final gap, the paper will argue the museum should be more like *Animal Crossing* and have a larger emphasis on community, and importance on visitor involvement and active participation.

To begin with, it is important to give a brief introduction to the game, and why it is

deemed appropriate to re-imagine the gaps within an academic institution like a museum. As Nina Simon mentions in her book, *The Participatory Museum*, the first step to changing is for our institutions to have a “genuine respect for and interest in the experiences, stories and abilities of its users,” (*Pre-face: Why Participate*). Saying that, this paper proposes that the new popular Nintendo game that has released its “fifth” title *Animal Crossing New Horizons* can serve as inspiration. Since quarantine on March 20, 2020 Nintendo’s game *Animal Crossing New Horizons* has become extremely popular amongst audiences worldwide. The game was given the title of “most digital units sold in a single month” but it sold “13.4 million” copies just after “six” weeks of (Zhu 157). In each game a player starts off on a “deserted island” (*Animal Crossing New Horizons Trailer* 00:03:03) where they are the “mayor” (00:00:00). From here, players learn the rules of the game, how to build DIY projects and their curation role on the island to create their own “personal island paradise...,” (*Animal Crossing New Horizons*). Once players advance in the game their island becomes home to more NPC animal characters like the Museum Owl Blathers, Isabelle from Residence Services, Timmy and Tommy from the Island Shop, and eventually players can even invite their friends to their islands with personal “addresses” (*Share Your Community*).

The first gap of *The Boston Children's Museum* would be the heavy emphasis of the exhibits to prepare child visitors for academic learning and their next grade-level (*Play and Learning Resources*). This can be considered a gap as Anderson, Piscitelli, and Everett in their article, *Competing Agendas: Young Children's Museum Field Trips* explains the importance of having a museum that adheres to the agenda of both adult and child visitors are crucial as they “have power to directly influence children's behavior, learning and overall museum experience” (257) and the “learning outcomes of museum” trips (256)”. Within their article

authors discuss how usually these trips are usually “preplanned” and “overlooked with the accompanying adults’ agenda” (254) and by “museum educator’s” (255). The article discusses how these adult agendas usually focus on their goals for the child visitation on the trip, the “content” and “mission” they deem appropriate, and their “time” schedule on how to achieve this (257). Saying this, this paper will argue that The Boston Children's Museum places this overpowering academic agenda onto child visitors. An example of this can be their pre-planned activities on their website where there are “free...learning resources and paid professional development workshops” like “Beyond the chalkboard”, “School Readiness”, and “Parent and Educator Resources” (*Play and Learning Resources*). Also, this heavy emphasis on getting children ready for curriculum learning can be seen first-hand within the museums as the exhibits mimic the classroom setting, such as the *Countdown to Kindergarten* exhibit, and the STEAM Lab where children engage with “hands-on science, technology, engineering, art, and math activities that encourage creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking” (*Steam Lab*). To even the Art Lab being an exhibit where “high-quality arts programs are developed by The Museum staff according to best practices in education and the arts,” (*Visual Arts*). Overall this paper will argue the museum feels very rigid on how child visitors should adhere to these pre-planned learning activities and goals placed onto them essential for their current or next grade-level. Like Anderson et. al’s article mentions the museum trip arguably seems to run on a very “time allocat[ed]” (269) agenda with there being no room for children to learn on their own time or just to be present in the museum and engage within it.

One possible solution for this gap found within the gameplay of *Animal Crossing New Horizons* could be for the museum to cater to a more casual learning style similar to what players have in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. On the official *Animal Crossing* website, their introductory

video for the game begins with explaining how one should not “feel overwhelmed” and players will “make [their] own way at [their] own pace” (*Animal Crossing New Horizons Trailer* 00:00:37) as “everyday is a new day” (00:00:44). The video further explains how within the game one is free “to do what you like,” (00:01:04) and “set...your own goals,” (00:01:07). Further explaining the causal gameplay scholar Jin in his article, *Interactivity, user-generated content and video game: an ethnographic study of Animal Crossing: WildWorld*, explains how *Animal Crossing* contains “two dimensions of narratives ...pre-determined... [and]...user generated” (360). He then discusses how players can either play the game and follow the rules and gameplay of the set NPCs, like Tom Nook. Examples of this in the game are found on the website on how players can actively engage in “Nook Miles” where players collect them through “special activities or as you go about your daily island routine....can use your Miles to access new recipes, bigger pockets, and more!” (*Explore*). Or, Jin mentions that the second option of the game would be for players to focus more on the “aesthetics” and design their island, explore the flora and fauna and create hybrids (363). Likewise Comerford in his article, *Coconuts, Custom-Play & COVID-19: Social Isolation, Serious Leisure and Personas in Animal Crossing: New Horizons* mentions how the game is run on this idea of “serious leisure” (106), and “self-set goals” (104).

Saying this, the game does not push players to complete tasks but rather allow each player to play the game how they would like. Arguably the more time put into the game the more a player will get out of it. This paper will argue through *The Boston Museum* taking up this “flexible and spontaneous (agenda) that can be modified to accommodate children’s interests” (267), and how using a “broad approach” and “interpretive approach” (257) would not only release this academic pressure placed onto children to learn at such a young age and break the stigma of museums being these “socratic” academic institutions (Unrath and Luerra 43), but

would allow for a more child-safe learning environment that adheres to children learning at different paces and in different ways. This would be beneficial for the disabled community as well because this would allow more time for other “modes” of learning (Mayo 81) that their community often does not have as these institutions were originally built to serve able-bodied visitors (*Introduction Episode, Disability...*). Ending off this paper thinks *The Boston Children's Museum* should “throw out the lesson plan in favor of agendas that may be more profitable for children,” (Anderson et. al 269).

Moving along to the next gap of the museum this gap is also created by the overarching “adult-centric power dynamic” (Patterson & Fiend 169) found within the museum, and it is how there is a lack of child curation in exhibits and artifacts. This is a gap as Patterson and Friend mentions in their article, *Beyond Window Rainbows: Collecting Children’s Culture in the COVID Crisis*, the child demographic has historically been overlooked in museums “collecting initiatives” and often features artifacts that adults believe reflect children and their lives (167). Saying this, the article discusses how these artifacts end up being “romanized and reified understandings....that reflect a longer history of excluding children’s voices from museums” (167). *Understanding this gap then, why is it an issue?* This can be explained through Zimmerman’s article, *The Curating Child: Runaways and Museums in Children's Fiction*, where he mentions how objects are an important part for creating identities and making connections “about” oneself through objects (56) calling this “thing theory” (47). Zimmerman discusses how curation is a “deeply personal business” (55) and how it can make a “public space” more “private” (52). Within the article he teaches readers how “objects make meaning and how children discover their own sense of meaning when they see themselves as objects,” (45).

Relating this to *The Boston Children's Museum* although it is “designed specifically” for children this paper argues it does not reflect the children’s voices within the community and does not give opportunities to discover oneself as Zimmerman’s article discusses, and it adheres to the ways in which institutions like museums have been ignoring the child demographic in “collecting initiatives” (Patterson and Friend 167). This lack of curation of objects that adhere to children can be seen with the *Toy Collection* of the museum. This portion of the museum has gotten most of its toys from “Micheal Denker and the support of the Denker family” with toys from “1985 and 1995” (*Toy Collection*). The toys were said to have been bought in the “United States...Germany, Japan, and Spain”, and most are “built” by him and his family (*Toy Collection*). Some of the toys shown included *Snow White, Spiderman, Nauto Osaka from Sailor Moon, Power Rangers figurines*...The article also has a quote from Denker himself mentioning how it was fun for him to “re-discover some of the toys from my youth” (*Toy Collection*). Although perhaps a lot of children might know these characters, they are outdated. As well, they are mostly all donated from one family. As well, the exhibits that could showcase creativity of the children like the *Japanese House Gallery Exhibit* instead feature art from “students at Tohoku University of Art & Design (TUAD)” (*Japanese House Gallery Exhibit*). Saying this although there are creative ideas for the community to engage with in exhibits and the museum does have toys as artifacts they do not showcase child art and children of this era. Children are asked to create but are not given these platforms like these celebrity artists to showcase their work and this paper thinks this is a missed opportunity. Overall the museum seems to lack ways for child visitors to curate the museum and exhibits designed specifically for their age group. Noting this gap a possible solution for this gap found within *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* would be for the museum to allow children a bigger role in curation of the exhibits and artifacts. Within the gameplay, a player is from the start an active agent in the creation of their island (Comerfeld 104). In the introductory video of the game it states how “It's pretty amazing how

many personal touches you can add to your island” (*Animal Crossing New Horizons Trailer*, 00:03:26). The game gives players many options “from fish to catch, bugs to sneak up on, residences to befriend,” (00:01:22). On your island the many “sticks” and natural elements are able to be “collected” (00:01:34). You can “place buildings” anywhere you choose (00:02:47). And you can “create and customize” (00:01:42) elements of your island, clothes to “highlight your personal style” (00:02:43). As well there is a “residence service” where you can make “DIY recipes” from stuff you found on your island (00:03:16). Even on their website they have artwork designed by players of the game (*Create Your Gateway*), and the website itself is arguably catered to the younger audiences as there are moving animations in the background, characters pop up, and the instructions are mostly in the form of videos with no words, it’s easy to understand with Simple step, by steps, games, quizzes, codes, worksheets and printables, unlike *The Boston Children's Museum* website just having articles explaining the academic importance and goals for the exhibits, and being geared more towards the adults. This paper will argue through the museum allowing children a bigger role in the curation of the exhibits, and artifacts could not only allow a greater appeal to children and their agenda, but could also create a more personalized museum where children have these opportunities to connect with objects in ways Zimmermans discusses. Ideas could be how perhaps instead of just one family donating toys the exhibit like the game could offer a sort of trade system to give in an old toy for curation and in return a visitor receives a new one. Taking this idea from the game this paper will argue is beneficial as it will allow for what Patteron and Friend explains of museums being ways for children to curate themselves for future generations. Overall if the museum were to take on this idea of giving children a bigger role in curation they could have opportunities to make connections within the museum, feel a personal connection within the “public space” (52), and have an opportunity to become a part of something larger for future generations to look at

(Pattern and Friend 175).

A final gap noticed within *The Boston Children's Museum* was the lack of community, and opportunities for the children of the community to connect with one another. This is a gap as throughout the course many articles and videos have explained the importance for museums to have communities not only to survive time, but also to create a sense of community and identity. Within the documentary, *Museum in the City*, Dr. Sean B. Murphy had mentioned the history of the Montreal museum mentioning how an institution like a museum is a reflection of a community itself and the “cultural ecosystem” of the community within (00:07:11). Dr. Murphy also mentioned how some museums were created from the “funds...of the community” (00:07:50). Similarity in Nina Simon’s Ted Talk entitled *Opening up the Museum*, she discusses how in our twenty-first century, people are now finding other places to connect with culture, such as knitting in bars (00:01:10), and partaking in science experiments together that are not in museums and are “outside of cultural institutions” (00:01:26). She says to solve this problem for the *Santa Fe Museum* they are trying to create more “invitation(s) to participate” (00:04:22), and showing visitors that the museum “care” about their stories, ideas, and thoughts enough to give them options to share and create (00:05:42). Overall, a museum is supposed to be reflective of a community, but his paper will argue there is nothing really connecting all the exhibits together. It just feels like the exhibits are all separated. Just a space of teaching, not one that reflects the community that lives there, the residents and people that come there.

A solution for this gap found within the gameplay would be to include more “invitations” (Simon 00:04:22) for the community to have platforms and places to engage in and outside the museum with one-another. In *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* a lot of articles found discuss how community and active participation is a main focus of the game. On the official website it

mentions how players should check-in on their islands “frequently so you don’t miss out on anything,” (*Animal Crossing New Horizons Trailer* 00:01:00). Such as how the store shop items change “daily” (00:02:25). How there are options to visit other people’s islands (00:03:47), and this is encouraged as there are fruits and items on other islands that aren’t native to your island,” (00:03:53). As well, an article entitled, *Ten Economic Lessons Learned from Animal Crossing during the Lockdown* by Mateer and O’Roark, further explain this need to be active as your NPC neighbors could leave (102), and how the museum on the island actually gives players an opportunity to contribute to the curation of their island (97). Mateer and O’Roark also discuss how there are time sensitive quests like “Flick”, “CJ” (92), “Gulliver”, and “Wisp” (97). As well, researching about the game, a lot of articles commented on the impressive community outside the game, such as Gandolfi’s article that discusses how there are online platforms, like “Discord” for players to discuss “gadgets and animals” of the game (47). This *Animal Crossing* community online is even seen on bigger platforms like *Youtube* where many creators are uploading videos regarding the game; such as Chase Crossing’s video entitled, *12 Useful Things I wish I Knew Sooner in ACNH*, or Consolecatio’s video on *5 Design Tips to Elevate Your Island Animal Crossing New Horizons*. Saying this, the paper believes how *The Boston Children's Museum* lacks this sense of community the *Animal Crossing New Horizons* Game focuses on and that players have created outside the game amongst each other. As well, on their website there are many articles entitled “Tips and Tricks” that have explanatory videos for the players of the game, unlike how *The Boston Children's Museum* just had pamphlets and worksheets for academic advisors and parents (*Tips and Tricks for Fishing...*).

Ending off, the paper argued *The Boston Children's Museum* lacks participatory methods from three gaps and common associations of adults and museum curators that have been placed

upon children throughout the years. First from the heavy emphasis on curriculum and teachings and wanting to get children thinking in “socratic” ways (Unrath and Luehrman 43). Secondly, from the lack of child curation within exhibits and artifacts designed for their viewership. Finally from the lack of community within the museum. From this the paper had taken many ideas from the gameplay of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* as possible solutions to these issues. Such as how like the game child visitors should be more agency for child visitors to design and curate exhibits for their audience like in the game, and how there should be a larger sense of community like the game focuses on will hopefully help preserve and sustain *The Boston Children's Museum* for future generations. Ending off using a video game as inspiration to fix these attitudes of museums being these places just to worship art (Nodleman 10) could also be a part of this larger academic conversation to break the stigma of games only being for juvenile delinquents, and that they serve no educational purpose in our society and “negatively affect” youth’s “academic performance” (Drummond & Sauer 1). Although these are not the only gaps or solutions to help *The Boston Children's Museum* this begins the conversation into how to re-imagine and create more sustainable participatory museums for our future generation of children. To further continue my work, future scholars could add onto the conversation, or pick out elements of the exhibit that are starting to adhere to more participatory modes of teaching!

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