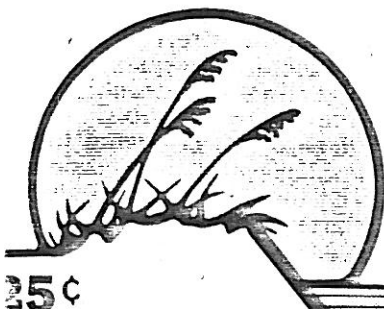


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Death exhibit shown at Children's Museum

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Associated Press

BOSTON — Away from the boisterous noise in the rest of building, hushed children listen to dirges, touch a plastic-shrouded dead frog and peer into an open coffin in a museum exhibit that teaches its young patrons about death.

The exhibit at the Children's Museum here bears a warning — "This is an exhibit about death and loss" — and tells children in a videotaped puppet show: "Dying isn't a vacation. It's not like going to visit your grandmother. You don't come back again."

"We have a commitment to children, to make life less threatening to them," says Janet Kamien, who developed the project with a team of advisers, including child psychologists, authors and clergy. "Parents have a natural instinct to protect their children from the harsh realities and scary, no-no topics in life. This show provides a vehicle to talk about dying and loss."

Ms. Kamien estimates about 450,000 visitors will see the show before it closes in June 1985.

In the sobering exhibit, a TV screen repeatedly shows a speeded-up film of maggots devouring a dead mouse. "Everything that is alive now will die, decompose and return to life," a sign says.

In another corner, a series of drawings tells a young boy's memories of his grandfather's

death, and concludes with, "I still miss him."

A film shows fighting in Lebanon and bloated, bullet-ridden bodies in the streets of El Salvador, and contrasts this real death with make-believe fatal violence, showing a sneering actor shooting a cowering foe, who dies dramatically in a pool of blood, but then stands up, laughs and shakes hands with the "gunman" after an off-screen voice shouts, "Cut! It's a take!"

Violence on TV "can be scary and confusing, even for adults," a narrator says in an even voice.

Painted in big white letters on one wall are slang terms for death: "Put to sleep," "Six feet under," "Belly up," "Croaked."

The most popular display is a dead frog entombed in clear plastic, and children run their fingers over its back, touch its eyes, pull its legs.

"This frog must have died 1,000 years ago," one boy told his mother. "Yuk."

One father urged his daughter to touch the frog. She reached out tentatively, and then drew back. "Is it dead for sure?" she asked. "It is," said her father. "I don't think so," she responded before turning away.

Another part of the exhibit is devoted to the rituals of death, and includes a gravestone, an empty open coffin, burial robes from various religions, embalm-

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Museum-

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ing chemicals and makeup used on corpses.

Children can pick up phones and listen to funeral music from around the world, including Bach, the military farewell *Taps* and songs from Africa.

Parents often linger longer than their children. Asked for their feelings about the show, many youngsters answer, "I don't know."

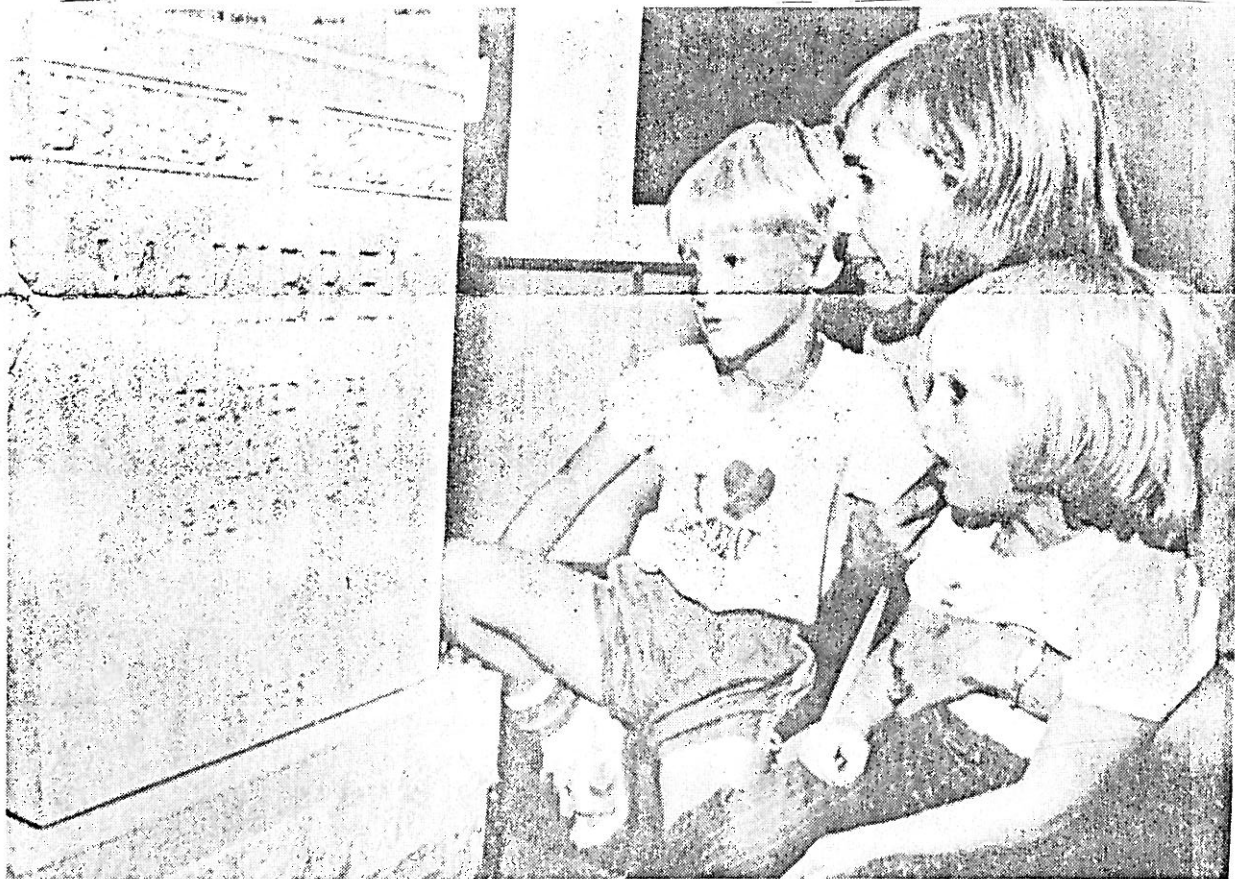
But around the exhibit, children and parents have been encouraged to post their opinions on bulletin boards asking for "talkback."

"I like this exhibit because I love my grandmother dearly and the doctor said she might die," wrote a girl named Lindy. "And I don't want her to so this makes it a little easier."

"I think the frog was gross!" one note read.

An 11-year-old wrote, "I think your exhibit is OK. But when kids come here to have fun it makes them go home with a sad feeling."

And one 8-year-old boy simply said, "I hate thinking about death."



AF

Learning the inevitable

Andrea Prince of Needham, Mass., holds her children Doug, 7, and Shannon, 4, as they examine a mock tombstone at the Children's Museum in Boston Monday.