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WIGWAM OUTSIDE IN JAMAICA PLAINS

John

H.A.



Neighborhood Exhibit Program

First phase of the Neighborhood Exhibit Program has gotten under way, encouraged by challenge grants from the Rockefeller Family Fund and the Agnes Lindsay Trust in Boston. Matching funds are being actively sought.

As a part of its basic plan to extend Museum experiences to children everywhere, compact easily moved exhibit modules have been packaged and installed in locations where they can be used by many children. First exhibit tryouts, including Microscopes, Math Machines, Reflections, and Zoetropes were tested at the Elizabeth Peabody House in Somerville; the Children's Hospital; the Children's Zoo; at Child Festival in the Natick Mall Shopping Center; Small Wonders retail store in Acton; and at South Boston and Charlestown Boys' Clubs.

Additional experimental installations are in at City Hall and Grove Hall and North End branch libraries. Triple installations are scheduled for Howard Johnson restaurants on the Mass. Pike, and a major tryout at the Whole World Celebration, ethnic festival to be held October 28-31 at Commonwealth Armory.

Wigwam

Whenever you visit the Museum, be sure to stop at the Algonquin Indian exhibit. It has expanded in both scope and size and moved outside, adjacent to the Museum parking lot. Twice as large as the old VC wigwam, the new structure is located in a 16th century forest setting which required some special planting this fall.

Whenever the wigwam is open to the public, a knowledgeable teacher-guide will be there, inviting you to share experiences of an earlier life-style. In the wigwam are the familiar artifacts: skins, snowshoes, mortar and pestle for grinding corn. But now in addition to seeing and touching, visitors will be urged to use materials in related activities planned by Candy Williams, developer for the exhibit. Making soapstone beads, leggings, or corn-husk dolls; playing Indian games, perhaps doing some Indian cooking -- all are in her plans for the winter.

The Museum acknowledges with thanks substantial assistance from Gino's in getting the Algonquin exhibit readied for the fall opening. Gino's provided labor and equipment, dug out loam, contributed new gravel fill and made a new path to the wigwam.

WIGWAM IN VISITOR CENTER,
JAMAICA PLAIN (11.6)

THE WIGWAM EXHIBIT



Training Folder

PURPOSES OF THE WIGWAM EXHIBIT

I. The Creation of a Context*

A full-size Algonquin Indian wigwam was reconstructed to provide a cultural context (a real physical setting) for Algonquin Indian artifacts.

It was assumed that the reconstruction of such a context would:

- A. Lessen the verbal explanations usually necessary to have "dead" objects make sense.
 - The objects would be revitalized by the act of returning them to the kind of context in which they once existed.
 - The objects would, by their placement in an Indian home, again be convincing as real objects once used by real people.
- B. Create an Indian place where people could really interact with Indian things.
 - Objects could be used as they were meant to be used by the people who created them,
 - emphasis would be on DOING rather than TELLING; the visual and verbal would be enriched by active use,
 - people would have the opportunity to do some things the way the Indians did.

II. The Destruction of Stereotypes

It was assumed that exposure to an Indian context would lead to the breakdown of false stereotypes about Indians.

Instead of "wild, dirty savages," one finds:

- a neat, comfortable home
- well-established family and village living patterns
- reasonable solutions to the basic human problems of survival

Instead of crude, primitive utensils, one finds carefully worked artifacts that required skill and patience to create.

*If you are interested in a more detailed explanation of these ideas, read the paper "Presenting Cultures to Children, Doing Things the Way the Indians Did," by Joan Lester. A copy is in the library.

PURPOSES OF THE WIGWAM EXHIBIT

III. The Establishment of Indians who lived in Southern New England

It was realized, after extensive curriculum study, that educators did not distinguish between the Indians who once lived in Southern New England and other Eastern Woodland groups - especially the Iroquois (a New York group).

The exhibit tries to establish:

- A. The form of an Algonquin home - A WIGWAM, not a longhouse not a tepee.
- B. The dress of the Algonquins
 - no fringed leggings, no feather bonnets
- C. The "look" and "feel" of their daily life
 - no enormous cornfields, no fully permanent settlements
- D. The natural materials available in this area, especially the sea resources available to coastal groups
 - oysters, cod, crab, quahog
- E. The absence of False Face masks, peace pipes, horses, buffalo, etc.

STAFFING THE WIGWAM EXHIBIT

Interpreting the Exhibit

I see the role of staff member changing gradually from that of a quiet observer to that of a "good teacher." Ideally, the child should be free to enter and poke freely about the wigwam without having to talk to staff. Then, as the child begins to question, the staff is there to lead him as far as he is interested in going- answering questions, suggesting further objects to be explored, offering Discoveries, etc. I do not think that a staff member should feel compelled to start talking and explaining the minute a visitor enters the wigwam. There is a great deal to be absorbed and the quieter it is, the better. A child and surely an adult will let you know when guidance is needed. Since most parents are no more familiar with the wigwam than their children, I would encourage parents to explore together with their children. I don't, of course, know how you keep a parent from spoiling the "discovery experience" by TELLING all he knows. Perhaps you can come up with some good ideas on this.

There is the question of staff members feeling "out of place," just sitting, like a guard, in the wigwam. If you feel like it, put on the Indian poncho and necklace, kept in the storage pit B. It has helped some staff members to feel more like part of the context. I sometimes solve this problem by taking a skin from the platform and sitting on it, outside the wigwam, under the trees. Having an Algonquin project of your own to work on while in the wigwam might also help you feel more relevant. Once kids are busy exploring, then there is a real teaching job that can be done.

Setting Limits

The limits to be set seem obvious-behavior destructive to the artifacts, or to the setting, or dangerous to a child is simply not acceptable.

SO - no jumping on wooden bowls, batting the birtch bark bucket back and forth, climbing on the wigwam frame, climbing through the wigwam frame, (there IS a door) using the sander for a pestle, using the pestle for a sander, scattering corn all over, grinding corn in the paint mortar, grinding paint in the corn mortar, using spoons for pestles, demonstrating the war club, shooting the bow and arrow, etc., etc. Doubtful though it may sound, I have really seen all of the above happen in the wigwam. Maybe you'll add other examples... I hope not!

I really think there is a great deal to do and be seen in the Museum. I don't think that we have to be afraid to communicate to children and to parents that what the Museum is trying to do is special and that if they would like us us to continue to be able to do it, certain limits are necessary.

11.9

STAFFING THE WIGWAM EXHIBIT (cont)

Maintenance

There is also the inevitable job of maintenance. If all of you could familiarize yourself with the contents of the wigwam (via the diagram and the checklist) it should become very easy, almost automatic, for you to retrieve a misplaced object wherever you see one. If the sander is retrieved from the fireplace by the first person who spots it there, time will not be wasted later on looking for it. The more faithfully this kind of immediate retrieval is done, the less overwhelming the job of the daily maintenance check will be.

Similarly, if you can repair an object on the spot, before it becomes so badly mangled that it has to be removed from the exhibit and sent to the shop for extensive work, time and energy will also be saved. If you would retie the baby when it first starts to slide off the cradleboard, sew up the bow case before it rips wide open, fasten a loose label before it really gets lost, the overall exhibit will last a lot longer. There is twine, a knife and glue in pit B. to help you do this.

Background Reading

I've had staff tell me that the more background reading they do, the more interested they become and the more comfortable they feel in the wigwam.

If you only have the time or interest to read one summary of available information, I would recommend "A Brief Introduction to Algonquin Culture," a copy of which is in everyone's training folder. A second recommendation would be Dickon Among the Indians, by M.R. Harrington. This is the story of a white boy who grows up among an Algonquin Indian group. This is good, easy reading and really gives a feeling for Indian life. Ignore the part about the Delaware ceremonials - we do not know if such ceremonies also occurred in New England. There are three circulating copies of Dickon in the Museum library. Finally, there are the Xeroxed copies of explorers journals and settlers diaries on which most contemporary statements about the Algonquins are based. These copies are all in a green cardboard magazine holder in the library. They do not circulate due to the difficulty of replacing even the Xeroxed copies.

If you are more interested in the creation of the exhibit as an exhibit I would suggest you browse through the looseleaf notebook entitled, The Wigwam Exhibit - How Do We Know/Where Did We Get It? It contains some "fun" pictures and some brief explanations. If you're still interested after that, there

there is the very detailed resource file Algonquin Exhibit Artifacts that records the cost, source of object, source of idea, background information and remarks and illustrations for each artifact in the wigwam. Finally, there is the Detailed History of the Wigwam Exhibit, complete with photos and some conclusions. Copies of all these are also in the library and do not circulate.

If you are interested in tracking down other Algonquin materials in the Museum - Loan Boxes, MATCH Boxes, Programs, Discoveries - you can start finding clues to their whereabouts in The Algonquin Map. Several copies of the map are also in the library.

! KWEH !



Injun Joan Lester

ALGONQUIN INDIAN DISCOVERIES

Four Algonquin Indian discoveries have been developed - "Ring and Pin," "The Bowl Game," "Face Paint" and "Nuts." These discoveries have been "tried out" in the Museum and now seem ready for general use.

Purpose

The purpose of these discoveries is to expose children to the Indian way and to encourage them to participate in the Indian way. From them, children should get a feeling for Indian materials and Indian activities. Even though, in most cases, we have used reconstructions, we have tried to preserve the Indian structure and a sense of Indian materials.

The Indian Way

We are trying to involve children in the Indian way. Indians did not line up for face paint, They applied paint with thought and care. They did not treat ring and pin lightly - it was a lover's game. They did not toss dice without rules; intense evenings were spent playing the bowl game. They did not smash nuts - they cracked them.

The rhythm of Indian life differed from our 20th Century pace. These discoveries should be developed slowly and peacefully with a small group of children. The children should leave the discovery with a sense that they have participated in a specific Indian experience, but not that they have exhausted such experiences. A child, by his questions, may lead you to a specific discovery. If he is interested in the stone mortar and pestle, perhaps he is ready for the Face-Painting Discovery. If the nutcracker fascinates, how about Nuts. If he plays with the modern ring and pin, how about introducing the Ring and Pin discovery.

Staff Preparation

We ask of you that you read and feel the discovery before you actually try to bring it to children. Perhaps you could do the discovery with a staff member already familiar with it. This kind of preparation will help you use it in an Indian way.

Location

ALGONQUIN RESOURCES IN THE LIBRARY

Non-Circulating:

The Journals and Diaries of Early Explorers and Settlers:

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| C. Gates | On the Culture of the Indians of Plimouth |
| D. Gookin | The Indians in New England |
| J. Gyles | The Indians of Maine |
| J. Josselyn | Two Voyages: New England Voyage |
| T. Morton | New England's Memorial/Visits to Massasoit |
| C. Willoughby | The Wilderness and the Indian |
| W. Wood | Accounts of the Massachusetts Indians, 1630 |
| A. Young | Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers/Winslow's Account |

Pertinent Secondary Sources:

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| E. Butler | Uses of Birchbark in the Northeast |
| E. Dodge | A 17th Century Pennacook Quilled Pouck |
| P. Kalm | A Description of Maize |
| W. Moorehead | The Merrimack Archaeological Survey |
| A. Skinner | Notes on Mahikan Ethnology |
| F. Speck | Utilization of Marine Life by the Wampanoag |
| F. Speck | Territorial Boundaries of the Wampanoag... |

The History of Algonquin Indian Activities at Children's Museum - 1964-1970

- General Resource File - The Algonquin Wigwam - How Do We Know?
Where Did We Get It?
- Detailed Resource File - Algonquin Indian Artifacts and Their Sources
- Beyond the Wigwam - Algonquin Indian Map
- Paper to N.E.A.A. "Presenting Cultures to Children, Doing Things the Way the Indians Did."
- Extra set of Algonquin Discovery Booklets - "Ring and Pin"
"The Bowl Game"
"Nuts"
"Face Paint"
- Five Extra Training Folders - The Wigwam Exhibit

Circulating:

- The Indians of New Jersey, Dickon Among the Lenapes by M.R. Harrington