



22 Wall Street New Haven Ct 06511  
203 562 5437

# Connecticut Children's Museum

MetLife Foundation  
and the

## Association of Children's Museums 2005 Promising Practice Award Application

1. Briefly describe your museum's promising practice.

*Creating Readers* is a diverse and inclusive literacy initiative at the Connecticut Children's Museum that recognizes that all children need strong literacy learning skills to succeed in school and in life. It is our promising practice. To 'create readers' we: (1) integrate children's picture books into the Museum exhibits, creating a tapestry of literature to support children's diverse learning styles, (2) help children acquire vibrant language by reading aloud to them in English and Spanish and using American Sign Language, (3) infuse family visits and educational field trips with interactive and enriched, arts-based literacy experiences and (4) provide each visiting child with a book in English, Spanish or Braille.

2. How does your promising practice support issues of diversity and inclusion?

*Creating Readers* is a promising practice that embodies a diversity of learning styles, ethnic diversity and is inclusive. This is realized in the following ways:

*The integration of books into the exhibits creates a tapestry of literature to support children's diverse learning styles.*

The Connecticut Children's Museum creates literacy learning opportunities for children in a multiple intelligences-based museum with a room dedicated to each of the eight intelligences: musical, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, spatial, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic and naturalist. Books are tucked into every corner of the Museum and provide information and a deeper engagement with the exhibits, a rich and resourceful approach that honors the many learning styles of children.

For children who are nascent naturalists, fingers can be trailed along the path of the live ladybugs climbing up and down the twigs in the Naturalist Room terrarium. Puzzled at the clever bug's ability to suspend itself this way and that, the children see the book, *Are You a Ladybug?* by Judy Allen, sitting beside the exhibit. Opening it, they see illustrations and find an explanation for just how that little red beetle walks upside down!

Tomorrow's builders strap on their tool belts, filling them with the tools of their trade, and then navigate the bulldozer through the Spatial Room construction site. There, peering through their goggles, they flip the pages of *Tools*, a cross-cultural picture book by Ann Morris. Future architects busily build at the Box Architecture workbench, inspired to create by the children's book, *Simply Wright: A Journey Into the Ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright's Architecture* by Diane Fleming.

*Children acquire vibrant language by being read to aloud and in many languages.*

Readers are created when books reach across the ocean to the Latin lands many of our visiting families call home, and their children listen to the story of *The Tortilla Factory* or *La Tortillería* by Ruth Wright Paulsen, read aloud in both English and Spanish. The book follows the tortilla in both languages, adding American Sign Language interpretation for the story's colors, from its beginning as green corn grows and is gathered by farmers, to the yellow kernels on the grinding stone and its transformation into a round, white tortilla ready for dinner. A museum tortilla exhibit inspires the children to shuck the corn, grind the kernels and knead the tortilla dough in preparation for making an authentic tortilla to take home with their book.

In the Linguistic Room, children of all ages are enchanted when they enter ... for this is a child-sized replica of the great, green room from the classic children's picture book, Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown. Here is where children can find and touch the telephone, the two little kittens and the pair of mittens, the toy house and the young mouse ... as they call out, with perfect recall, each and every word of the book ... and then tuck themselves, just like the bunny from the beloved book, into bed. Parents and teachers become the 'quiet old lady who is whispering hush', rocking rhythmically while reading the classic picture book aloud in English, Spanish, Hebrew or Japanese while the children on their laps glide their fingers across the Brailled words.

*Readers are created through the infusion of interactive and enriched, arts-based literacy experiences into family visits and educational field trips to the museum.*

Every week, artists, dancers, actors, educators or puppeteers come to read at the well-attended and much-anticipated Saturdays at 2 component of *Creating Readers*. On a day in the Musical Room, surrounded by a collection of drums for children to explore – a steel drum, an ocean drum, a pipe drum and pint-sized African drums - - the children listen as a drummer reads the rhythmic prose of Max Found Two Sticks by renowned author, Brian Pinkney. The picture book depicts Max, a child with abounding musical intelligence, creatively using two falling tree twigs as drum sticks ... making rhythms on the flower pots balanced on his city stoop and the trash cans poised by the curb ... as he imagines himself in a marching band. Read aloud to the children, it inspires a marching and clapping rhythm session where children joyously join in. The durability of this enriched, arts-based literacy experience is evident as the children, at the conclusion of their visit, tuck their copy of the book under one arm as they march to the memory of the beat, right out of the museum.

The Bodily-Kinesthetic room comes alive when a visiting Salsa dancer reads the bi-lingual book, Salsa by Lillian Colón-Vilá. The children follow the story of Rita, the little girl who wants to play and dance the salsa with her family. At the conclusion of the storytelling, the music begins playing and the children sway to the Latin beat as they step and count ... step and count. When they leave, they take their book and experience to add to their literacy repertoire.



The Naturalist Room hosts a group of children gathered to listen to A Walk in the Rain Forest or Un Paseo por el Bosque Lluvioso a bi-lingual story of a little ant who travels alphabetically through the beautifully illustrated rain forest pages of this book. The children reach for the matching finger puppet as the reader turns the page to “D ... a dazzling Dragonfly”. Next is “E ... an elegant Emerald Tree Boa” and the children form a long line to support a visiting boa constrictor for a unique and hands-on literacy experience that brings true dimension to the pages of their new children's picture book.

*Creating Readers provides each visiting child with the gift of a book in English, Spanish or Braille.*

*Creating Readers* recognizes that all children, particularly those living in impoverished circumstances, need books of their own to read and strong literacy learning skills to succeed in school and in life. Through *Creating Readers*, the number of books in both children's home libraries and the book collections in their early childhood programs is increased, and reading opportunities are broadened, by the gift of 5,400 picture books annually.

Children visiting through *Educational Field Trips* as well as those attending the *Saturdays at 2* family literacy programs, all receive high-quality children's picture books in English, Spanish or Braille. To complement the Museum's *Saturdays at 2* literacy program, the featured book is transcribed into Braille for children or their parents who are blind or visually disabled. These Brailled books are made accessible with specially made audio CDs

of sound effects to accompany the book. When the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor book, Rap a Tap Tap by Leo Dillon, was read, children who are blind or visually disabled heard the sounds of tap dancing and several artists singing Mr. Bojangles and received a copy of the CD with their book.

Our readers include American Sign Language teachers. Using the literacy platform of the Eric Carle book, From Head to Toe, a reader reads aloud alongside the ASL teacher signing the story. As the catchy storyline unfolds, visiting children learn the signs for the dozens of animals within it, animatedly mirroring the sign language teacher. As they leave the Museum carrying their new book, children also carry with them the memories of the signs they have learned to enfold in their bedtime story time re-reading of From Head to Toe.

3. Is your promising practice novel or innovative? Does it inspire a new model for the children's museum field?

*Creating Readers* is an innovative practice that uses a multiple intelligences children's museum and its programs to provide multiple entry points to literacy for children. These include weaving books into the exhibits to make them resource-rich and accessible to children and their diverse learning styles, enriching visits by reading books aloud that are given to children and by creating novel, arts-based and inclusive literacy programs each week to strengthen the engagement of all children with books. As a model, it inspires the children's museum field to embrace literacy as a way to honor diversity and to be inclusive.

4. How have you measured, or how do you plan to measure, the effectiveness of your promising practice? What were/are the goals of your evaluation?

We evaluate the program using visitor statistics. Entry data reveal that families time their arrival to the Saturdays at 2 *Creating Readers* program and often stay two or more hours. They provide positive feedback at receiving a children's picture book at the conclusion of their visit and in conversation with the museum data collection staff who telephone them to talk about the *Creating Readers* program. Educational field trips are solidly scheduled, with teachers organizing curriculum units to match the books given to the children.

5. Is your practice replicable by other children's museums? If so, what resources (time, personnel, funding) are needed? Additionally, describe the merit of replication in other communities.

*Creating Readers* is a replicable practice. Funding for literacy programs is available. When coupled with funding for diversity agendas and for inclusive, accessible programs for children, *Creating Readers*, is possible.

There is merit in placing diversity and inclusion through literacy on the national children's museum agenda.

6. How does your museum's internal management team support your promising practice?

*Creating Readers* is a promising practice created, designed and run by the management team of the Connecticut Children's Museum.

7. How does the promising practice enhance or support your museum's mission or strategic direction?

The *mission* of the Connecticut Children's Museum is to provide children, their families and teachers with innovative and inclusive educational programs in a multiple intelligences-inspired, magical place, rich in resources and rooted in the community.

The Board of Directors develops a comprehensive strategic plan for the Connecticut Children's Museum annually. The need for innovative and inclusive learning opportunities for children, their families and teachers is a driving force of the Museum's strategy as manifested in its exhibits, program design and implementation.

*Creating Readers* is central to the mission of the Connecticut Children's Museum and its comprehensive strategic plan.