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Historic house museums are dynamic learning centers for students. They provide an evocative setting that stimulates imaginations, actively engages students in learning, and inspires further investigation. Whether a local historic site or a national historic landmark, these museums have unique programming and resources that greatly enhance the student learning experience.

A planned visit to an historic house museum places the student in a rich contextual environment that encourages sensory investigation and promotes experiential learning. At its very simplest, the museum provides opportunities for learning and/or reinforcement of ideas, facts and concepts that are part of the students' curriculum. The historic house environment of the museum fosters an aesthetic understanding as students investigate their surroundings by looking, listening, smelling and touching. Students interact with buildings, objects, people, landscapes and documents. As students explore familiar settings, the homes of "people of the past," they make social and cultural discoveries about themselves and others. Through exhibitions and interpretation, the museum presents shifts in attitudes, values and beliefs. Programs emphasize imaginative and creative thought and action. These diverse learning experiences encourage and refine students' critical thinking skills.

A valuable learning experience is one that establishes connections with students' lives. These links make the abstract personal, bringing it into focus as tangible concepts that stimulate further investigation. A historic house museum creates connections with the people, places, objects, buildings and facts that are America's richly diverse cultural heritage. At Roseland Cottage, Historic New England's 1846 Gothic Revival summer estate located in Woodstock, Conn., students walk along the same parterre garden paths that Henry Chandler Bowen walked in 1880. They smell the same scent of boxwood warming in the sun that his guests did when they visited. Entering the garden, students catch their clothing on thorns from the same rose bush that snagged the clothing of the Bowen children as they played. From time to time at Roseland Cottage, the sounds of the modern world recede and, just for a few moments, it could be 1880.

Personal, sensory learning experiences help students draw meaning from activities and stimulate further interest. They generate a sense of curiosity, inviting comparisons and questions. Students are actively engaged in learning and their imaginations are excited at an historic house museum.

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Museums are an excellent resource that educators can use to provide subject enrichment for their students. Teachers are the experts on their students and their curriculum. They are experienced lesson plan designers and activity creators. Museums are the experts on their collections and exhibitions. Working collaboratively, the two can provide unique educational opportunities for students that accommodate diverse learning styles.

A local or regional historic house museum is a rich repository of information and material. Exhibitions serve as stimulating vehicles to transmit the essence of the

museum collection. However, they frequently represent a mere fraction of the institution's relevant material. Contained within a museum's archives is a wealth of primary source material that forms the core of the collection. The documents, photographs, and manuscripts, when combined with the objects, reveal the story of the peoples of a region, and its growth and development. Often focused upon local history, they are the visual displays of the printed word; the concrete examples of the abstract concepts taught in the classroom. Whether used as a reference or as a ready, relevant enrichment to subject study, the museum collection is a valuable tool for the educator.

Collaboration with local educators is a crucial component of museum school and youth group programming. Museum educators view the museum/teacher relationship as dynamic and long-term. Communication and a mutual exchange of ideas and needs are the keys to establishing and maintaining a valuable relationship. Staff rely upon teachers for current information on local curriculum and standards. This enables the museum to maintain programming that is relevant to the needs of area educators. Museum sponsored workshops are one way this is achieved. Sessions can provide in depth exploration of a chosen topic, instruction on how to visit a museum, an introduction to resource material; or can be devoted to the development of unique ways educators can utilize museum collections.

The museum resources available to educators are exciting. Staff work constantly to create innovative ways to answer the needs of today's students. Communication and collaboration between educator and museum staff insure that the site and the classroom form integrated units of study to enable the student to achieve a better understanding of the past through physical history and personal experience.

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Museums are working to create innovative ways to reach their diverse audiences. Recognizing the increasingly difficult task that educators face to "find the time," museum staff are developing programming that goes right into the classroom. Discovery kits, activity packets, museum educator led programs, and video displays are just some of the options available to today's educator.

Discovery kits are an excellent tool for putting tangible objects directly into the hands of the students. Theme based, they add depth to the curriculum. The kits are student directed exploration units, that contain step-by-step instructions, activities, primary source materials, objects, and equipment. They offer inter-disciplinary explorations of a topic through crafts, art projects, games, language arts projects, or experiments. Many educators dedicate one instructional period to an explanation of the kit and, subsequently, students work out a schedule for individual or small group use. Kits may also provide materials for one or more full class activities; or simply provide supplemental material for the educator. All materials are carefully prepared for appropriate curriculum and grade level requirements. Many museums provide kits that contain pre_ or post_visit materials for the class that has scheduled a site visit.

Historic New England's *Programs to Go!* is one example of the mobile field trip. This type of programming brings the museum experience to the school. Programs developed to travel are taught by museum educators, who bring materials directly into

each classroom. Like their counterpart programs at the site, they strive to create a learning experience for the student that promotes meaningful interactions with objects, buildings, people, visuals, and other sources of data, and assist the student in drawing meaning from these experiences. Traveling programs can also serve as introductory sessions, prior to the class trip to the site.

Recognizing that, while an on-site visit is the ideal, schools are often limited by time and resources, today's historic house museums offer an array of options for the educator and the student to participate in the museum experience. Their goal is to create a sense of curiosity and stimulate comparisons, questions and further interest.