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## Interactive Technology

### Introduction and Exhibit Links

Planting Fields Arboretum may not actually be a museum, but its general main goal can easily be applied to any museum: "...preserving and interpreting Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park as the premier public garden and Gold Coast estate for today and tomorrow by educating, enriching, and entertaining the visiting public"<sup>1</sup> Even though Planting Fields is not a museum and may not have many interactive displays, it is unique in that a person does have the opportunity to interact directly with the objects on display. The exhibits are all living plant material, so a visitor will have the opportunity to touch the different types of plants and trees in the arboretum, but this may not be enough for some visitors: "Visitors to museums are no longer satisfied simply gazing at worthy displays of exhibits in glass cases. They expect to be actively involved with the exhibits, to learn informally and to be entertained simultaneously."<sup>2</sup> One such source that Planting Fields Arboretum could utilize is the Arbor Day Foundation. As a member of the Arbor Day Foundation, I have been through their website many times, and I am very familiar with how the foundation operates. This foundation is dedicated to protecting and providing knowledge about trees: "We inspire people to plant, nurture and celebrate trees,"<sup>3</sup> and some of the ways they accomplish this is through interactive pages on their website. Here is the first and main link:

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<sup>1</sup> Planting Fields Foundation, "About Planting Fields" last modified 2017, <https://plantingfields.org/about-planting-fields/>.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Caulton, *Hands-on exhibitions: managing interactive museums and science centers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Arbor Day Foundation, "Home Page" last modified April, 2018, <https://www.arborday.org/>.

<https://www.arborday.org/generalinfo/SiteSearch.cfm?criteria=life%20of%20a%20tree&q=life%20of%20a%20tree>

This page leads to other links that provide the interactive exhibits for learning about trees.

Under the “Pages” heading, the first two links: “[The Life of a Tree](#)” and “[Tree Life Stages](#)” are the most interesting.

### The Life of a Tree Exhibit Features

The first link, “[The Life of a Tree](#),” is a Flash program that allows people to go inside the trunk of an old tree and learn about its different bark layers and lifecycle. A person visiting this page has the opportunity to learn about these different parts of a tree in sections so as not to be overloaded with information. Visitors are given the option to “Click Here” only when they’re ready to move on to the next piece of information: “... visitors can follow their own interests, unconfined by the clock or the bell, for as long as their concentration lasts.”<sup>4</sup> While the inner layers and lifecycle of a tree can easily be explained with an article, this interactive website makes it easier for visitors to understand.

### Audience Examples of Interactivity

Its simple design and bright pictures are perfect for children as they begin their first steps towards learning about the lifecycles of the tree. There is even a wand-waving Cardinal to guide children as they continue through the exhibit and learn more and more about trees. While the Monkey Puzzle Tree isn’t mentioned specifically, the interactive

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Caulton, *Hands-on exhibitions: managing interactive museums and science centers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 19.

website is generalized to include all types of trees. The inner layers of a tree aren't specific to one species, so children can use the general guide as a learning tool for basic tree anatomy.

### Examples of Interactivity in Planting Fields

Planting Fields Arboretum could make use of a website such as this because it'll engage younger visitors and allow them to interact with the trees on a different level. Instead of just looking at the tree from the outside, they could learn about its life and how it functions: "Learning in interactive exhibitions—especially children's museums—is often placed within a context which is familiar to visitors, enabling them to investigate the commonplace in a new way."<sup>5</sup> This way, when a child is taking a tour of the arboretum grounds, he or she can look at a tree with a new appreciation for a different type of life.

### Tree Life Stages Exhibit Features

For those looking for a little more of a challenge when learning about trees, the second link under the "Pages" heading: "[Tree Life Stages](#)," leads to a group of pages that each talks about a different stage of life for a tree and culminates in a quiz at the end: "Tree life stages can be related to human life stages... and begin with the tree's first life stage. When you are finished, see how much you learned with the Life Stage Identification Quiz."<sup>6</sup> There are eight pages in total, including the introduction and the quiz pages, and this exhibit discusses the characteristics of a tree from infancy through

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Arbor Day Foundation, "Tree Life Stages" last modified April, 2018, <https://www.arborday.org/trees/lifestages/>.

end of life. The quiz then produces pictures of trees at different stages, and the quiz-taker must identify the proper life stage. This quiz could be a way for adults to learn while challenging themselves. Instead of just reading an article on trees, the Arbor Day Foundation provides an incentive to get visitors to learn, a 100% score. It is a good way to draw in potential visitors with the opportunity to compete against others on tree knowledge.

### Audience

This quiz is more suited for adults as it requires focus on many small details of each tree picture, and it may be too complex for children to understand. For adults who attempt the quiz, there are no repercussions for a wrong answer; the quiz will simply provide a hint until the right answer is chosen. The quiz is actually quite challenging, so the reader must pay close attention to the traits of each life stage, but, because there are no consequences for wrong answers, this quiz could provide a fun contest between friends trying to best the other's top score.

### Examples of Interactivity in Planting Fields

The arboretum could use this exhibit as a fun way to further their visitors' knowledge on trees and how they act at different stages of life: "Supporters of the interactive movement argue that if visitors are enjoying themselves, it is more likely that they will be learning at the same time. At the very least, it is argued, visitors will take away an enthusiasm for scientific enquiry."<sup>7</sup> The quiz will force visitors to pay attention

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<sup>7</sup> Tim Caulton, *Hands-on exhibitions: managing interactive museums and science centers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 17.

to the different traits of the trees while remaining lighthearted; although, the arboretum could add special prizes to the quiz for those who receive the highest scores, but that would be a future installment after the initial release of the exhibit.

## Conclusion

Even though each exhibit is more centered on a specific type of audience, “The Life of a Tree” for children and “Tree Life Stages” for adults, there is nothing stopping a visitor from trying out each exhibit: “A successful exhibit will shake the visitor ‘out of the glazed and passive role of the ambulant couch-potato into that of the agile mental gymnast.’”<sup>8</sup> Despite the playful designs and colorful pictures, there is still plenty of information for adults in “The Life of a Tree” that they may not have known before. As for “Tree Life Stages,” it may be a challenging quiz, but children can still read the article and take the quiz about the different life stages of the tree. There are also other interactive exhibits in the Arbor Day Foundation website that can be used by Planting Fields Arboretum, such as an interactive tree identification guide. The possibilities for interactive exhibits at Planting Fields are endless, and this arboretum should consider partnering with the Arbor Day Foundation in order to have access to their interactive website exhibits or to give Planting Fields some ideas for their own exhibits.

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Caulton, *Hands-on exhibitions: managing interactive museums and science centers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 27.

## References

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