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Bags of Fun – Sachau o Hwyl

‘Family activity bags to help you explore The National Museum Cardiff’ - Annette Townsend

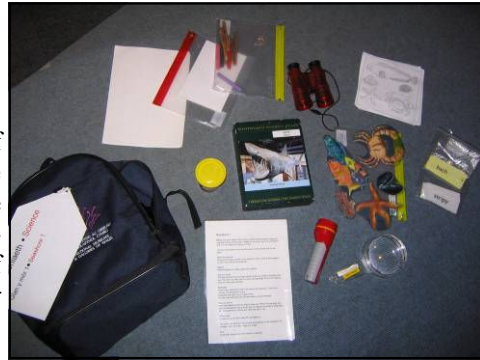
Bags of Fun were introduced at The National Museum Cardiff in the Easter holidays 2006, by the Education team. They are free to use and are financially supported by visitor donations and The Basic Skills Strategy for Wales. When entering the Main Hall, families can now pick up a rucksack which contains equipment and an ideas sheet to help you discover more about a particular area or Gallery in the Museum. There are a total of 24 bags to choose from with many different themes covering both Art and Science.

One Sunday morning I decided to conduct my own visitor research and brought my seven year old son along to the Museum to try it out!

When we arrived we were warmly greeted by the front of house staff who recommended to us, as inexperienced bag users, that we try out Science ‘Seashore 1’ as a good introduction. The laminated card in the front pocket of the rucksack told us to find the right part of the Gallery, ask for some comfy cushions to sit on if we needed them and look at the equipment in the bag. Inside we found a pair of binoculars, a magnifying glass, and a torch which we could use to explore.

We then sat down to have a go at the activities. We were encouraged to draw pictures, identify and match images, describe and write what we could see using words provided, make a model and complete a jigsaw.

Firstly we used the information panels to find the names of all our favourite seaside birds, which we could see with the binoculars even though they were positioned high on the cliff face. Then we matched all our cut out rock pool creatures, and went on to do the jigsaw. It was a photo jigsaw of the huge basking shark which was hanging high above our heads in the gallery, a particular favourite of my son.



The Seashore 1 backpack and contents

We watched the video footage about the basking shark to answer the questions on the sheet and we were soon inspired to make a drawing of our own to take home.

We saved the best till last and modelled a fish from the rock pool out of soft dough, all whilst learning about the need for the soft sea creatures to stay wet when the tide has gone out.

You are told that you can keep the bag for as long as you like during your visit, but you must place the items back in the correct packets and return the bag to the main desk when you leave. A register is taken of your name and address when you first collect the bag and you are signed out when it is returned. The visitor figures for the two week Easter period show that 372 bags were taken out and used by an estimated 1500 individuals. So far only one bag has been stolen from the Museum.



As we had the opportunity to use the items for as long as we liked, we then dashed off to visit the dinosaurs, a priority for any respectable seven year old. On the way we bumped into ‘Bertie the Bison’ and gave him the once over with the magnifying glass!

This is even better than just getting nose to nose with the animals!

The outcome of my visitor survey was that my son thought the bag was ‘brilliant’, and he wants a return visit to try out another one, the dinosaur bag of course. We’ve heard it’s got real dinosaur bones in it!