For more than fifty years the Metropolitan Museum of Art has shown a special concern for children. The record begins in January 1905, when the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees voted to permit “teachers and scholars from the public schools” to come in free on pay days. Guidance in the galleries has been offered to “teachers and scholars” ever since 1908, when the first instructor was added to the staff. The Children’s Bulletin, issued quarterly from 1917 to 1935, the Story Hours presented by Anna Curtis Chandler from 1917 to 1934, and Grace Cornell’s Saturday morning classes in design from 1925 to 1931 were distinguished contributions of subsequent years, contributions that bespeak an interest in the individual child. With the opening of a Junior Museum in 1941, there was for the first time a center for children’s activities, an innovation that caused sufficient stir, even with war in Europe, to command many columns and at least one editorial in New York papers.

Nevertheless, it is surely safe to say that the Metropolitan’s young visitors have never been so happily provided for as they are today, enjoying a choice of activities in the modern and spacious setting of the new Junior Museum, pictured in action in this issue of the Bulletin. In planning this new area nearly four times as large as the original Junior Museum, the comfort, convenience, and visual delight of young people was the primary consideration of the architects, Brown, Lawford and Forbes, as it was of the Museum staff. No mere refurbishing, this complete reconstruction of the south wing of the first floor was made possible by the generous gift in 1951 of $250,000 from the James Foundation.

What is the Metropolitan’s objective in this long-continued attention to the needs and interests of children? The new Junior Museum is another step in the vast program of reconstruction begun in 1950, a program whose aim is to contribute to the realization of the Museum’s chartered purpose, which includes “encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts . . . and furnishing popular instruction.” This encouragement and instruction the Museum seeks to furnish to individuals and groups of various ages. What the new galleries of paintings, medieval and later European decorative arts, arms and armor, the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, the new Restaurant, and the Special Exhibition Galleries do for adult visitors the new Junior Museum does for boys and girls. They, it is confidently expected, will be the advanced students, artists, designers, and interested laymen, the Museum patrons of the future.

The Junior Museum staff seeks to introduce children to the Metropolitan and to help them come to know and enjoy its collections. Sometimes this is simply a matter of encouraging them to come and to look and see for themselves. Usually, though, a certain amount of selection, dramatization, and explanation is required, for children lack the background information so helpful in understanding and appreciating unfamiliar objects from long ago or far away. Techniques used vary with the age of the child and with his purpose in coming. They vary too with the size of the group. Generally speaking, because the staff is small and the attendance large, exhibitions, tours, and auditorium programs that will accommodate relatively large numbers are planned. Through publicity and through appointments an effort is made to attract to a given program children of similar age and interests.

Everything about the new Junior Museum helps the staff in the challenging job of hospitality and interpretation. A separate entrance from Fifth Avenue, adjacent to the new parking area, admits children approaching by bus or on foot directly to the Junior Museum lobby. Here self-service checking racks for coats and parcels, supermarket carts for box lunches, washrooms, and registration desk—all contribute to the comfort and convenience of the arriving visitor. The class or the individual is quickly oriented and
ready to pursue the serious purposes of the day.

A very large, centrally located gallery with modern lighting and low, acoustically treated ceiling provides flexible space for presenting exhibitions installed and labeled for children. The theme of the opening exhibition is The Age of Discovery—By Caravan and Caravel. This subject was chosen because it is richly represented in the Museum collections, is excitingly interesting to boys and girls, and, of utmost importance, is widely studied in New York City schools. In the planning of Junior Museum exhibitions teachers and officials of the Board of Education are always consulted and the presentation is tailored to meet their needs. The exhibition begins with Marco Polo and continues through the active years of exploration up to about 1620. The theme is illustrated by more than a hundred objects from the Museum's collections of medieval, renaissance, pre-Columbian, and Near and Far Eastern arts and is pointed up by photographs, maps, and ship models borrowed from other institutions. Holes to peer into, buttons to push, recordings to listen to, spices to sniff, and a large animated map with a dial to turn have been incorporated to satisfy the child's need to be active. Related objects that can be handled under supervision satisfy the child's urge to touch. Although the age of discovery can be studied in the galleries of the Museum proper, it requires much walking, a great deal of time, and a knowledge of the collections that few teachers and fewer parents and children have. Even with a staff member as guide, the sequence is difficult, the objects, shown in other contexts, do not stand out, and of course the fascinating extras, the push buttons and peepholes, are missing. Special exhibitions have been found to be one of the most effective ways to make the collections live for children. A new special exhibition will be presented in the Junior Museum each September.

Adjoining the exhibition area is a handsome, wood-paneled auditorium seating 279. A thoroughly professional projection booth equipped for continuous showing of 16 mm. and 35 mm. films and double projection of 2 x 2, standard, and 3-D slides encourages the use of a wide variety of illustrative material in programs which complement and supplement the Museum collections. A stage with front and rear curtains and theatrical lighting permits the smooth presentation of puppet shows, music, and dance. Three sections of wall open, accordion fashion, revealing lighted display bays. Here pertinent objects may be assembled and shown as part of an auditorium program. Egyptian sandals and cosmetic jars, animal figures and wall paintings displayed in this way following the play Nitokris and the Golden Sandals, presented in November, were raptly examined by the audiences of children still under the spell of the legend they had just seen re-enacted. Such Saturday entertainments, to which parents may subscribe as a series, are offered monthly during the school year. All are professional productions selected, after preview by the staff, for their high quality and their value in increasing understanding or appreciation of a cultural area represented in the Museum. Served by three entrances, from 80th Street, from 81st Street, and from the parking lot, the Junior Museum auditorium is conveniently located for Museum-sponsored evening events for adults.

The Junior Museum library is very pleasantly situated, with large windows on Fifth Avenue and Central Park. Gay colors, comfortably upholstered chairs and sofas, an acoustically treated ceiling, and some two thousand carefully selected illustrated books make this a restful and rewarding spot even on the busiest days. Here children seek answers to their many questions about art, work on school projects, or spend a quiet hour browsing and looking at chessmen in small, lighted display cases and examples of American painting from the eighteenth century to the present on the walls above the open shelves.

Contributing to the flexibility as well as to the variety and scope of possible activities is the studio, a self-contained, multi-purpose room equipped with display panels, storage units, stainless steel sinks, tables and chairs, a projection screen, and stereopticons. Here changing exhibitions of children's work can be attractively and easily displayed. Here are held Saturday Studio Hours for Members' children. Here school groups sit down and pass around "real" objects that may be touched. Even adults benefit, for a Columbia class has met in the studio each Monday evening this year.
Anyone who has ever escorted children on a trip knows the importance of providing something to eat. Thus it is no surprise that the attractive new Snack Bar seating 204 is bursting with activity from its opening to the public at 10 until its closing at 4:45. It is reserved for classes bringing box lunches from 11 to 12:30 each school day. At other hours it is open to all Museum visitors, serving soup, sandwiches, grilled items, fountain specialties and other beverages and desserts. With five windows on Central Park framing views of the landscaping newly completed by Olmsted Brothers of Boston, with contrasting walls of persimmon and blue, stainless steel counter, columns, and trim, and molded plastic chairs in six colors, the new Snack Bar is light, airy, and gay. It fittingly complements the more formal appointments and more complete menu offered in the Museum Restaurant on the floor above.

After refreshments come souvenirs in the child’s estimation of the extras that contribute to a memorable trip. The Junior Museum’s new sales desk, located in the exhibition gallery near the auditorium entrance, offers post cards, color prints, picture sets, maps, and books about art and archaeology, as well as a few unusual toys and models related to the collections. Happily the new counter is large enough to serve an entire school class at one time and to display virtually everything that is in stock. The Junior Museum staff prepared for Museum publication several souvenir items related to the age of discovery—two new subjects in the school picture-set series, two ship stickers, one of them a bookplate, a crossword puzzle in the form of a caravel, and a perpetual calendar derived from the astrolabe.

Not actually part of the new Junior Museum but adjoining it and planned with children’s interests in mind, is the gallery of models, now nearing completion. Architectural models of ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman buildings are shown, along with casts of associated masterpieces of sculpture. For example, on the wall behind the Museum’s popular model of the Parthenon, newly restored and repainted, is a full-scale cast of a section of the procession from the Parthenon frieze, while on a pedestal near by is a cast of a horse’s head from the Eastern pediment.

Although the new Junior Museum has been planned to meet as completely as possible the needs of visiting children they are by no means confined to its quarters. Weekdays and week ends they can be seen in any of the Museum galleries, often with a Junior Museum staff member as guide. School classes most often seek a first-hand glimpse into some period in history, with the American Wing leading all other collections in popularity. Individual children, who come in after school or on Saturdays or Sundays, are apt to be more interested in knights in armor or life along the Nile. Guidance in the regular Museum galleries is a direct and effective means of interpretation. Informality is the rule. The children sit comfortably on rubber mats and are encouraged to question and to comment on what they see. The Socratic method is a favorite with our lecturers—leading children by a sequence of questions to figure out their own answers through observation and reasoning. Because children like to participate actively in whatever interests them imagining, pretending, and even acting are often made part of a “gallery tour.”

The new Junior Museum can comfortably accommodate about two hundred thousand visitors a year, twice the former capacity. Publicity about the opening has resulted in a press of visitors this year far exceeding anything in the past and often exceeding even the newly doubled checking and seating capacities, particularly in the Snack Bar. This is expected to be a temporary problem, however, one that will solve itself once everyone’s initial curiosity is satisfied.

Do children like the new Junior Museum? Their reactions leave no doubt. They usually whistle when they first see each room, paint pictures of what impressed them most when they get home, and write us “bread and butter” notes full of surprise and enthusiasm. We have included some of their comments in the captions for the photographs which follow.
Two views of the exhibition gallery in the new Junior Museum, which opened on October 11, 1957, with the current exhibition The Age of Discovery—By Caravan and Caravel. The entire Junior Museum is built to a child’s scale, and unusual displays are specially planned to attract and hold the children’s interest. One school class wrote of its visit: “We liked to learn by hearing music, seeing pictures, models, touching and smelling the spices.”
ABOVE: The voyages of several explorers are marked out on a map by series of lights. BELOW: A class, accompanied by a Junior Museum lecturer, looks at a model galleon, lent by the Casa de Portugal.
ABOVE: Children smell the spices that sent explorers around the world. BELOW: A tiny Burmese orchestra seems to be really playing: music sounds at the push of a button.
ABOVE: Showing slides from the projection booth, which is also equipped for 16 and 35 mm. movies. BELOW: The Junior Museum auditorium. Sections of the wall may be opened to display objects related to a lecture or play.
ABOVE: The sales desk, where children can buy post cards, books, and other souvenirs of their museum trip. BELOW: The library, praised by one girl as a "beautiful room with bright colored furniture." Another wrote: "There was a wonderful selection of books, and such comfortable chairs." The collection includes about two thousand books.
ABOVE: Box lunches are checked in the entrance hall. BELOW: The Snack Bar, with gay-colored walls and chairs. It is reserved for school classes from 11 to 12:30 but is open at other hours to the general public.
ABOVE: Children and their parents look at some of the exhibits in the gallery of models, which adjoins the Junior Museum. BELOW: The studio—a lecturer is showing a class objects connected with the Age of Discovery.
LEFT: All the exhibits in the Junior Museum are not be found in the display cases—miniature scenes must be viewed through peep holes. Each scene is described on a label underneath. RIGHT: Some girls examine “handling materials” in the studio and gain a new appreciation of history and geography. Judging from their enthusiastic letters it seems likely that most of the children who have come to the Museum would wholeheartedly agree with this conclusion by one of their number: “I think that the Junior Museum is a lovely addition to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and I plan to revisit it many more times in the near future.”