“Is anyone wearing squares?”, a Junior Museum lecturer asked a group of youngsters participating in an unusual kind of treasure hunt—the “treasure” being squares. Then, before sending them into the galleries to look for squares in works of art, she had the children identify four-sided shapes in slides of objects from the Metropolitan’s collections: squares subtly placed in chairs and sarcophagi as well as those more easily defined in paintings by Vermeer, Seurat, and Albers. The treasure hunt is just one of a great variety of educational activities designed by the Junior Museum to awaken the senses and sensitivities of young Museum visitors by teaching them how to look at and appreciate art.

The Junior Museum offers a full program of events every weekend, most of them free of charge. Staff members introduce the child to art in terms familiar to him, often stressing the “how” behind creating a work of art. With this kind of background the child feels comfortable in the “grown-ups” galleries, and his visit becomes an enriching (rather than awesome) experience. On Saturdays in the library there are art-related games, puzzles, and a story hour for the very
young; in the auditorium a film festival on such diverse subjects as cabinetmaking and Chinese shadow plays, and talks on archaeology by visiting experts; and in the studio one-hour classes in arts and crafts. There are also demonstrations of methods such as brush painting, ceramics, tapestry weaving, and silk screening, and “Let’s Explore,” a program in which children learn artistic techniques and then study examples of the day’s lesson in the galleries. On Sundays there are gallery talks on subjects of particular interest to children: knights in armor, ancient Egypt, and life in the Middle Ages, to name a few. And of course during Museum hours children and their families can visit the Junior Museum exhibition The Artist’s Workshop that vividly presents techniques and tools used in the arts from ancient to modern times. See an unfinished fragment of a Greek drinking cup juxtaposed with a completed vase of the same period; an Iranian pot and the mold used to decorate it; and a lithograph along with the stone from which it was printed. The show includes a prehistoric cave (the first artist’s studio), a Renaissance painter’s workshop, talking labels (hear how stained-glass windows are made as you look at examples of stained glass), and other kinds of audio-visual devices that never fail to delight children. In addition, on weekdays as well as weekends, the Junior Museum restaurant is open for lunch and snacks and for viewing the frequently changing exhibitions installed there. These are devoted to works by New York community groups, while shows in the studio present pictures by children from all over the world, from New York to Taipei.

On school days, elementary and junior high classes, by appointment, see a film and tour specific galleries with a Junior Museum lecturer, who adapts her talk to their study program. By confronting students with artifacts of history—the sculpted image of a pharaoh or an actual ancient tomb—much that seemed remote in the classroom suddenly becomes alive and meaningful. For teachers, the Museum conducts courses on how to use the Metropolitan’s resources and how to make art an integral, relevant part of the curriculum and of daily life.

Children can also join Century II, a program giving them an opportunity to learn about the Museum and its collections in a series of special events. A tour of the Far Eastern Galleries enlivened with stories and demonstrations by a calligrapher, a potter, a dancer, and a musician; a visit with “medieval craftsmen” at The Cloisters; and a lecture by Emanuel Winternitz, the Metropolitan’s Curator of Musical Instruments, followed by a visit to the new musical instruments galleries are some of the events planned for this year. The Century II group, along with members’ children, are invited to attend the annual children’s pageant, and two afternoons a week they are welcome to create their own works of art in the studio, under the supervision of a teacher.

The Junior Museum also provides things for children to do in their free time during summer vacation. Art-history courses, a drama workshop, films, stories, and studio classes are offered during the summer months.

Over one thousand children visit the Metropolitan each day. The Junior Museum is creating and maintaining the interest of young visitors by making available to them more and more activities that are both educational and fun.

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