

Imagine no museums ...

"I believe that a world without museums would be a much less profound, imaginative, creative, beautiful, understanding, curious, tolerant, compassionate, grateful, joyous, peaceful, and loving place."

For many museum-goers, museums are places not only of knowledge, but places of meaning-making, connection, and the future.

"Without museums, we lose a touch point or cornerstone of our humanity. We would have no connection to the historic past or our physical present. We may not be able to learn the lessons of then and now to prepare us for innovating and progressing towards an inclusive and peaceful future. On a more personal note, without museums, I would be pretty bummed out 😞."

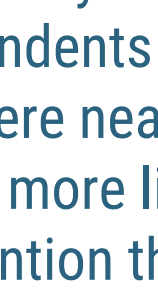


The mental exercise we asked museum-goers to undertake, to simply imagine what life would be like without museums, brought the expansive outcomes of curiosity, creativity, and imagination to mind for many. The sense that museums allow for the act of learning to be far more effective, for dreamers to dream, and for the impossible to be possible, all through these three things:

Curiosity. Creativity. Imagination.

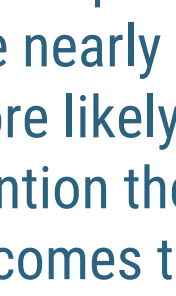
First off, let's consider *who* cares about curiosity, creativity, and imagination.

Two main groups emerged:



Young adults without children

These younger respondents (under 40) were nearly **two times** more likely to mention these outcomes than adults over 60... and they also outpaced parents and guardians of minor children.



People with a more "Open" mindset

These respondents were nearly 1.5x more likely to mention these outcomes than more "Resistant" respondents.¹

1.5x

For many respondents, the outcomes of curiosity, creativity, and imagination are intertwined. Comments tended to mention at least two, if not all three of these things, rather than just focusing on one. Indeed, most of the comments we share in this *Data Story* illustrate that!



But as we kept looking at the responses, we realized there was an implied, somewhat linear, process suggested, with curiosity kickstarting a creative brainstorming that allows the imagination to envision new possibilities.

Curiosity

Why does curiosity seem to come first? Respondents shared that being curious about things that are new or different, or about people who have had different experiences (either in the past or today), was crucial to getting creative juices flowing. That with curiosity, minds have greater capacity to dream, innovate, empathize, and solve problems.

"Even the oddest museums offer challenges and delights because they shake up how you think the world 'must be' and show you different options."

Creativity

Respondents then tended to talk about creativity as the act of playing with new ideas, and combining those new ideas in innovative ways. This was typically expressed through the negative alternative ... that without creativity, there would be a dearth of new ideas, lacking in innovation and progress.

"It would be void of creativity and very conformist and bland."

Imagination

Finally, imagination was expressed primarily as a way that we as humans move forward into the future. That we need to look back to historical areas where we are today, then creatively combine new ideas or perspectives that we can then use to imagine a better future. In some cases, respondents also focused on how we needed to be inspired to use our imaginations to help humanity address the many challenges we face. In others, they suggested individual imagination was necessary for important agency. Some respondents also shared the importance of imagination in delivery of delight, joy, awe, and wonder ... all vital to our wellbeing.

"Without museums we have no community gathering spaces to share experiences and learn about history, art, culture, and what humans are capable of imagining and doing - we need museums now more than ever."

With that, "imagine no museums" evolves into "imagine the possibilities."

Or, in other words,

hope.

As local and world events continue to pull on all of us in different ways, that capacity for *hope*, and the human agency to act on those hopes, seems to matter more than ever. Is this something museums can inspire more of? If so, how? And how do we do this work effectively when so much seems to divide us rather than unite us?

This seems like a critical line of inquiry, and so we've made both "imagination" and "hope" themes for the 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers. Because clearly there is more we need to learn from museum-goers on these outcomes and needs.

"We strive to be better people, showing more humanity and kindness. We often lack the skills or knowledge on how to do this. Museums can guide us to these realizations."