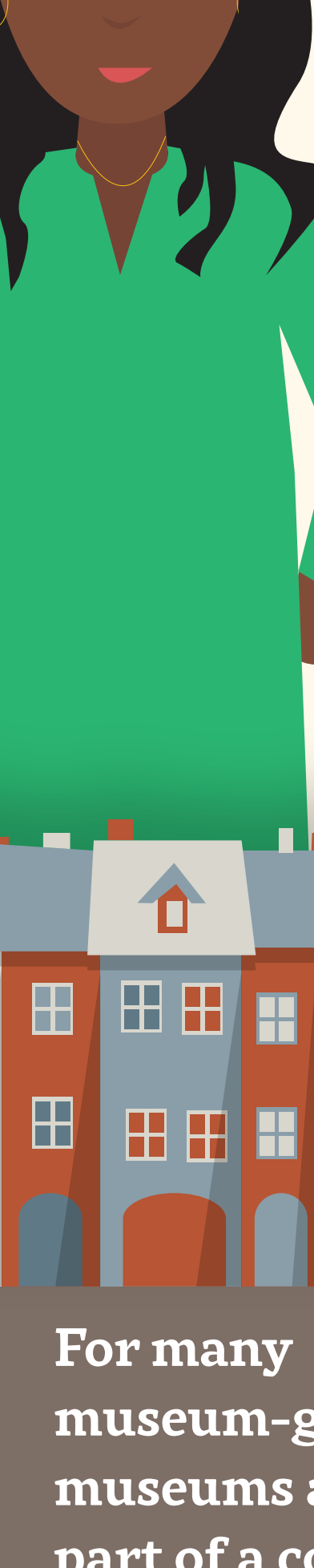
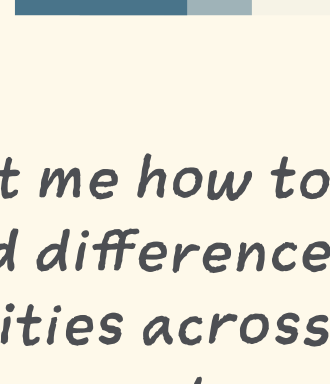
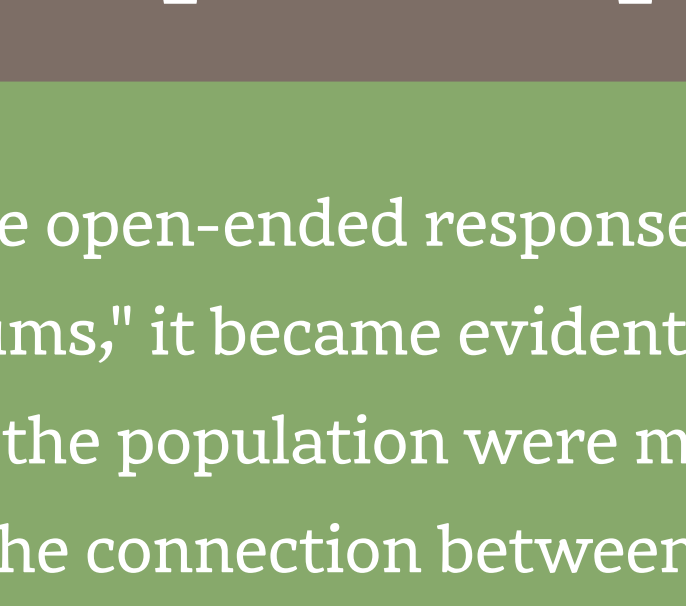
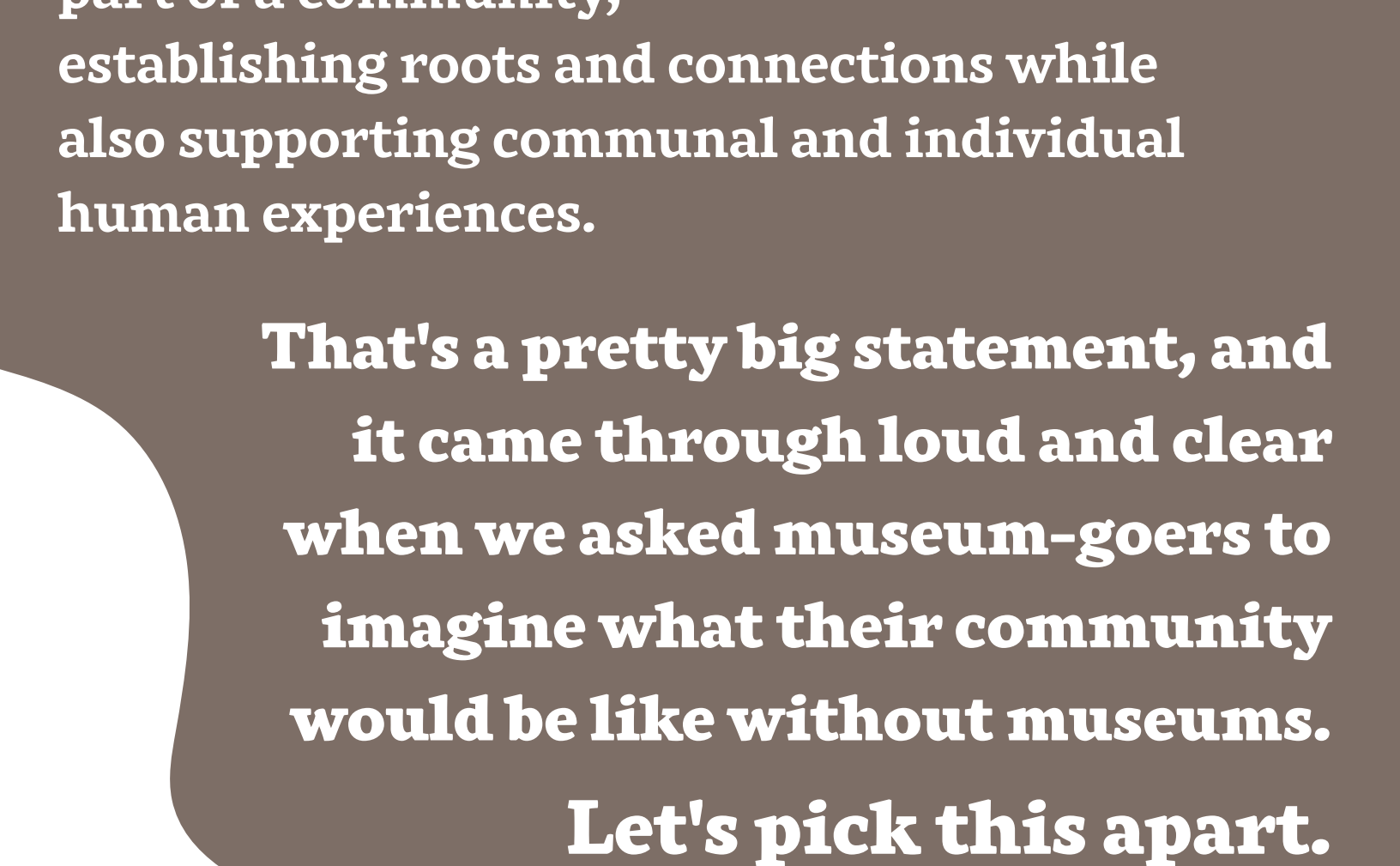


Imagine no museums ...



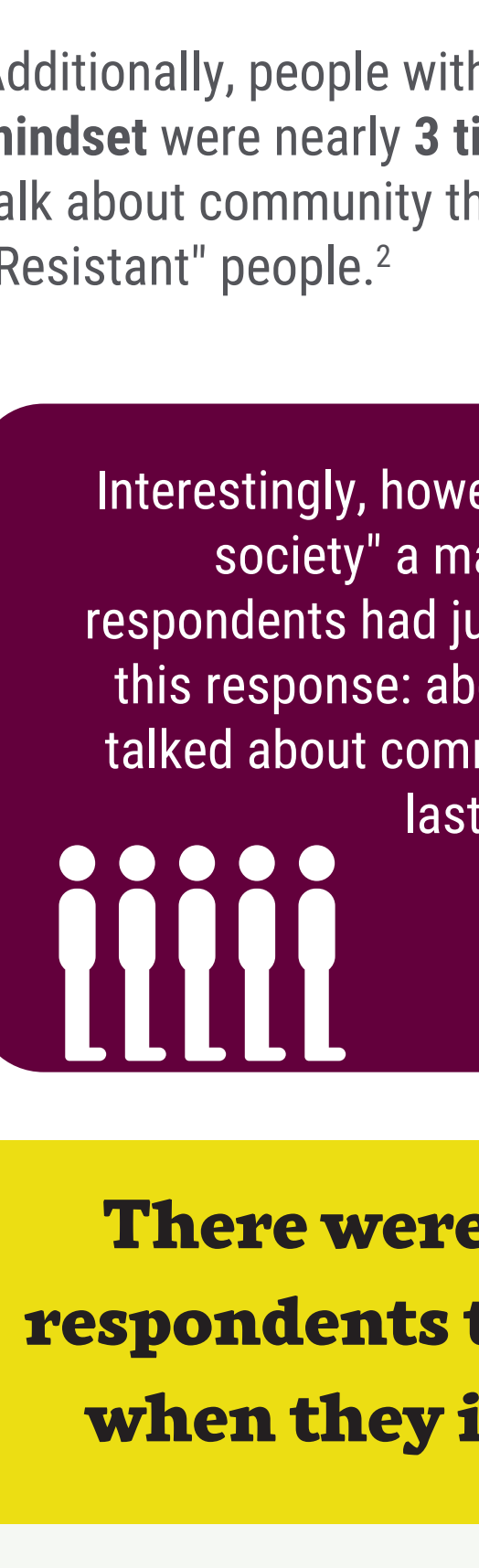
"As a child, museums taught me how to welcome and understand difference while searching for similarities across humanity at large. Museums are places in which we can imagine, dream, and connect to the past while building a better future. They are the lenses through which we understand all of humanity. The world would be a lot less bright and happy without them and Chicago, the greatest city in the world, would be even dimmer. Museums hold us together and they are an important pillar of society. That will never change."



For many museum-goers, museums are a vital part of a community, establishing roots and connections while also supporting communal and individual human experiences.

That's a pretty big statement, and it came through loud and clear when we asked museum-goers to imagine what their community would be like without museums. Let's pick this apart.

When we coded the open-ended responses to "Imagine No Museums," it became evident that some segments of the population were more likely to make the connection between museums and community than others.¹



In particular, young adults (under 40) without children care a lot about this community orientation: they were nearly **twice as likely** to mention it than adults 60 or older (parents and guardians and middle-aged adults fell in the middle; this is a pattern we've seen pretty consistently since 2016).

Additionally, people with a more "Open" mindset were nearly **3 times more likely** to talk about community than more "Resistant" people.²



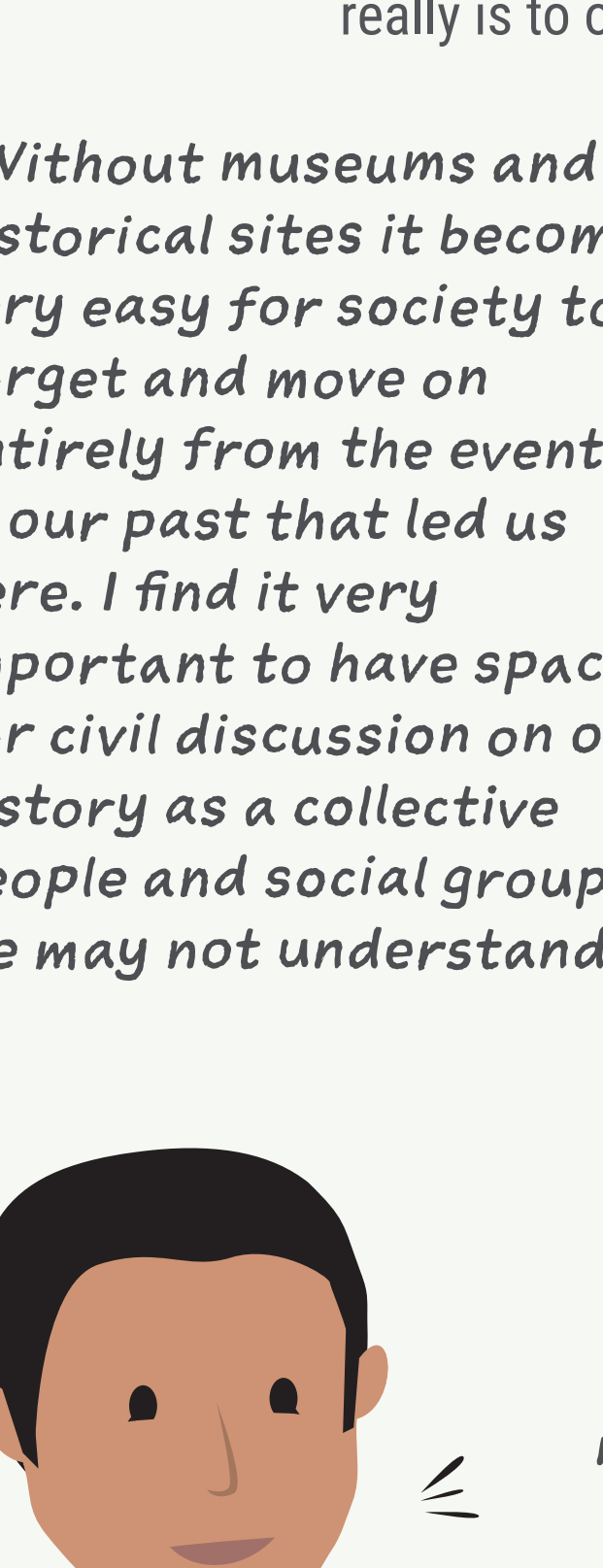
Interestingly, however, our making "civics and our civil society" a major theme of the survey these respondents had just completed did *not* seem to affect this response: about the same percentage of people talked about community in 2023 as in 2018, when we last asked this question.



There were three main ways that respondents talked about community when they imagined no museums:

1 Dull vs. lively

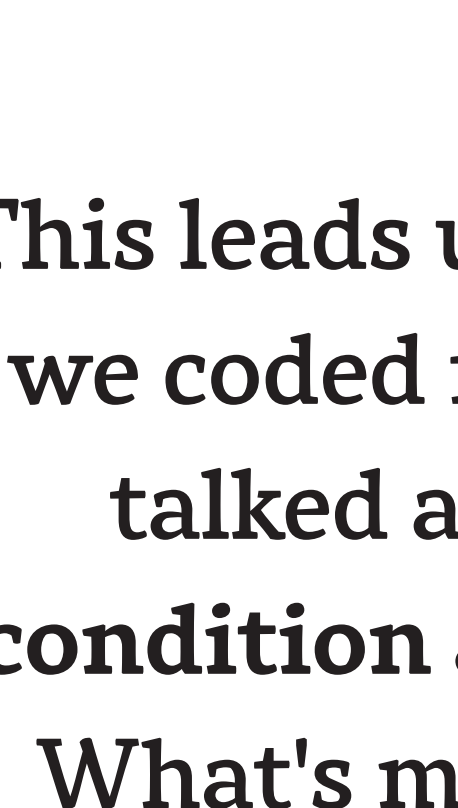
This was most typically expressed with the idea that without museums, communities would be dull and boring. Sterile. Uninteresting.



*"WAY MORE BORING
WAY LESS FUN
WAY MORE LONELY
WAY LESS COOL
... this applies to both me and my community."*

2 Isolation and less concern for others

Similarly, without museums, respondents suggested there would be fewer connections between people and individuals would be more isolated.

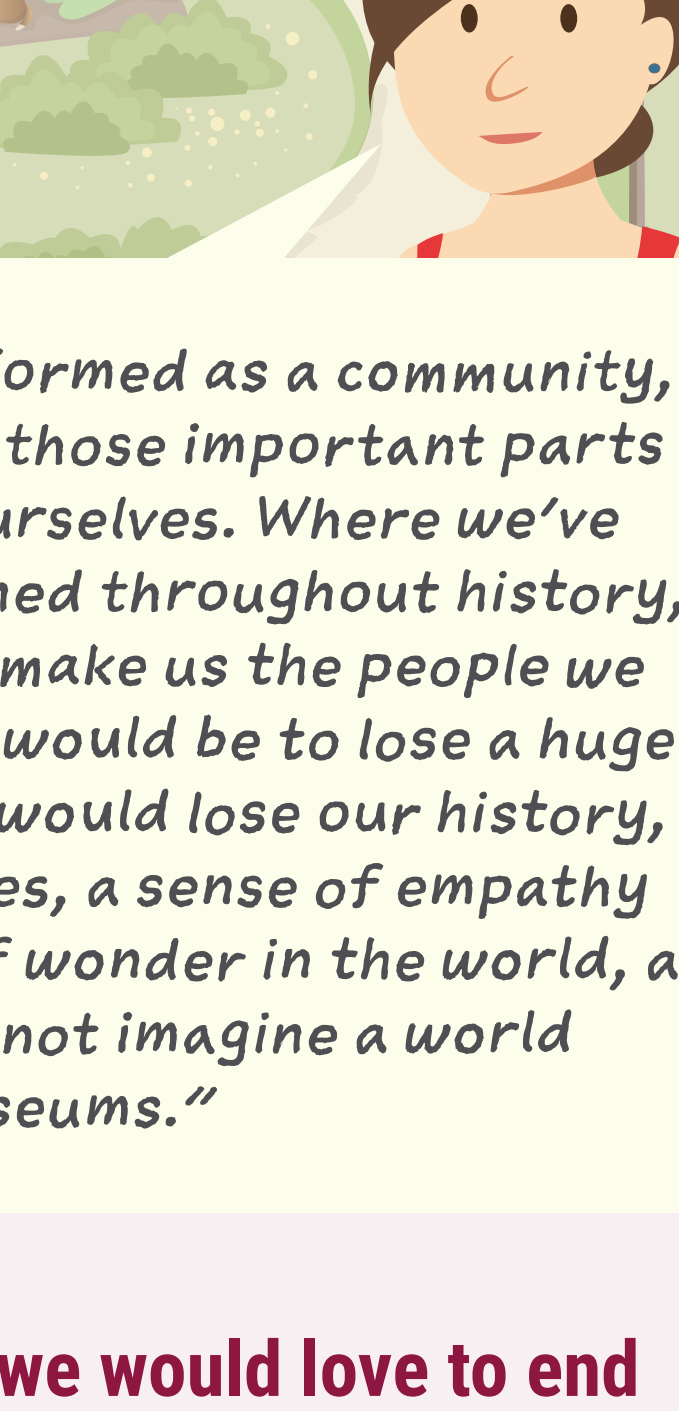


"My community would suffer from a bigger lack of awareness about others and their struggles."

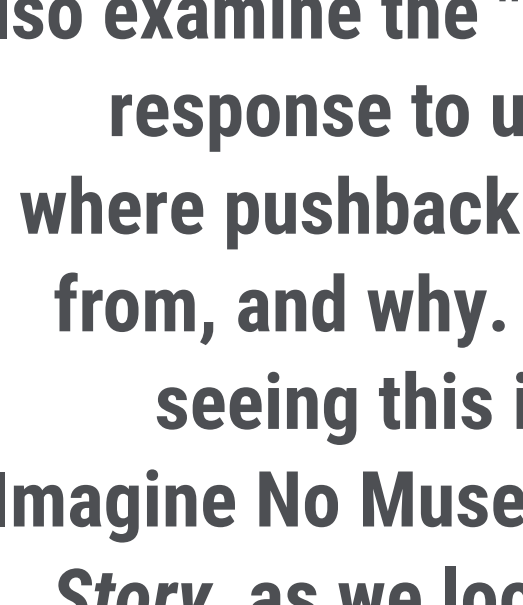
3 Our collective experiences

Here, past and present intertwined in ways that underscore how crucial connection really is to our civil society.

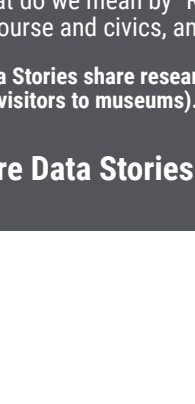
"Without museums and historical sites it becomes very easy for society to forget and move on entirely from the events in our past that led us here. I find it very important to have space for civil discussion on our history as a collective people and social groups we may not understand."



"Museums help us capture stories of ourselves and revisit them as a collective experience. They are a mirror to see ourselves, a window to see others, and a door to engage with others. Without museums, we would have no place to gather and make meaning of our shared world in quite the same way."



This leads us to something else we coded for: responses that talked about the human condition and/or experience. What's most striking about this theme is we *didn't* even code for it in 2018.



This suggests a significant shift. Events of the past five years may have spurred some introspective thinking that yielded a more conscious articulation that our shared humanity matters. (At least, that's one of our leading hypotheses ... we'd love to hear any you have.)



"I think we would be less informed as a community, we would begin to overlook those important parts of our past and even of ourselves. Where we've come from, what has happened throughout history, it has all come together to make us the people we are today. To lose museums would be to lose a huge connection to our past. We would lose our history, our perspective of ourselves, a sense of empathy with one another, a sense of wonder in the world, a curiosity for more. I cannot imagine a world without museums."

As much as we would love to end it here, with these lovely comments, we can't. While many museum-goers would agree with the sentiments shared in this Data Story, not everyone does. We've hinted at that already when we shared that these respondents are more likely to share an "Open" mindset.

In upcoming Data Stories, we'll be sharing far more about the perceived role of museums in our civil society, from civics to our connections to each other. While we will have a lot of good news to share, we'll also examine the "Resistant" response to understand where pushback is coming from, and why. We'll start seeing this in the next "Imagine No Museums" Data Story, as we look at some rather different ideas about our shared history.