

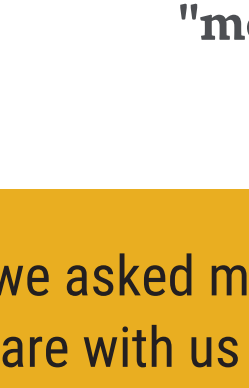
IMAGINE NO MUSEUMS, PART 2: LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

A 2023 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

Imagine no museums ...



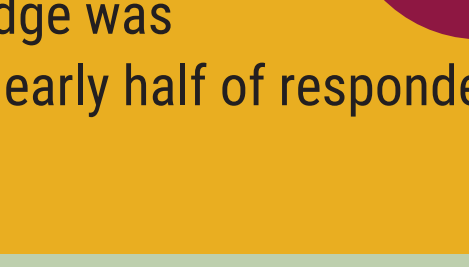
"It would be horrible! Less knowledge and education, empathy, and people would have less experiences of joy and moments of 'wow!' and awe."



For most people, when they think of the purpose and impact of museums, learning and knowledge come immediately to mind.

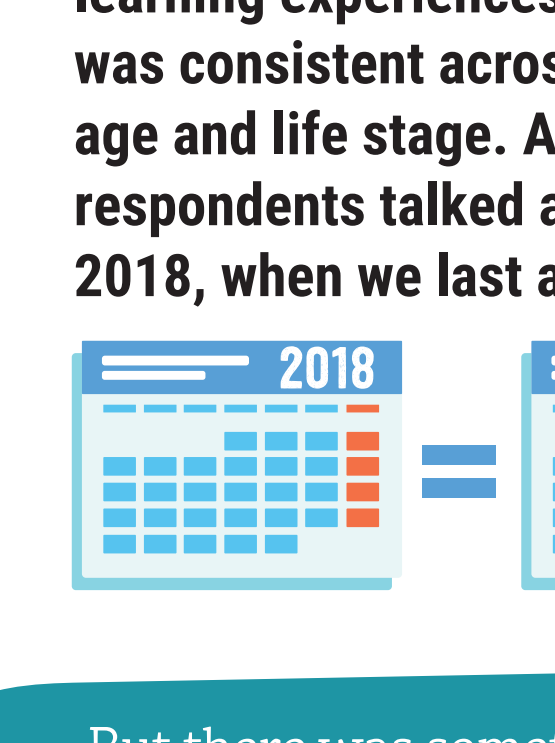
Indeed, 9 out of 10 museum-goers say museums have made them

"more knowledgeable."



That's a great outcome!

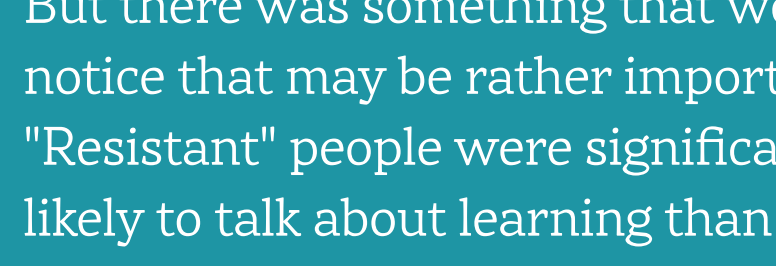
When we asked museum-goers to "imagine no museums," and share with us how they thought their lives and communities would be different without museums, it was no surprise that learning and knowledge was mentioned more than any other impact. Nearly half of respondents mentioned it in their answer.



"The world without museums is like a closed door to the universe of knowledge."

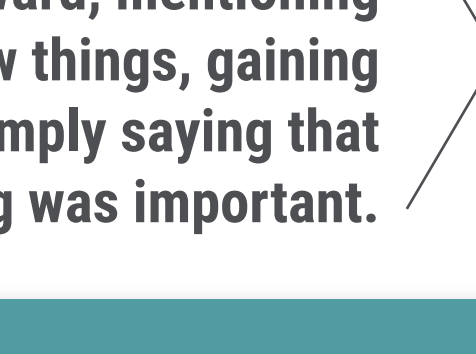


The value of these learning experiences was consistent across age and life stage. Additionally, about the same percentage of respondents talked about learning and knowledge in 2023 as in 2018, when we last asked this question.



But there was something that we did notice that may be rather important: more "Resistant" people were significantly less likely to talk about learning than other, more open and curious respondents. And there were sub-themes where the differences between these mindsets were more dramatic.

What do we mean by "Resistant?" In short, "Resistant" people tend to resist certain types of content that museums often share, especially content that is inclusive, supports climate action, promotes civil discourse and civics, and/or that encourages a connection to humanity. About one in five U.S. adults (and one in five frequent museum-goers) fall in this "Resistant" group. They are a small, but vocal, minority.



"Museums allow me to expand my knowledge and learn about new and different ways."



Most responses about learning were straightforward, mentioning learning new things, gaining knowledge, or simply saying that learning was important.

While most left it at that, there were some respondents that shared deeper, more complex, or more emotional thoughts. These fell into three general categories:

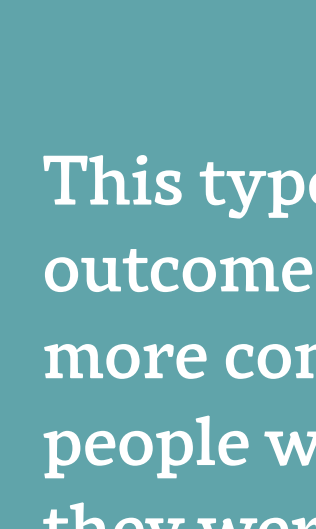
Learning in museums broadens perspectives and/or exposes people to a variety of lived experiences. These responses took that idea of learning and began to explore why that learning matters, underscoring the value of a mind open to different ideas and ways of doing things.



"Museums help us learn about things, and by learning we can broaden our perspective and have greater appreciation and understanding of the world and those around us."

"I would be less aware of the world, of other cultures and peoples, of our global history and relationships. I would be a much narrower and less empathetic person with a limited perspective."

A smaller percentage of respondents went even further, suggesting that **museums are vital to contextual and critical thinking, provide deeper context, increased understanding of others, and embraced and supported complexity, nuance, and empathy.**



Interestingly, respondents in 2023 were **twice as likely** to mention this than in 2018, perhaps indicating a greater awareness and need for this kind of deeper learning experience in our society.

This type of learning outcome was also much more common among people who indicated they were more open and curious to a variety of content; Resistant people were less than half as likely to share these types of thoughts.

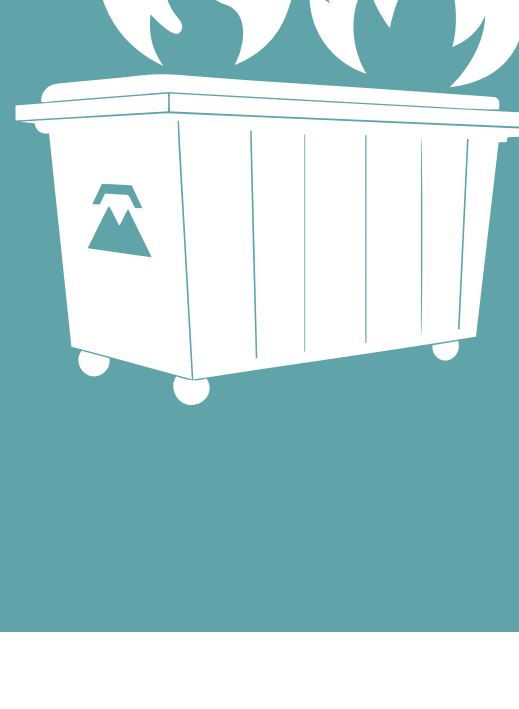


"We would just see and experience the same things, day after day. We would become suspicious and even hateful and fearful of any others unlike ourselves. This is a mindset that breeds selfishness as well and stifles creativity. This is the stuff of the downward spiral into oppression and war."

The third type of learning comment tended to be more intense and emotive: **dystopia.**

Without museums, these respondents suggested that the world would face much greater ignorance, a narrowing of views, and that people would be even more likely to live in bubbles and not consider the experiences of different people, leading to bleakness and strife.

This theme also increased markedly in 2023 from 2018, perhaps a reflection of the increased polarization, distrust, and unrest over the past 5 years.



And once again, the Resistant were far less likely to share these types of ideas than those who were more open and curious.

While these thoughts focused on the knowledge-gaining and learning that happens in museums, there were other impacts that museum-goers felt were incredibly important as well. Over the next few **Data Stories**, we'll be sharing their thoughts about inspiration and creativity, the role of museums in civil society, and look specifically at the value of history (and the role of museums as memory-keepers).

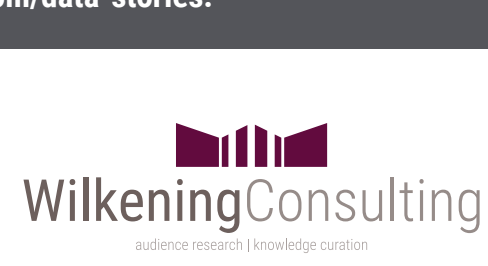


Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
- 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 107,187, 228 museums participating
- 2023 Broader Population Sampling, n = 2,002
- 2017 - 2022 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

*Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums). See the Purpose and Methodology (Update) Data Story from September 12, 2023 for more information on methodology.



American Alliance of Museums



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