

Create.Connect

Things to try: Turning objects into hands-on snoops and reveals

You may find that static labels and objects in cases have a hard time competing with hands-on activities in the same space. In our initial evaluation of the *Create.Connect* prototype, we found that far fewer visitors stopped at historical objects and labels than at the STEM activities. This was an ongoing concern in creating an interdisciplinary experience. We felt that by making the historical elements of the



A costumed interpreter shows off her electric refrigerator- an actual appliance from the 1930's filled with replica food and an interpretive label.

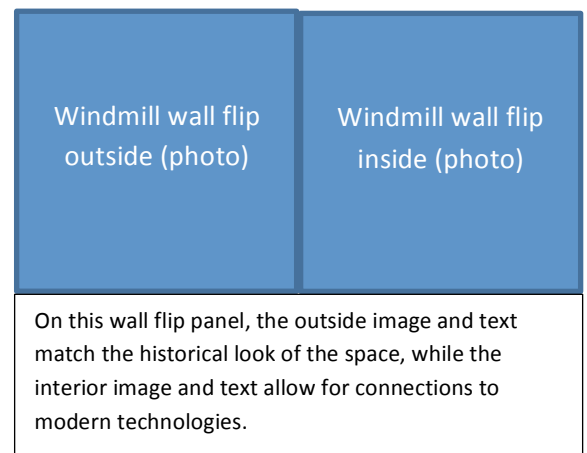
exhibition more hands-on, visitors might be inclined to interact with them more.

Our collections team took authentic appliances from the 1930's and stabilized these already-durable objects to allow our visitors to interact with them in a hands-on way. We also attached labels to the objects using magnets to help visitors make connections between the objects and the historical narrative and STEM principles discussed, as well as to facilitate exploration and interpretation of the historical objects. The labels are only visible when the object is opened, inviting visitors to “snoop” around the space and discover the historical narrative as they do.

In subsequent evaluation these objects were visited by more people than the static labels and images had been. For example, a radio from the 1930's that was exhibited inside a case was stopped at by 5% of children during the Formative evaluation. When a similar radio was displayed outside of a case on side table, where it allowed for hands-on exploration, 17% of children stopped to explore the object. In our recordings of family conversations in the space, we found that these hands-on objects often acted as catalysts for history conversations.

Labels that “flip to the future”

Flip-style wall labels can also be used to allow the inclusion of more modern images and information while maintaining the historical look and feel of the space. For example, in *Create.Connect's* windmill area, wall labels showing historical images can be opened to show how wind power is being used today. Making these kinds of connections, which show the importance of STEM in the past, present and future, helps visitors see the relevance of STEM and why it is important to understand. Connecting historical STEM practices to modern technologies, like wind turbines, has helped families make personal connections to these topics in recorded family conversations.



Using historical media

In *Create.Connect*, we have employed audio-visual media to augment the interpretation and provide another means to communicate the historical narrative in each space. In each space, the communication medium selected matches what would have been most popular at the time. The radio mentioned above was retrofitted with a digital audio device to allow it to play radio programs (produced by Conner Prairie) on the topic of rural electrification. A silent film projected on the wall shows early planes and aviators in the Flight area, and a television from the 1950's has been adapted to play digital content in the Patent Office. Reproduced documents and publications, such as a catalog showing turn-of-the-century windmills from Indiana's Flint & Walling company, also invite exploration and discovery of the historical stories presented. Communicating the historical narrative in multiple modes can help it to be more prominent in the experience.