

The early years programme at the Museum of London

We have been running an early years programme for the last nine years, at the Museum of London and the Museum of London Docklands. We run a varied programme of drop-in and ticketed sessions for under 5s and their parents and carers, both during term time and the school holidays, as well as a programme for Foundation Stage school groups. Our sessions are always designed for adults and children to play and learn together and are based on themes linked to the museum's collections and exhibitions. All our sessions are free to attend.

This document explains how we run our under 5s programme and looks at some of the practicalities we consider.

WEEKLY BABY AND TODDLER SESSIONS

Our weekly sessions take place on the same day every week during term-time only and are a major part of our programming. These sessions always follow a theme that links closely to the collection.

At the Museum of London on Wednesdays we offer:

Mini Moles – a pre-booked session suitable for babies aged 6 months to those who are not yet walking. This session is for 10 babies and their adults and runs from 11am-12pm. Adults are directed by the facilitator to engage in a range of activities with their baby, ranging from sensory games using scarves and treasure baskets, to singing songs using puppets, and dancing along to the sound of a drum. This session also includes a short activity for babies and adults to explore independently for 10-15 minutes, such as a craft activity where the adult creates a London bus prop which they then use to sing 'The Wheels on the Bus' with their child.



Early Years toolkit

Little Moles – a pre-booked session suitable for toddlers who have just started walking up to the age of five years. This session is for 15 children and their adults and runs from 3.30-4.30pm. We also provide a healthy snack at the end. Families engage in a range of free play activities and some activities are always available, such as story books about London and building materials, such as DUPLO. These familiar activities create a safe environment for children, which we hope will then encourage them to be confident to explore further. In addition, there is always a different main activity each week. This could be a craft activity where families create prehistoric footprints of animals that used to roam London, or a physical activity, such as taking part in old fashioned Olympic Games!

At the Museum of London, we hold a messy session on the first Wednesday of the month, where families can engage in messy play activities. On the third Wednesday of the month we run a gallery session, where families get the chance to visit and explore one of the main galleries in the museum.

At the Museum of London Docklands on Mondays we offer:

Little Mudlarks – pre-booked toddler sessions suitable for children who have just started walking up to the age of five years. These sessions are for 15 children and their adults and run from 10.15-11am, and again from 11.15am-12pm. They are similar to the Little Moles sessions, but also include an opportunity for families to explore our Mudlarks children's gallery before or afterwards. The sessions have a different focus each week: the first Monday is always a messy session, the third Monday is a musical session and the fourth Monday is a gallery session.

Mini Mudlarks – a pre-booked session suitable for babies aged 6 months to those who are not yet walking. This session is for 12 babies and their adults and runs from 12.45-1.45pm. They are very similar to our Mini Moles sessions, but also include a dedicated 15-20 minute visit to our Mudlarks children's gallery afterwards.



MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

We run these sessions once a month on the third Tuesday of the month during term-time at the Museum of London Docklands, and they are suitable for children aged 1-5 years. They are drop-in and take place from 10.15-11am and again from 11.15am-12pm. We also book the Mudlarks children's gallery from 10am-12.30pm so that the families can visit this gallery afterwards. Music and Movement sessions involve elements of song, dance, drama and other physical activities, such as balancing plastic fish on our heads like porters would have done on their Bobbin hats, and freezing when the music stops.

STORYTIME

For many years we have run drop-in storytelling sessions every Thursday from 3-3.30pm during term-time at the Museum of London Docklands, although as of 2018 we have taken a break from delivering these. The sessions are aimed at children aged 2-5 years and take place in a different gallery each week, depending on the theme of the stories. These interactive sessions often include: puppets and characters, singing, repetitive actions or words, object handling and parachute or scarf games. Some stories also include sensory elements, such as passing around a bucket of ice to help participants imagine what a Frost Fair might have been like. Storytelling sessions can be based on well-known and often popular children's stories, such as Commotion in the Ocean and the Night Pirates, but others are stories made up and based on objects and stories from the museum's collection. Stories are written and delivered by the early years team as well as Visitor Experience Hosts. To find out more about this collaboration, read our case study about working with Visitor Experience [here](#).

HOLIDAY EVENTS

We don't run our regular programme of events during school holidays but instead offer different types of sessions. The early years team plans themes alongside the rest of the family programme and will run an under 5s activity as part of a whole half term or holiday offer. During half terms, we deliver one day of sessions at both sites and during longer holiday periods, such as Easter, we will offer two days of sessions per site. We often programme these activities on a Monday or Wednesday, so that our regular visitors are able to attend.

Holiday events in the past have included:

Sorted? - an interactive world full of cardboard boxes, delivered in partnership with Octopus Inc, where children explored cardboard boxes of different shapes and sizes, and opened them up to find different maps of London.

Dance like a hero - a dance session where children took on the different roles of people who have helped in the Docklands, such as porters, firefighters and sailors.

Paddington rhyme time - short and snappy 15 minute sessions, following Paddington's journey through London and singing a song for each obstacle or person he meets.



FAMILY FESTIVALS

Family festivals take place at both museums on selected weekends throughout the year. Sometimes these festival weekends are part of a larger celebration, eg the Lord Mayor's Show or Open House Families, or they are dedicated museum festivals that are organised and run by our Family and Family Festival Programme Managers.

Although the early years programme does not organise family festivals, in May 2017 we collaborated with the family festival programme to deliver a two-day Toddler Takeover weekend, as part of the Kids in Museums Takeover Day. Activities included baby yoga sessions, music and drama performances, storytelling, craft activities and a Jungle themed sensory room!

Even though the museum's festivals are usually aimed at children aged 5+, if the theme of is appropriate for under 5s we will programme an activity to take place at some point over the weekend to ensure that our youngest visitors are always catered for. These activities tend to be drop-in, in order to provide a more relaxed atmosphere. For instance, we often create a chill-out zone for under 5s, where we provide a range of toys and games as well as books and dressing up clothes, and lots of comfy cushions and blankets.

SHOWS

The Museum of London Docklands has delivered summer shows since 2015 and the early years team has collaborated with the Family Programme Manager to plan and coordinate, as well as deliver some of the shows. The majority are aimed at families but one show a day is dedicated to an under 5s audience. We decided that the under 5s shows would be at 11.15am, as this audience seems to prefer morning sessions. The under 5s shows last 30 minutes and can accommodate much larger numbers of families than our other regular under 5s sessions. Shows run every Wednesday through to Saturday during the whole of August and always link to a major theme of the museum's collection or a temporary exhibition - in 2017 our summer show 'Time Tunnellers' linked to our Tunnel: The Archaeology of Crossrail exhibition. The shows are usually led by one performer but with a range of interactive elements for families to join in with. During our 'Shiver me timbers' pirate themed show, interactive elements that families participated in included:

- sailing a ship by repeating the words fore, aft, larboard, starboard with actions
- working together as a team to raise the sail
- climbing aboard another ship to steal luxury items
- designing a flag by shouting out things that are scary
- creating a fireball!



FOUNDATION STAGE SCHOOL SESSIONS

We run a dedicated Foundation Stage schools programme at both museum sites. All our sessions are aimed at children aged 3-5 years and are often booked by nursery and children's centre groups as well as schools. They are suitable for a maximum of 30 children. The sessions vary in themes, type of activity and length in order to fit in with different topics that groups might be focussing on, and the different needs of the children. We tend to run either two or three sessions during one day and we often group sessions together at the same time of year, eg our 'Dig it' sessions always take place four days in a row in February.

At the Museum of London we offer two sessions, both lasting 90 minutes.

Saxon stories and clay crafts:

Groups are split in two for most of the session. Each group takes part in one activity and then switch over to take part in the other. The first activity is a storytelling session, where the children meet Hilda - a time traveller who has travelled back to the Saxon times. They travel to the Saxon House in our Medieval London gallery and hear a story all about her home. The second is a craft activity where children use clay to coil their own clay pot to take back to school with them.



Stories old and new: This session is split in three parts. The session begins with the group discussing what a museum is and the different types of objects you might find there. They then take part in object handling of new and old objects and play a game of snap to work out what they are used for, as well as taking part in an interactive storytelling session which incorporates the old objects. The children are then given iPads in groups of three and visit our Medieval London gallery, where they are encouraged to take photographs of objects they find interesting – these images are then used to create a story with the group at the end of the session. We send this story to the group leader afterwards so they can build on or use the story later on.

At the Museum of London Docklands we offer four sessions, all of which last 60 minutes.

I live in London!: During this session, children share and learn all about their experiences of living in London. The session starts with children sharing their experience of their journey to the museum and exploring the locality of the museum. They then find out about different jobs in London – from chef, to firefighter, to nurse and builder. Children are asked to select an item of dressing up clothing that represents a job they would like to do in London. Then in small groups, they come to the front to share what their chosen job is and sing a song about what their job entails eg for a group of chefs, they might sing 'this is the way we cook the food, cook the food, cook the food, all day long'. Children then examine local buildings and the session finishes with children using paper shapes to create a skyline of London – each child's skyline can then be stuck together back in the classroom to create a giant panorama.

Early Years toolkit

The sailor who knew a thousand stories: This is one of our most popular sessions. Children learn about the warehouse before it became a museum and discover the goods that arrived from all over the world, in particular from China, and were stored here. Children role-play the journey of rice, tea, pottery and silk by passing plush crates around in a circle, mimicking the ship sailing from London to China and back again. Children explore the different goods and have sensory bags full of rice, tea, pottery, silk and other props, such as chopsticks and maps to prompt discussion. The group then takes part in an interactive storytelling session and hear a traditional Chinese tale, about a selfish emperor.

I do like to be beside the seaside!: Children discover what it was like to go on holiday in the past through interactive storytelling, object handling and song. The group meet Lizzie, who takes the group back to Victorian times on a visit to Clacton-on-Sea. The children share their own experiences of going on holiday, take part in a Punch and Judy show and visit the beach to buy ice cream.

Dig it!: This session introduces children to archaeology. The children meet Ally the Archaeologist and her helper, Dig the Dog. The session starts with a group discussion about what archaeology is, how it helps us to learn about the past, eg through objects, and children compare old and new objects. The group then find out what tools and equipment an archaeologist uses and how they do their job. The children then become archaeologists themselves – they don hard hats, hi vis jackets and pick up tools to take part in their own mini dig, where they discover fragments of objects from the past as well as jigsaw pieces from a puzzle. The jigsaw pieces fit together and create a photograph of an object from our collection. These jigsaw images are then used in a storytelling session at the end.

