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Family Fare

Looking at the Past Through a Glass, Brightly

By LAUREL GRAEBER

How could people who were largely illiterate appreciate the richness and color of biblical stories?

In the Middle Ages the answer was often stained glass, explained Emma Wegner, a spokeswoman for the education office of the Cloisters, the branch of the Metropolitan Museum devoted to medieval art. The great windows of European cathedrals often depicted Scripture pictorially, and "the sensory experience of being in a church flooded with colored light was thought to be spiritually uplifting," she said.

This weekend stained glass will be the focus of "How Did They Do That?," a Met program of 30-minute drop-in sessions for ages 4 to 12 that will reveal, well, how they did it. Three instructors will invite children to examine raw materials, like the sand and ash for glass blowing, as well as the tools used to score the glass and shape it. They will also explain how it was vibrantly painted.

"They'll probably have some pieces of deaccessioned glass to show the kids how it was assembled into windows," Ms. Wegner said.

Of course the Cloisters is one of the best places in the city to see medieval glaziers' finished art.

The workshops will also include a tour to observe it in areas like the Boppard Room and the Gothic chapel.

"Stained Glass! How Did They Do That?," tomorrow and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park, Washington Heights; (212) 923-3700. Free with suggested admission: \$15; ages 62+, \$10; students over 12, \$7; under 12, free.

Upside of the Lower East

Many years ago the Lower East Side was a world bustling with immigrants. Later it was associated with the Beats, hipsters and the avant-garde. This weekend it will feature a celebration related to all these groups, as well as to one found in virtually any neighborhood: children.

Tomorrow will be Lower East Side Kids' Day, part of the 11th annual Lower East Side Festival of the Arts, in and around Theater for the New City in the East Village. What's particularly exciting about the children's segment, said Crystal Field, the festival's director, is that "a lot of these pieces are created by kids."

"We have a 9-year-old piano virtuoso, Josephine Yalovitser," she noted. Josephine will play a Haydn piece as well as her own compositions. The Children's Aid Society Carrera Program will perform three scenes, written by seventh graders, about the prevention of child abuse. And teenagers in the Loisaida Players — the name is derived from the Latino pronunciation of "Lower East Side" — will present skits on social issues, like avoiding smoking and combating adolescent pregnancy.

Adult performers will also be involved, including those from Vital Children's Theater, Action

Racket Theater and Manhattan Theater Ensemble, which will present "Fools in Love," its 1950's-inspired version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." John Grimaldi, of New York Lyric Circus, will be the M.C.

And for children who are interested in acting, the Theater for the New City's Arts-in-Education Program will offer improvisational games like Stop and Go, in which a youngster runs up to one of three teachers standing in a line. The teacher will immediately start an improvisation that the child will have to enter into.

"The adult might say: 'Why are you late? You know I've been expecting you,' or 'Drop and give me 50 pushups,' " Ms. Field said. In a few minutes someone will shout "Stop!," and the child will have to run to the next person and start the process again. "It's a wonderful aid to teaching an actor how to act," Ms. Field said. Not to mention getting a mental and physical workout.

Lower East Side Kids' Day, tomorrow from 2 to 5 p.m. at Theater for the New City, 155 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, East Village. Free. Schedule: (212) 254-1109 or theaterforthenewcity.net.

No Stone Unturned

Most of the rock that fascinates 8- to 12-year-olds is the kind that can be played on an I-Pod. But tomorrow the Staten Island Museum will invite children of those ages to explore the other type: that beneath their feet.

"Geological Wonders" is part of the museum's Family Science Favorite Things series, through June 3, in which instructors present demonstrations on subjects that intrigue them. Tomorrow, Ed Johnson, the museum's director of science, will display minerals and talk about their

properties, like hardness, luster, streak (the color when the mineral is rubbed on unglazed porcelain) and cleavage (the way it breaks).

Next comes a mystery game. "The children will be given a set of unknown minerals and have to figure out their identities," Mr. Johnson said. He will provide clues — a list of the rocks' names and their most important characteristics — "but it's not as easy as it seems," he added. "Some have the same properties."

Mr. Johnson plans to show hematite, which gives a distinctive reddish-brown streak, and calcite, which causes what you might call double vision. "If you have a nice transparent piece, and you look through it, it doubles everything," he said. "It's called double refraction." Children will also learn about feldspar and quartz, quartz sand being a household material: it's in window glass and scouring powder.

Participants will even examine the humble beginnings of an extremely precious stone. "I'll give them a piece of graphite," Mr. Johnson said. "It's just carbon." But when the atoms are bound together in a certain way, he explained, this lowly carbon becomes worthy of Tiffany's. Just don't expect to encounter that form — diamonds — in the workshop.

"Geological Wonders," tomorrow from 10 to 11:30 a.m. at the Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place, St. George. Free but preregistration required: (718) 727-1135, Ext. 105.

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