

# INTERACTIVE PLAY CORNER

## FOR THE NATIONAL SZÉCHÉNYI LIBRARY'S EXHIBITION

### "A STAR IN THE RAVEN'S SHADOW"



It was on the occasion of the National Széchényi Library's grand exhibition in the Renaissance Year that it has first held museum pedagogical sessions for visitors. Nothing proves the success of the initiative better than the fact that subsequent grand exhibitions also featured interactive play corners for younger and older children. The group sessions and the play corners that are integral to the exhibition are introduced by museum teacher Viktória Drinóczky:

As a practicing teacher I like methods that are suitable for children and I follow new educational trends with interest. Perhaps this is why I got involved in museum pedagogy. Because like many of us, all I remember from my museums visits on school excursions is that as a kid I always had sore feet. It was important to me that children should have many pleasant experiences of this exhibition. The play corners were primarily intended for families coming on their own. The idea was that we should let parents and their children of different ages play together and learn the basic information about exhibits in interactive games before actually entering the exhibition.

Our public relations objective was that families coming with children should obtain information and impressions together and in a playful manner. The posters placed on columns featured the descriptions of tasks, core information and copies of the pictures the originals of which were thus familiar to children when they walked round the exhibition. The play corners were very successful also with school groups and weekend museum pedagogy sessions. The child-guide worksheets for two age groups equipped young museum goers with experience gained in the play corner before stepping into the exhibition space.

**Our pedagogical objective** was to evoke the age of the Hungarian Renaissance, to focus on its characteristic actors, with special emphasis on codex production and King Mathias's corvinas -, on work processes, materials and tools involved. In the workshops, participants did not only view and get to know the features of Renaissance codices but also gained hands-on experience. The posters in the play corner provided basic information about the

various activities. Our goal was to make the visit memorable both for children and their parents, turning it into a positive attitude towards museums.

## THE PLAY CORNER

### 1. Corner of puppets and costumes – King Matthias's Renaissance court

Puppets were made using the Matthias Gradual and pictures in other codices, invoking Matthias's mythical figure, whom kindergarten children and young school pupils already know. Besides the king, there was his wife Beatrice, ladies in attendance, noblemen, poor men, a court jester, a mercenary in the Black Army, a monastic scribe and János Vitéz. Wearing contemporary costumes designed based on sketches of the time (ladies' dresses, the king's and queen's cloaks, the monk's robe and the clothes of a secular scribe, a pharmacist and a printer), visitors may step into the Renaissance), visitors "walk" into the Renaissance. On the columns there are contemporary representations of the king and the queen and the court, which served as models for the puppets. Children and their families are given laminated cards with the beginnings of stories and tales that they can act out with puppets and finish as they think best. The original ending is given on the back of the card.

### 2. Scriptorium

Children can turn into **scribes**, putting on costumes and sitting behind their desk (similar to the one the initial shows) and can experience how hard the scribe's job was, using a quill and ink they can write a page of the codex, continuing step by step a pattern of letters that is described in a poster. In the **tactile** section two corvine copies, one in leather and the other in velvet binding, can be touched and compared with each other and with modern books.

### 3. Manuscript illumination workshop

Becoming miniators or illuminators, children can decorate the codex page they have written. Sitting in the old desk, wearing contemporary attire, they may copy or create new designs for their "codex pages". On the



walls, they can see enlarged initials, ornaments, frames and crests, whose originals they can look for in the exhibition.

#### 4. The library

Children are to arrange on the shelves boxful of books on various topics, using their own criteria for the classification. The purpose is that they should find the major groups themselves: fictional novels, tales, poetry, non-fiction and encyclopedias. There is some illustrated information about the library on the surrounding walls. They also learn how the corvinas were stored.

**Cooperative game:** In this board game, the four artisans, namely a pharmacist, a tanner, a scribe and a painter are to arrive at Matthias's court in Buda at the

same time in order to jointly produce a book. In comparison with traditional competitive board games, here co-operation is required so that they can reach their destination of Buda together.

#### 5. Pharmacy

On the shelves all around there are herbs and raw materials for dyes in glass vials, which anyone may smell, touch or look at. Putting on the pharmacist's gown, children are to separate herbs from ingredients for dyes. Selection is helped by their knowledge, as several of the herbs are still in use today (and we know their scent) or the poster which explains in a codex page the ingredients of different colour dyes.

#### 6. Printing house

Playing with the rubber printers, children experience the utility and speed of printing compared to writing in hand. They may typeset their own name and print it out, leaving space for decoration, thus learning through experience that the illumination of the first printed books was done manually.

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