

## Interpretive Troubleshooting: Interpreting To Children and Student Audiences



### Working With Elementary Students

For a museum guide, interpreting to young students can be very rewarding. Children of this age are very receptive, however, they can also be very disruptive. They are just full of energy which creates quite a challenge when attempting to have them channel their energy into listening and learning from you. **By being both friendly and commanding, you can keep their attention and have a successful tour or program.**



**‘Jazz Hands’**  
Use your hands!  
Make the shape of a clay pot when talking about pottery making. Pound your palms together when speaking of pounding corn into meal.

**“Eye Contact = Engaged Children”**

### Eye On The Prize

Make eye contact with every child. Ideally, you should be able to make ‘eye-contact rounds,’ where you look every child in the eyes like clockwork. More important than you watching them, make sure they are watching you. Keep their attention by directing their vision in certain directions. Look up, look down. Watch my hand as it moves this way and that way.

### Leveling The Playing Field

Kneel down. On their level, they feel as though they cannot escape your attention, and therefore must give you theirs. Do more at their height or lower. Children can be especially attracted to motion on or near the ground - its naturally where they play and learn. It is also a comforting and welcoming level.







## Imagine That!

You don't need objects or props. For example, imagine you are all in the longhouse. Look up and see the smoke from the fire billowing along the ceiling. Look down at the wall and see the bed platforms that run the whole length. Describe it and point around as if you were really in a longhouse.

## At Arm's Length

For an interpreter, there is no such thing as personal space. Keeping distance only serves to lose a child's attention. Space can signify "the adults are talking" atmosphere, causing you to lose their attention. Plus many children have no concept of your 'personal space.' This is especially true for costumed interpreters whose clothes just scream to be touched!



## "No Such Thing As Personal Space."

## Back Away, Slowly

On the other hand, there are many shy children whose cautious behavior may impede them from learning from you, especially in hands-on activities. When this happens, demonstrate the activity or how the hands-on exhibit or object works, then back away. Hand the job off - let mom or dad jump in there. Much more comfortable with their parents teaching them, they will get their child to try it out.