

Children's
of Manhattan Museum



Monkey King: A Journey to China

summative evaluation

Prepared for the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM)

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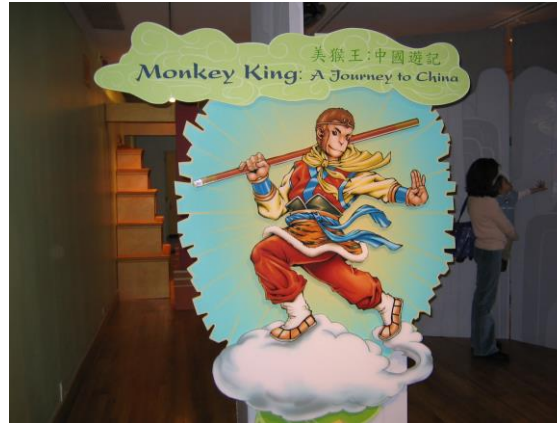
May 12, 2004

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I. INTRODUCTION

The *Monkey King* Exhibit



- *Monkey King: A Journey to China* is a exhibit developed by the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM).
 - It is based on the traditional Chinese folk tales of Monkey King and the written version The Journey to the West.
 - The exhibit will run at CMOM through July 2004.
- Funded by the Freeman Foundation, the exhibit will eventually travel to 10 other exhibition spaces in the Association of Children's Museums (ACM).

The Need for Summative Research

- The funder for the exhibit--The Freeman Foundation--requires a program of summative research during the initial exhibition at CMOM, and prior to the exhibit's travel to its next ACM location.
- CMOM contracted **BLiP research** to conduct this research.

II. OBJECTIVES

Three Core Objective Areas

- The research aimed to examine three core and interrelated objective areas.

Comprehension	Engagement	Attitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What do visitors understand of the content after viewing the exhibit?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Characters• Narrative• Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What is visitors' level of connection with core elements of the exhibit?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Artifacts• Text• "Interactivity"• Layout/Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What is visitors' motivation for attending exhibit?■ How does the exhibit influence visitors' perception of Chinese culture?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness• Appreciation• Involvement

III. METHODOLOGY

Design

- In order to meet the objectives, **BLiP research** created a program of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Methodology	Scope	Sample
Participant Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written Still photo Video 	Parents Children age 5-12
Intercept Surveys	66 completed	46 Children 5-12 20 Parents
Mini Focus Groups	7 completed	2 Children 5-8 2 Children 9-12 3 Parents/guardians
Follow-up In Depth Interviews	5 completed	2 parent/child 5-8 2 parent/child 9-12

Sample

- The research was conducted on site at CMOM during operating hours on April 17 and April 18, 2004.
- The sample was thus drawn from visitors to the Monkey King exhibit during those days.
 - Participant observations were conducted by *BLiP* researchers on an individual and a general level.
 - Written, video, and still photo observations were included.
 - Children's surveys were administered one-on-one by *BLiP* researchers.
 - Parent surveys were self-administered.
 - All focus groups were moderated by *BLiP* researchers.
 - Groups lasted approximately 20 minutes.
 - Follow-up in depth interviews took place over the phone.
 - These interviews were conducted by *BLiP* researchers.
 - They occurred 1-2 weeks after participants' visit to the exhibit.

IV. FINDINGS

Comprehension

The Story Takes Place in China

- After viewing the exhibit, children (and parents) were highly aware of the fact that the origin of the exhibit was rooted in China and Chinese culture.
- Out of the 46 children who answered the survey, 36 said the featured story took place in China.

Q. What country did the story take place in?

Japan	2
China	36
America	0
Asia	0
Karate Place	1
New York	1
Don't Know	6

Cues to Chinese Culture

- Children recognized the following items within the exhibit as cues that the content of the exhibit was of Chinese origin:
 - Writing/characters in text, video, books
 - People on video screens
 - Pictures in books/videos
 - Dancing/movement
 - Clothing
 - Food
 - Buildings/structures

“Everything looks like it’s from China.” -girl, 9

“On one game, it says: Let’s explore China.” -boy, 7

New Information on China

- Many children felt quite certain that they had learned something new about China/Chinese culture from viewing the exhibit.

"I got to see that China is very big. It has big buildings and a big brick wall." -girl, 7

"I found out that China is far away." -boy, 6

"I got to see what houses in China look like." -boy, 9

- Children were particularly taken with ideas of "difference" between American and Chinese culture.

"They have kings and queens there [in China]." -girl, 9

"They're not like us. They have different clothes, different holidays, different dances, face painting." -girl, 11

Source of Narrative Less Clear

- Children were much less clear regarding the origin of the narrative basis for the exhibit.
 - Just under a third of the children queried were aware that the exhibit was based on a story/book/folk tale.
 - The respondents who identified the concept as rooted in a narrative were generally on the older end of the tested age range.
 - Younger children were much less likely to be aware of the exhibit's narrative origin.

Q. Where did the idea for the exhibit come from?

A folk tale	0
A book	2
A story	13
Monkey's Life	3
China	4
Don't Know	24

Character Recall

- Of all the characters presented in the exhibit, children had the greatest recall for Monkey/Monkey King.
 - Children had limited recall of the other characters featured in the exhibit.

Q.Who were the characters in the exhibit?

Monkey King	35
Piggy	11
Bull Demon	9
Buddha	6
Jade Emperor	5
Sandy	3
Dragon Horse	3
Buddhist Monk	3
Silk Princess	2
Lion	1
Gardener	1
Phoenix	1
Don't Know	7

Narrative Comprehension

- Children seemed to derive narrative content piecemeal, and almost solely from their favored exhibition components.
- They were thus most aware of content connected to these particular elements :
 - Monkey's attempts to steal/eat the Emperor's peaches
 - “Monkey Eats the Peaches”
 - Monkey's battle with the Bull Demon
 - “Battle of Wits”
 - Monkey's ability to fly
 - “Cloud Soaring”

“He [Monkey] was trying to get the peaches to live forever.” -girl, 11

“Monkey was winning battles against the Bull Demon.” -boy, 6

“He [Monkey] knew how to fly.” -girl, 7

Character Content

- Based on their narrow understanding of the Monkey King narrative, children tended to reduce the story to a superhero-like battle between good and evil.
- In this struggle, Monkey was seen as “good” and “heroic”, and his only known antagonist was the Bull Demon.
 - Further gradations regarding Monkey’s character were mainly lacking.

“Monkey was trying to get freedom for his country.” -boy, 7

“Monkey was battling to get justice.” -girl 9

“Monkey and the Demon were fighting each other.” -girl, 6

- An understanding of the personalities of, or connections between, other characters was extremely limited to non-existent.

Parental Comprehension

- Parents were much more aware of the exhibit's basis in an oral/written narrative.

"It [the Monkey King story] is a Chinese tradition, passed down from generation to generation." -parent, 7 year old

"It's obviously to teach about culture and cultural legends." -parent 11 year old

- They also had a significantly deeper understanding of the themes of the narrative.
 - They generally saw these as revolving around ideas of cooperation.

"It was about working with others." -parent, 10 year old

"It was to teach teamwork somewhat." -parent, 8 year old

Engagement

Engagement=Comprehension

- Responses to the survey, discussion group answers, as well as our own observations, led us to understand that children derived and retained content knowledge almost solely from the exhibit components that most engaged them.
 - This was true regardless of whether or not children viewed, read, or attended to other portions of the exhibit.

Interactivity=Engagement

- Correlative to this, the components of the exhibit that featured opportunities for interactivity--especially those involving technologies like video, audio, animated movement, and/or simulation-- were the most effective delivery devices for narrative content. These included:
 - “Monkey Eats the Peaches”
 - “Cloud Soaring”
 - “Battle of Wits”
- These were the portions of the exhibit to which children attended most closely and for the longest periods of time.

“My kids like touching things, and to be able to work toward a goal.”

-parent, girl, 7

Text

- Parents who moved through the exhibit along with their child generally read about half of the text aloud to their child.
- Very few children read any of the exhibit's text themselves.
- Many parents (and children) noted that the wall text:
 - Lacked visual contrast.
 - Was often difficult to locate.
 - Was written at a level of difficulty beyond that of the target audience.

"Maybe they need something more contrasting or colorful. It's [the text] is kind of hard to read like it is. It's too light or something." -parent, 9 year old

"Most of the print isn't at eye level for kids to read." -parent, 7 year old

"[I thought it was hard to understand, so it must not have made any sense to her [my daughter]]"
-parent, girl, 8

Text Comprehension

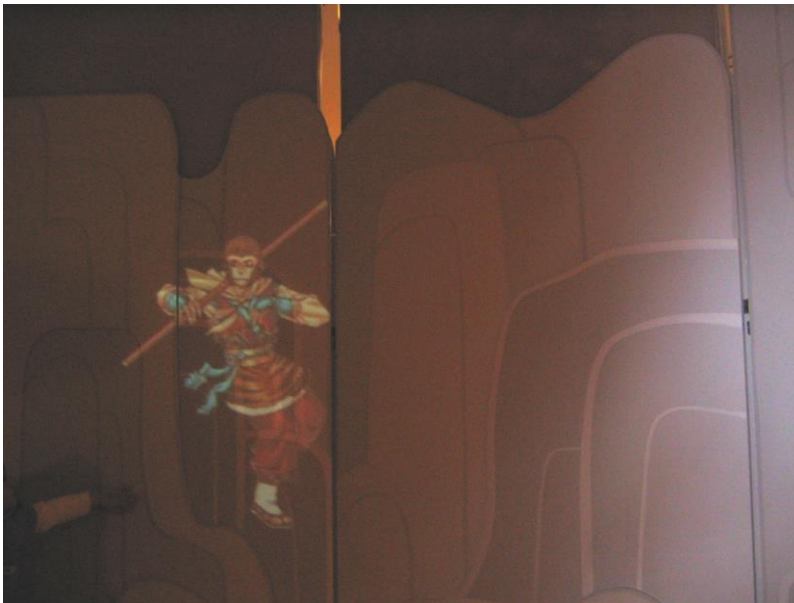
- Children were much more apt to attend to and comprehend text delivered to them in the context of interactive exhibit components (i.e. printed on video screens, in recordings, etc.)
 - In particular, children seemed best able (or compelled) to synthesize textual information that was contextualized and integrated into interactive games.

"Kids today have got to have a hands-on approach. It's like the computer or a game. Kids nowadays are more drawn in by the interactive." -parent 11 year old

"I read the parts on the video screens in the battle game: Monkey beats Bull Demon."
-boy, 10

Individual Exhibit Elements

Who is Monkey?



- Most children were intrigued by, and interested in, this video projection/sound environment.
 - This was particularly true of younger children.
- Yet, as exhibited in their survey responses, children didn't gain much introductory information here regarding the narrative or Monkey's character.

Monkey Eats the Peaches



- This was one of the most favored elements of the exhibit. Children (and parents) enjoyed:

- The interactivity.
- The musical sounds of the peaches.
- The “surprise” of the emperor appearing.

“In the peaches, I touch something and it does something cool.” -boy, 10

*“I loved the musical part. It was like composing.”
-parent, boy 9*

- Children clearly connected this element to the Monkey King story.

“In the story, Monkey stole the King’s peaches.” -boy, 8

- Recall about peaches as a symbol of longevity in China was quite high.

“In China, if you eat a peach, you get to live forever.” -girl,

11

Monkey See, Monkey Do



- Children--especially younger children and girls--were relatively compelled by this element.
- A number of children recalled the makeup worn by the character featured in the video.
 - Yet they didn't seem to connect this to a staged performance.
 - Rather, they often assumed this was how people "dressed" in China.
- A few children donned the costumes and wore them around the exhibit.
 - A smaller subset of these children performed some of the movements, usually at the encouragement of their parents.

Monkey Spoils the Banquet



- Children liked to play with the food on the banquet table.
 - Younger children (due to their under-table size) were more likely to discover the levers and gears that controlled the food's movement.
 - They would then cue in their older siblings to the location of these tools.

- Children didn't integrate this banquet into their concept of the Monkey King narrative.

"The table [was my least favorite part]. The kids didn't understand this part."

-parent, 8 & 10 year old

Buddha's Hand



- This was a popular spot for children to have their pictures taken by their parents.
- This seemed to be about the extent of children's participation in or recall of this element of the story/exhibit.
 - Very few children mentioned Buddha as having anything to do with the story/exhibit.

Buddha Hand-Flipping



- This large wall mural was almost completely invisible to exhibit attendees.
 - Very few children or parents were observed reading it, or even noting its presence.
 - Recall of this portion of the story was virtually nonexistent among children or parents.

A Second Chance



- This component seemed to hold very limited appeal or interest for children.
- Yet a number of children seemed interested in--and able to recall--the character of Pigsy ("the pig", "the big pig"), who was presented herein.

Cloud Soaring



- This was a highly favored element, especially among girls.
- Children liked the experience of simulated flight and wind.
 - It reminded some of them of a flight simulator, like those at video arcades.

"I liked it because it felt like you were flying." - girl, 7

- A number of children noted this element as "educational", in that it taught them about what things look like in China.

"You got to see China and lots of places there." -girl, 9

Borrowing the Leaf Fan

Crossing Oijue Mountain



- These elements generated interest mainly among the youngest children (below target age range) for whom they were at eye level.
 - Yet these children had difficulty reaching the character cut-outs.
- These elements were frequently mentioned as target-age children's least favored in the exhibit.
 - As they didn't comprehend the travel narrative in the exhibit, these dioramas made little sense and held little appeal.
 - The split focus of creating a scene from the side and viewing it from the front also made it difficult for children to design or realize a scene.

"The things with the cards were really boring. Who were those people [character cut-outs] supposed to be?" -girl, 9

"You couldn't see in there." -boy, 7

Working Together



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- This was one of the most and least favored exhibit elements.
- Children and parents enjoyed the theme of these games, in that they required cooperation and skill.

"I like that you work with a friend." -boy, 11

"It's challenging. It's teamwork." -girl, 7

"It taught about cooperation." -parent, boy, 8/ girl, 10

- At the same time the functional action of the game was difficult and/or ineffective.

"There was no ball!" -boy, 9

"They couldn't make the ball launch in one game, and it wasn't there in the other. The kids were disappointed not to play." -parent, girls, 5 & 7

- In addition, children made no connection between this game and the Monkey King narrative.

Battle of Wits



- This was by far the most popular element in the exhibit among parents and children, (especially among boys.)
- Parents and children really liked:
 - The interactivity
 - The similarity to video games
 - Strategizing/guessing who would win
 - Interacting with other children
 - Learning about Monkey's "enemies"
 - Connecting this to the "story" of Monkey King

"Other kids get on the other side and you might win." -boy, 6

"You get to pick characters and see who wins." -boy, 8

"You get to see the characters' strengths and weaknesses." -girl, 9"

"My child enjoyed learning about the animals." -parent, boy, 5

Behind the Story



- This area seemed to function mainly as a place for parents to take a break and sit on the benches.
 - Some parents took the opportunity to read some of the materials presented.
- Very few children seemed to engage with this element.

"I didn't like the part with the books. There was all that boring stuff, and I didn't read."
-girl, 9

- Parents noted that this area was set apart from the more interactive elements.

"If the reading materials aren't mixed in, they tend to avoid that and go to the hands-on."
-parent, boy 6

Western Paradise



- This portion of the exhibit was nearly invisible to visitors both physically and content wise.
 - It was mentioned only once during the entirety of the research, and this was by a parent as a least favored element.

Climbing Spirit Mountain



- This was not a widely noted or visited portion of the exhibit.
- Older girls seemed somewhat more drawn to this element than other categories of viewers.
- A number of children noted that the magnets were difficult to reach and/or remove.

"I couldn't get those pictures [magnets], they were hard to get off the board." -girl, 5

"I didn't like the magnets. They weren't fun."
-boy, 9

Flow

- Visitors did not seem to follow any set order when viewing the exhibit, generally electing to move about from element to element.
 - Children took the lead, noting their areas of interest or engagement, and adults followed.
- This lack of a consistent flow pattern seemed based in part on visitors' lack of understanding of the exhibit's reflection of/connection to a linear story with a beginning, middle and end.

"The narrative is hard, I didn't really get the narrative, so it was hard to figure out that you were supposed to go in some order." -parent, boy, 8

Layout

- The fact that the exhibit could be entered from either end--without any indication that one was clearly the “start” and one the “end”--added to this confusion.

“When I first came in, I didn’t know where to go, because I came in from the back. But then I saw more people coming in from the other side, and so I followed them.” -boy, 9

“I would’ve liked to start at the beginning instead of having to find my way there.” -parent, girl, 7

“They could have made a whole story with arrows, could have put it on a map.” -girl, 11

Course of Movement

- Most children's movement through the exhibit seemed largely motivated by a search for/interest in the interactive elements.
 - Parents thus followed their child from one of these three core--and most compelling--elements to the next.
- After exploring these elements, a good number of visitors (parents and children) would then backtrack and return to other areas within the exhibit for further exploration.

Parent/Child Interaction

- Parents generally allowed their child to take the lead in charting their path through the exhibit.
- Most parents we observed seemed to engage with their child during their time in the exhibit. These engagements revolved mainly around:
 - Reading/calling attention to the wall text;
 - Helping their child to understand the rules of a game;
 - Encouraging their child to engage with less immediately compelling elements such as:
 - Trying on the costumes
 - Sitting in Buddha's hand
 - Playing with the dioramas
- Children's comprehension appeared to be enhanced by parental interaction.

Attitude

Ranking of Exhibit

- Following viewing, parents and children were asked to rank their opinion of the Monkey King exhibit overall.
 - Parents and children alike were quite satisfied by the exhibit, with the great majority of visitors in both categories giving the exhibit highly positive rankings.

Q. What did you think of the Monkey King exhibit?

	Not So good	OK	Good	Great
Parents	0	2	15	1
Children	1	11	13	18

Motivation for Visiting

- When asked to choose their top two motivators for their visit to the Monkey King exhibit, parents choose:
 - Interactivity/hands-on experiences
 - Exposing their child to Chinese culture

Q. What was the most/second most important motivator for your visit to this exhibit

Motivator	1st	2nd	total
Allowing my child to engage with interactive elements	12	4	16
Exposing my child to elements of Chinese/Asian culture	2	7	9
Giving my child a hands-on experience with art and artifacts	2	2	4
Providing a safe space for my child to interact with other children	0	3	3

Interactivity a Plus

- When asked to describe their feeling about the interactive components in the exhibit, parents generally found them favorable in terms of helping to clarify the content.

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: *The interactive features in the exhibit helped my child to understand the ideas and concepts presented.*

Strongly agree	4
Somewhat agree	13
Somewhat disagree	1
Strongly disagree	0

"I believe kids are very hands-on and can relate to abstract ideas/higher level thinking with these activities." -parent, girls, 5 & 7

"I enjoy watching my children interact and ask questions." -parent, girl 6 & boy 10

The Limits of Interactivity

- At the same time, parents and children had some criticism of the interactivity in the exhibit.
 - There were some elements in the exhibit where the necessary components were missing or not functioning.
 - The puppets in the “puppet theater”.
 - The ball/ball launcher in both “working together” exhibit.
 - Older children and their parents felt that the interactive portions of the exhibit were geared toward younger children.

“Helen is a bit old for some of the games.” -parent, girl, 10

*“It seemed like it was for kids age 7 and down. Most kids our age don’t get into the things here.”
-boy, 9*

- Some parents also expressed concern that their children were “too” drawn to the interactive portions of the exhibit, at the expense of comprehending the overall messages/narrative.

*“In some ways, it [interactivity] is all about their attention span, which I wish was longer.”
-parent, boy 10*

*“They congregate around all the interactive parts. They need parts where they have to read too.”
-parent, girl 8*

Exposure to China

- Prior to their visit, children's contextual understanding of China seemed limited mainly to martial arts (esp. television programs and films.)

"My son has an interest in China already because he does martial arts." -parent, boy 7

"It reminded me of a movie: Jackie Chan." -girl, 11

- Parents and children alike very much appreciated being exposed to aspects of Chinese culture about which they had little prior knowledge.

"I learned about the Monkey King books, which I had never heard of." -parent, boy, 6

"I learned a little more about Asian culture." -parent, boy, 10

- It should be noted that much of the new information that children and parents took in seemed focused on "traditional" elements of Chinese culture.
 - Ideas presented (in the videos) about contemporary life in China was mainly invisible to both cohorts.

Motivating Interest in Chinese Culture

- Following their viewing, many children expressed a desire to learn more about elements of Chinese culture to which they were exposed in the exhibit.

"I would like to learn more about China." -girl, 7

- Of particular interest were:
 - The written/oral language
 - Rituals (performances, holidays, etc.)
 - Martial arts/combat
 - Buildings/architecture
 - Food

"[I'd like to know] How to write their language. When do the kids have to start learning to learn how to do all those different drawings [characters]?" -boy, 9

"I would like to find out about how they do the face painting [as depicted in the Beijing Opera performance]." -girl, 9

"[I'd like] To learn more about China and the food they eat and their culture." -girl, 11

More about *Monkey King*

- Following viewing, a number of children (and parents) expressed an interest in finding out more about the story of *Monkey King*.

"I would like to learn about the Monkey King. What is he really, a King, a monkey, or a person?" -girl, 10

"I want to read the whole book and see how it really is." -girl, 8

- Anecdotally, sales of *Monkey King* paraphernalia--especially books and videos--have been very strong at the CMOM gift store.

Follow Up: High Recall

- Follow-up interviews with a random selection of attendees 1-2 weeks after their visit revealed that children had a significant recall of the same aspects of the exhibit they connected with during their initial visit:
 - The character of Monkey
 - Monkey stealing the Jade Emperor's peaches
 - The battles between Monkey and Bull Demon
 - The fact that the exhibit was set in China
 - The idea of Monkey fighting to defeat evil

"It was about a monkey in China." -girl, 5

"There was a monkey who ate peaches from the king's garden." -girl, 9

"In the battles, the phoenix was the most powerful because of it's hypnotic song." -boy, 9

"My favorite was the Monkey King fighting the bad guys." -girl, 6

Compels Introspection/Exploration

- All children involved in the follow-up interviews reported thinking about the exhibit after their visit.

"We're studying monkeys in school and that reminded me of it." -girl, 5

"I saw a China map in school which said on it, China is a great place." -girl, 6

"I remembered flying on the cloud." -girl, 6

"I thought very clearly about the cool activities. It was absolutely great." -boy, 9

- A number of children (and their parents) also noted that they were compelled to seek out more information about China following their visit, mainly through books.

"The librarian gave me a book about China where I learned about the women wearing sticks in their hair." -girl, 6

"I saw a book about China at school that I looked for on purpose." -girl, 9

"My daughter was very interested in the books on China in the [CMOM] gift shop." -parent, girl, 9

Exhibit Recommended

- Many of the children and parents interviewed reported that they had recommended the exhibit to friends or co-workers. These recommendations were based mainly on:
 - The interactive features
 - The fun nature of the exhibit

"I recommended it to a few people with kids who work in my office. I emphasized the hands-on aspect, and how much fun it was." -parent, girl, 6

"I told a second grade teacher that I work with to make sure to see the Monkey King when she goes on her field trip there [to CMOM]." -parent, girl, 7

"[My daughter] called her best friend as soon as she got home and told her about the exhibit. I didn't hear their conversation, but she seemed excited and enthusiastic." -parent, girl 9

"I told some friends at school about the exhibit. Four friends didn't listen, but the rest were really excited." -boy, 9

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Remediation

- **Strengthen the sense of narrative.**
 - Connect to Monkey King story
 - Demonstrate the basis for the exhibit as originating in a narrative
 - Clarify characters, goals, themes, etc. up front
 - Create narrative sequence for exhibit components
 - Provide narrative map/linearity
 - Define “entrance” and “exit”
 - Use wall murals more conspicuously
 - Create “chapters”
 - Make more “interactive”
- **Make the text more “readable”**
 - Simplify/clarify content
 - Amplify contrast
 - Place at child’s level
 - Position in more obvious locations
 - Use “interactive” means to deliver important text

Recommendations for Remediation

- **Ensure that interactive components are functional**
 - “Working Together” balls
 - “Puppet Theater” puppets
- **Deliver important/core content “interactively”.**
 - Children attend most to interactive elements.
 - Making a section “interactive” strongly privileges the information delivered here.
 - I.e. Bull Demon takes on heightened importance.
 - Yet it is seen as decontextualized from the larger/general narrative (which is not delivered interactively.)