

Original Paper

Effective Learning Strategies in the Homes of Famous Artists and Writers Converted to Museums

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Abstract

Homes of writers and artists that have been converted into museums are powerful frameworks for a wide range of both individual and group learning experiences. The museums have a unique ability to engage the learners on a deeper level by piquing their curiosity, and also by encouraging participative creative activities. The foundation is that of experiential learning, with an emphasis on authentic and content-based learning. Each visit to an artist's home museum is a springboard for more universal learning experiences, particularly if the learner follows up and builds on memories of the visit, or to the museum's website. Meta-cognitive development of analytical skills and creative techniques can enrich the learner, particularly when accompanied by both individual and collaborative online activities. Each artist or writer's home provides a unique experience, which provides an opportunity for the museum's educational and creative staff to be very creative. The homes in this article include those of Pablo Neruda, Alexander Pushkin, Ilya Repin, Carson McCullers, Isak Dinesen, and Juan José Arreola.

Keywords

learning strategies, instructional strategies, museum education, museum homes, experiential learning, content-based instruction, constructionist learning, constructivism, consubstantiality, collaborative learning, mobile learning, authentic learning

1. Introduction

Artist-home museums can give rise to a wide range of educational experiences and incorporate activities that utilize both self-directed individual experiential learning and group-based collaborative learning. Contextual and content-based learning strategies can be incorporated as well. In some cases, artist and writers' homes-museums are already encouraging active learning, and their administrators

have developed a framework of informal instructional strategies for both face-to-face learning as well as mobile/distance learning. The key to a successful learning experience is in engagement, and each location leverages its particular set of resources to do so. In the case of artist-home museums, experiential learning can be enhanced by creating ideal conditions for learning, which can be done by piquing the curiosity. After the engaging experience, the learning experience can continue with meditative reflection, after one has returned home. Experiential learning can also be augmented by the artist-home museum's website where they may participate in online activities or an online course. In addition, creating unique emotional connections and bonds by means of sharing thoughts and stimulating creative writing and journaling can also lead to durable learning experiences. This paper discusses the experiences of visiting such home-museums and describes instructional strategies. The homes include those of Pablo Neruda, Alexander Pushkin, Ilya Repin, Carson McCullers, Isak Dinesen, and Juan José Arreola.

2. Method: A Unique Learning Setting: The Artist's Home-Museum

Often thought of as simply tourist destinations, the homes of artists and writers that have been converted into museums or historical monuments possess unique attributes that contribute to a deeper level of engagement and thus deeper learning about the artist or writer's life, times, and work. In addition, with planning and a design for learning, the sites can both motivate individuals to study the works of the artist or writer, and inspire them to produce their own art or creative writing. For example, the museum can put together a series of prompts for an engaging journaling experience that encourages the visitor to make close observations and to answer certain questions. In addition to guided journaling, artist-home museums can give rise to a wide range of educational experiences and incorporate activities that utilize both self-directed individual experiential learning and group-based collaborative learning. Contextual and content-based learning strategies can be incorporated as well.

While on-site learning is effective, mobile learning is also a viable alternative. In addition to making a history and repositories available at the artists' homes, it is also possible to have live streaming readings and interactive webinars, which can later be archived and accessed on demand. There are many web conferencing platforms, which could include BigBlueButton, YouTube Live, FaceBook Live, Skype, Zoom, etc. Depending on the goals of the artist home museum, one can develop a full e-learning solution with an integrated elearning platform such as MoodleRooms, which is free for up to 50 users.

More than anything, a visit to the home of an artist or writer is an experience. The type of experience it provides can be shaped by the preparation and the kinds of activities and displays that are available. Here we examine the artist and writer homes I have visited that have been converted into monuments or museums, and discuss how the museums have developed a framework of informal instructional strategies for both face-to-face learning as well as mobile/distance learning. The key is in engagement, and each location leverages its particular set of resources to do so.

Such experiential learning can be enhanced by creating ideal conditions for learning, which include inspiring curiosity and later, meditative reflection, after one has returned home and is visiting the website or participating in an online course. In addition, creating unique emotional connections and bonds by means of sharing thoughts and stimulating creative writing and journaling can also lead to durable learning experiences.

3. Cases

3.1 Case 1: Pablo Neruda's Home in Valparaiso, Chile: Poetry, Politics, and Natural History

I had the opportunity to visit Pablo Neruda's house, La Sebastiana, in Chile a few years ago on a day trip from Santiago to Viña del Mar and Valparaiso. Valparaiso is an important port city and the site of a number of naval battles. La Sebastiana has been converted into a museum and is maintained by the Pablo Neruda Foundation and it contains furniture, books, clippings, historical documents, and even a copy of a poem on his desk. (<https://fundacionneruda.org/en/museums-houses/la-sebastiana-museum-house/>).

Despite its vulnerability to devastating earthquakes, the last in 2010 and a particularly damaging one in 1906, Valparaiso has well-preserved stunning buildings and squares influenced by the German, Austrian, and French architecture. Valparaiso is a UNESCO World Heritage site, which translates into a great deal of local pride, with clean, well-maintained, freshly painted homes and well-tended gardens and fountains.

Pablo Neruda's house, "La Sebastiana" is located on a steep road on a hillside. You can see the Pacific Ocean from his rooftop balcony. I could imagine his writing *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (1924) and *Residencia en la tierra* (1931) with a fountain pen in his hand, clean, white sheets of paper in his notebook under his arm, and a stiff ocean breeze on his face.

The docent points out printed material in "La Sebastiana" that encourages the visitors to read and translate the poetry if Spanish is not our native language. She asks us to think of Neruda's life in the context of political change as well as the highly sensual verses he became famous for. The instructional strategy involves historical contextualization as well as a rhetorical strategy of consubstantiality. Kenneth Burke, who applied the term consubstantiality to persuasive writing, describes it as a method of connecting with the reader by making the experience so real that they are transported into the experience of the other. It "gets under the skin" but even more than vicarious experience, it triggers a sense of extreme identification, with a kind of hyper-awareness that foments one's creativity (Burke, 1969).

Pablo Neruda's poem, "A 'La Sebastiana'" lies on a desk, wonderfully inspirational. Later, for post-visit reflection, one can easily access an online version (<https://www.neruda.uchile.cl/sebastiana3.html>). Here's the first stanza. I took slight liberties with the word choices, and for that, I refer to Lawrence Venuti's ideas about literary translations and the idea that the best translation is one that captures the spirit of the work.

*To “La Sebastiana”,
I built the house.
I made it first of air.
Then, I raised a flag into the air,
and I left it hanging,
from the firmament, from the star, from
the brightness and the darkness.*

Here’s a link to the rest of Neruda’s poem (<https://www.neruda.uchile.cl/sebastiana3.html>).

And, in line with what Neruda envisioned as a perfect house for writing, the house and the neighborhood are cheerful, intimate, but not invasive. I noticed that the colors were bright, and each house seemed to be painted a different bright, cheerful hue. The rooms seemed small, which is not how I would design a house, but perhaps the options are limited when the hillside is so steep.

Valparaiso is still a critical port city. It is proud of its Navy, which undoubtedly was charged with maintaining the waters safe for commerce. If one thinks that this is a trivial duty, all one has to do is to look at Somalia, a failed state, and the fact that its waters are teeming with ersatz, improvised flotillas of pirate bandits who will attack and kidnap absolutely everything and anything.

As I look at the narrow pathways up and down the steep hills, I reflect that Valparaiso was also the epicenter of conflicts as well as earthquakes. Bolivia used to own a part of the coast now claimed by Chile, and Spain fought to keep Chile as a part of its possessions. Later, with various economic adjustments and political conflicts, Valparaiso found itself in a strategic position. Being willing to travel and experience the house and then the historical district immerses one in the experience and leads to highly effective experiential learning. “The most effective experiential learning occurs when individuals participate in concrete experience that fully involves their intellect, feelings, and behaviors” (Meyer, 2003, p. 353).

While walking in Valparaiso and other UNESCO World Heritage sites may not be outdoor adventure in the sense of mountain-climbing or kayaking, it is a physical experience, and as such triggers other aspects of cognition which are associated with physical activity. Meyer found that outdoor-adventure is a very effective type of experiential learning precisely because it brings together different types of learning (auditory, spatial, visual, kinaesthetic) (Meyer, 2003). Thus is it possible that the best artist or writers’ homes museums will incorporate hands-on, experiential learning that incorporates skills and challenges.

After visiting Neruda’s house, I went with my small group to the Plaza Sotomayor, where we toured some of the historical buildings and took photos of the stunning sculptures and monuments. It gave me a sense of the context of Neruda’s writing, and also of some of the influences on his view of nature, history, and heroism. I view Neruda as a philosophically heroic figure; perhaps not so much for his political stance (ephemeral—do we even remember what that was?) but for his gift of poetry and the ability to illuminate human spirit.

Looking out across the Pacific Ocean, one feels a sense of vastness and a sense of the infinite—feelings so well evoked by Neruda’s writing. One also feels a renewed sense of stewardship toward nature and harmonious coexistence with the oceans and all forms of life on earth.

3.2 Case 2: Carson McCullers’s House in Columbus, Georgia: Place-Based Learning

It was early in March and the weather alternated between chilly and wet, and bright green blossoming spring. I walked down the old sidewalks in the Columbus, Georgia neighborhood where Carson McCullers lived, and I could feel a certain vibration—was it the feeling of the underdog? The town is on a river that had just flooded, and like all towns on rivers, the heart and soul of the flowed in the waters.

To understand Carson McCullers, it is necessary to understand the attitudes toward race, women, the disabled, and the LGBT community in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. “As we envision it here, place-based study involves both the museum members of the community, and it may address museum or community needs or issues. For example, an art or history museum might turn to ethnic community to provide context and audience for a related traveling exhibition” (Villeneuve et al., 2007, p. 258).

Carson McCullers lived only a few miles from the Chattahoochee River, and to get to the location involved driving on old brick streets, where lawns are manicured and green, and the shrubs and bushes grow rapidly, to bud out, flower and fade equally rapidly. It feels like a place of genius, where conflicts and contradictions see the just below the surface, tormenting the sensitive and artistic until they capture the paradoxes in words, music, or art. The community Columbus has embraced Carson McCullers, and there are many historical monuments and plaques that educate the visitor on important historical and cultural facts. Instead of denying its uncomfortable past, Columbus has historicized it, and the individual visitor may gain a great deal by sitting, observing, and reflecting in a journal or a quickly drafted short story.

Carson McCullers’s home is now a living museum and a place for researchers working on Carson McCullers to stay in residence. It is affiliated with the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians (<http://www.mccullerscenter.org/>) at Columbus State University where McCullers specialist scholar Nick Norwood is its director. There they can immerse themselves in her life, times, and literary productions while living in a town that was, during Carson’s childhood, highly socially stratified and segregated industrial textile mill town.



Figure 1. Carson McCuller's Childhood Home in Columbus, Georgia. (Photo Credit: Susan Smith Nash)

The instructional strategy utilized by the Center is one of unveiling. They use the home as a way to reveal the historical conditions that figure so prominently in McCuller's writing. The visitor looks inward and seeks the parts of his or her psyche that has been damaged by the world, and is somehow healed by finding it reflected in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and *Ballad of the Sad Cafe*.

Once inside the home, I was struck by the fact that people did not include hallways in the floorplan and they had to walk through the different rooms. That may explain some of the odd floor plans I've seen in older homes. Further, they do not have closets. It's necessary to have armoires or large cedar chests and chests of drawers. So, you walk in and out of each other's rooms without any sort of separation or buffer. I considered how the arrangement of the home may have shaped the way that the inhabitants interacted with each other. It might have been difficult to have privacy. This awareness made me think of the scenes in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* where the bedroom is a place of refuge. That moment of reflection after my visit definitely deepened my understanding of both the work of literature and the social/psychological context. Similarly, young children in an international, bilingual Reggio Emilia school in Stockholm demonstrated that each visit to a museum that involved follow-on activities showed increasingly deeper levels of knowledge (D. Carter, 2018).

So, in such a home where there are no halls, you will always be a part of another person's room. As I looked at Carson's books, her work spaces, and her living quarters, I could imagine both her moments of sickness and of exultation. I felt the body desperately ravaged by rheumatic fever, and then by stroke after stroke. What was more, I felt the body that felt itself connected to all of society's harmed, broken, vulnerable, and desperately fragile, all of whom had in common the fact they loved, and they loved deeply, usually unrequited, unknown, or simply the wrong person. McCuller has a special ability to describe the loneliness and isolation of the human condition, and the special human qualities of society's misfits, outcasts, sick, young, old, and more.

Love was the condition that pushed the individual directly from room to room, place to place, feeling connections, but perhaps not able to express it, and certainly not able to articulate the pain and anguish when the desperately desired love was not returned. The day I visited was a bright spring day and outside the azaleas were already blooming, the trees oxygenating the air with their showy green foliage. In this close, narrow house, I felt the harsh ironies of love when one does not love oneself. Carson McCullers was small, with a pixie-cut hair style, and quite courageous, but fame was too much for her. She fell in love with a soldier at nearby Fort Benning. They married. They loved each other, competed with each other, and ultimately had to separate. People blame her drinking, but that was probably only a symptom. Carson needed the competition as a conversation to continue to write, to have the courage to write about taboo subjects: the racial issues of the Deep South, the loves of the developmentally delayed, the deaf-mute, the same and “other-sex” confusion, all are painted in through scenes in which people react to each other, sacrifice themselves for each other, and then realize that their sacrifices ultimately meant nothing.

I saw the sofa where she composed many of her works, and I was moved by the fact that she continued to write even after experiencing severe pain from her condition. Common wisdom holds that Carson McCullers was a desperate alcoholic, but others maintain that it was not really so much alcoholism as heart and vascular issues stemming from childhood rheumatic fever and the subsequent series of strokes. At a certain point the sense of grief in the home was too much for me. I shivered lightly and looked out the front window and contemplated the neatly trimmed yards. The home is on a quiet residential street in a very nice part of town.

The lots are large and there are wide sidewalks where people walk their dogs. It reminded me of Ardmore, Oklahoma, and my grandmother’s house. Where did “The Ballad of the Sad Café” take place? Near here? Near the river where Coca-Cola was supposedly formulated, and where people either worked as laborers in the textile mills or as gentry who spent time sipping mint juleps and capturing life in dreamy watercolors to hang in galleries with impossibly high ceilings and the musical tones of hushed, low Deep South antebellum accents.

3.3 Case 3: Content-Based Learning for Language Learning: Alexander Pushkin’s Home in St. Petersburg, Russia

The famous poet of heroism lived in a house that was actually a palace. Of the Russian aristocracy, Pushkin was also descended from an African King, General Abraham Petrovitch Gannibal, of a tribal kingdom near present-day Cameroun. Pushkin was proud of his heritage, and often referred to himself as “afrikanitz” (African).

Visiting the Pushkin House was a perfect opportunity to practice Content Based Instruction (CBI) for learning another language; in this case, Russian. Pushkin’s poetry is stunning, and the descriptions of his work and the history tend to be presented in a clear, almost technical Russian, which makes it easy for learning. The brochures we purchased along with books available for purchase in the gift store were in Russian, which helped with immersion: “By engaging students in subject matter they find interesting,

and by using authentic target language materials, CBI aims to make students' language output more natural, and to help students make new connections among language, culture, and society" (Sederberg, 2013, p. 252).

The day I visited "Pushkin House" was in late June, still in the season of "White Nights" where the sun never seems to set, but sinks in the sky until it touches the western horizon, just to strike up an eery glow on the eastern horizon. It rained almost every day, and in the photograph on the walkway to the house, I am carrying a borrowed umbrella. It was before 9-11, the ruble had just crashed, and you could see signs of economic suffering everywhere. Elderly people on pensions were reduced to begging, retired professors were selling their books for cash, and there was talk of violence and the Russian mafia. In fact, I saw a bloodied and beaten man groaning under the bridge across the Neva River near my dormitory at the Herzen University, where my two weeks of study ended far too soon.



Figure 2. Outside Pushkin House in St. Petersburg, Russia (Photo Credit: Susan Smith Nash)

I was delighted to have the chance to visit Pushkin's house, whose poetry I admired. Pushkin House was not necessarily easy to visit. First, I felt a bit uncomfortable because there was a great deal of resentment toward foreigners or outsiders, who were viewed to have contributed to the collapse of the economy. To my surprise, however, I was constantly mistaken for a Russian. I was learning Russian and sometimes could understand up to 50 or 60 percent of what was being said (but sometimes that dropped to around 10 percent).

We took a car to the palace, paid our fee, and entered. To visit the museum, you had to take off your shoes and put on slippers in order to not damage the wood floors or the exquisite carpets. Everything

was built in the style of Louis XIV through Louis XVI which featured bright white walls, gilt frames, gold leaf, mythological figures, dolphins, and cherubs. Many paintings were in the style of Poussin.

I could better imagine how Pushkin's values and his overwhelming sense of heroic loss could engender the desire to write epics and thereby construct history when I saw his house. I could imagine Pushkin drafting "The Bronze Horseman" in his home library, which had so many shelves it resembled the library of a university or monastery.

The wood parquet floor was roughly the same color as his mahogany *escritoire*, which had intricately worked French rococo bronze pulls and terminations.

In addition to writing poems, Pushkin also wrote short prose. His short story, "The Shot" also addresses issues of heroism, sacrifice, and firm adherence to a higher sense of duty. In it, the prince Ypsilanti attempts to institute reforms for the improvement of life for his people.

Pushkin lived the philosophy of political resistance, personal honor, heroism, and valor that he expressed in his poems. He died at age 38 in a duel.

In an unpredictable world where violence, issues of honor, and duty are a part of an individual's responses to real-life challenges, visiting Pushkin House also provides an opportunity for authentic learning. Authentic learning, in which one is encouraged go through a process of observing, making meaning, and then creating a work (Pearce, 2016), is an effective and appropriate strategy in this case. For example, how might one write a story that deals with a soldier's experience in war? The learner would acquire knowledge, transfer the learning to the situation, and then make meaning (in the form of the response, which could be written, visual, or a performance). The activity could be very healing for a veteran who is trying to make sense of the loss of his companions in battle.

3.4 Case 4: Content-Based Learning Across Cultures: Ilya Repin's House outside St. Petersburg, Russia

I had the chance to visit Ilya Repin's home several years ago while I was attending a 2-week workshop on language and writing at Herzen University in St. Petersburg, Russia. Because of the nature of Repin's historically informed romantic canvases, it was a perfect opportunity to see how an emphasis on content and themes enhanced the learning process.

Following Ritchhart's ideas (2007) group tours, along with self-guided tours can be made even more effective by positing questions as well as simply having docent or podcast-delivered information. In addition, the idea could be to capture the responses to the questions in a journal or a response-piece of art or creative writing.

Repin's house is outside St. Petersburg in the middle of a beautiful forest. I visited in June, and the weather was pleasant, the cool, summer light made the atmosphere crystal clear. The colors seemed super-saturated, and I could not think of a more engaging environment for painting.

I brought a journal with me and started to jot down thoughts. The docent asked us questions, too. In this case, some of the strategies for group learning could be effectively applied: "visits by instituting throughlines or overarching questions that could be used to learning". Their three questions—(1)

Where do ideas for making art come from? (2) How does art connect us to the artist? Ourselves? Each World? and (3) How can we find meaning in a work of art?—framework for group learning (Ritchhart, 2007, p. 141). In addition, the same questions could be incorporated in a discussion board in an online course, for either synchronous or asynchronous discussion, and thus learn from each other. This is the “social constructionist” learning philosophy that forms the intellectual underpinning of Moodle’s interface design, and also the kind of learning that takes place in group learning.

Social constructionism does not live in a vacuum, or by discussion alone. Instead, it is important to anchor it with a concrete learning object or situation. Here, being in Repin’s house was ideal. Ilya Repin was not a writer, but an artist, but it was extremely interesting to see the lovely home where he painted. It was in a wooded little area, and it had lots of windows and rooms, plus several inventions to make it easier for the cook to send him his meals without interrupting him. The house was comfortable and the rooms not too large, but definitely large enough for painting and having a studio.

Repin’s eyesight failed and he developed arthritic hands (similar to Matisse, I think). He had special accommodations made for that as well. One of Repin’s most famous paintings, “Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks” (1891) was painted in his home. Now hanging in the Russia Museum in Saint Petersburg (which I happened to visit as well), it depicts Cossacks engaged in the delightful task of composing a profanity-laced letter to the Sultan after they had defeated the Ottoman Empire troops in battle.

In the painting, the Cossacks are laughing uproariously as they collectively pen the appropriate response to their mortal enemies. It’s a gorgeously composed canvas in the realistic/Romantic style of the late 19th century.

I’m unconsciously engaged in Content-Based Instruction (CBI), and there are many opportunities for Repin house to offer tours on site, develop online learning courses, and also even collaborate with other museums that share part of the history and artistic experience. In addition, focusing on the themes in Repin’s work helps the museum visitor begin to see patterns and to make meaningful connections between the pieces. Museum educator and art historian O. Hubard (2014) has described her experiences working with collections of Mexican muralists and how she used the work to talk about populist and political themes, and deeper significances given their context.

In addition, Hubard was able to take a single work of art, namely Romare Bearden’s *Patchwork Quilt* and to use it as a way to find themes useful in story-telling (Hubard, 2014, p. 110). For *Patchwork Quilt*, she focused on the following themes: story-telling, pattern and rhythm, and cultural influences (Hubard, 2014, p. 110).

Imagine my surprise and delight when I found myself in the city museum of the town of Gandze, Azerbaijan, where I happened upon an exhibit describing Ilya Repin’s visit in 1888 where he sketched people and objects to correctly capture the people, artifacts, and culture of the Ottoman Empire.

Even more astonishing was a scabbard and long sword exactly matching the scabbard and sword which take center stage in Repin’s famous painting.

There is no doubt that there is a connection to of all three places: The Russian Museum, Ilya Repin's house, and the Gandze, Azerbaijan, City Museum's Repin exhibit. The content constitutes a kind of discourse which is artistic, historical, and cultural, and it encourages the visitors to make comparisons of the objects and also to think of the historical events from more than one perspective (Cossack, Ottoman Empire, Soviet Union). It's an opportunity for synthesis, as points out Duenas: "Studies in discourse comprehension processes offer powerful support for CBI as well, since one of the paradigm major goals is to make information available through multiple opportunities to work with varied yet coherently developed sets of content resources, and to recycle that information with different procedures and techniques" (Duenas, 2004, p. 79).

The synthesis of art, history, culture, and political science allows one to develop explanations for certain phenomena, and to posit explanations for one's own observations, especially while traveling.

3.5 Case 5: *Reflection, Regrets, and the Construction of Autobiographical Metafiction: Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen)'s House in Nairobi, Kenya*

I had expected Africa to be hot, but Nairobi was not, due to the altitude, which was right at a mile high, and perfect for cultivating coffee. I was eager to make a pilgrimage to Karen Blixen (writing as Isak Dinesen) because I consider her work to be autobiographical metafiction that encourages one to re-read and rethink other works of literature.

The air was cool under the trees, and there was a soft, light breeze. I was in Kenya for two weeks on as a volunteer consultant for an economic development program to develop marketing materials and to develop a system for communication among smallholders in order to achieve economies of scale and to improve the markets. It was a fascinating project and there was a sincere desire to make things better for people in rural areas. It was not easy, though.

The Danish author, Isak Dinesen (real name, Karen Blixen) lived in Kenya for 17 years as she tried to make a go of her coffee plantation. It was a turbulent time in terms of politics and also in terms of her emotional life, all of which she captures in *Out of Africa*, which was written long after she had moved back to Denmark.

Blixen published under the name, Isak Dinesen, for English-speaking audiences. I have no idea why. I think that no one cares about the name the author uses; they care about the writing. Karen Blixen lived in Nairobi, Africa, in a suburb now named "Karengata" which means Karen's home. The suburb is an exclusive one, now, and all the homes have walls and security services. There are lush gardens, green lawns, and large, shade-imparting trees.

Karen's house is a one-storey rock building, a farmhouse with multi-paned windows, a steep red tile roof, and long winding paths that crisscross the grounds. Karengata is near the lovely Ngong hills that she visited frequently during her years in Kenya (1917 to 1931).

I visited one cool, cloudy afternoon, and the greens had a super-saturated hue, and one felt the magic of possibilities. During Karen's years in Africa, Karen established deep bonds of trust with the Masai people and their culture. She came to deeply appreciate the changes in the politics, and the conflicts

over land, influence, and control of resources. Her experience, however, was difficult, and at the end of the day, she failed to make her farm economically viable.

One thing that interests me about the process of writing the novel is that was written in 1937, years after Karen had moved back to Denmark. Like Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798), *Out of Africa* was written years after the events happened and in a different location, which means that work is freighted with an unforgettable emotional element.

Being in the place encourages one to reflect and take notes about one's own memories, and to construct what turns out to be a metafiction about one's youth, one's young adult dreams, sacrifice, and hopes (and what turn out to be highly romanticized and unattainable) for love.

Blixen's (Dinesen's) work is shrouded in nostalgia, regrets, and memories of a glorious, youthful time of intense experiences and feelings. In addition to trying to make her family's farm a success, Karen went lion-hunting and explored the African veldt in a small plane flown by her pilot friend, a man she could never have, but whom she dearly loved.

The novel is drenched in a hot, bright Africa sun, the Rift Valley area with its thorn trees, grass lands, massive shallow lakes that radiate a shimmering pink hue as thousands of flamingos stand knee-deep in the waters brimming with fish.

Out of Africa was one of fellow author Carson McCullers's favorite books, and there is a photograph in Carson McCullers's house that features Karen Blixen and also Marilyn Monroe.

3.6 Case 6: Embodied Responses: The Complex World of Juan José Arreola

I visited the house of the Mexican writer and critic Juan José Arreola in Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco, Mexico the 100-Year anniversary of the Author's Birth Arreola's house sits perched on a hill with a stunning view of the city, the valley, and the Colima volcano. When you pass through the gates, you are in a walled garden, and a house that has many levels. It has been converted into a gallery and cultural center. When I visited, there was an exhibition of "papel picado" (pierced paper) the perforated paper flags that are hung across streets during holidays and fiesta. Most were celebrating Día de los Muertos.



Figure 3. The Entrance to Juan José Arreola's Home in Ciudad Guzman, Jalisco, Mexico (Photo Credit: Susan Smith Nash)

To understand Arreola's work, one has to understand the context. Like his fellow author, also from Jalisco, Juan Rulfo, Arreola experienced the Guerra de los Cristeros, which was remarkable in its immediacy and brutality. Trusted priests were hidden by parishioners, to be brutally murdered in front of the mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, and children who protected them. To have such close contact with seemingly indiscriminate bloodshed was very traumatizing.

Arreola's house contains a museum as well as a garden, and an invitation to participate in his activities, which included riding a bicycle and devising elaborate costumes. Such a kind of participation is an "embodied response", which can be effective. "Embodied responses make the learning experience more enjoyable. But aside from making visits more dynamic and fun, non-discursive activities make unique contributions to museum learning. They help visitors engage their bodies and emotions in response to an object, they grant viewers access to those aspects of a work that may elude discourse, and they enable people to express their responses through processes other than rational thought. In short, non-discursive activities can help activate, in particularly direct ways, the embodied ways of knowing that are so essential to aesthetic experience" (Hubard, 2007, p. 48).

Juan José Arreola's house sits perched on a hill with a stunning view of the city, the valley, and the Colima volcano. When you pass through the gates, you are in a walled garden and then in a house that has many levels. The home itself has been converted into a gallery and cultural center. When I visited,

there was an exhibition of “papel picado” (pierced paper) the perforated paper flags that are hung across streets during holidays and fiesta. Most were celebrating Dia de los Muertos.

The grounds are lovingly landscaped with pine trees and jacarandas, along with other flowering trees. Supposedly, Juan José rode around town on his bicycle, his wild hair flowing. He made an impression in the 1950s with his innovative fictions, which combined a kind of Borgesian surrealism with whimsy and irony. He is considered a quintessential Mexican writer who incorporated many of the traditions, values, and language of his home, Jalisco. Because of the Guerra de los Cristeros, Arreola had to drop out of school after the 4th grade, at age 8. After that, he taught himself everything he knew, which included acting, writing, and working with book construction.

Arreola was known for his prodigious memory for poetry and drama, which must have helped him develop his ear for language, and also to incorporate the world around him. Further, having such a deficit of formal education might account for Arreola’s flamboyant dress and behavior—it would provide armor in a very hierarchical and snobbish literary world.

At the same time, Arreola seemed to appear on the scene at a fortuitous moment in time, when artists such as Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were championing the authentically Mexican. In being an autodidact, he reminds me of Charles Dickens. I had the good fortune to visit Arreola’s home on precisely the 100th anniversary of his birth, just when a reading/presentation was wrapping up.

My friend and I were both given a gift of his book of whimsical short stories, *Confabulario*. I’ve read a few of them. I find them absolutely delightful. “Rhinoceros” shimmers with a delightful schadenfreude as the divorced wife of a choleric and abusive judge (the “rhinoceros”) is tamed by a quick-witted (but selfish) new wife; he lives an enforced and circumspect life... only wonders why he allowed himself to be converted into a docile, slightly malnourished vegan.

For all who have had to deal with a brute, it has a Dantesque symmetry as the judge experiences his own “contrapasso”. There is tremendous wisdom in Arreola’s “beast fables”—here’s a quote from “Girafa” which perfectly captures the ironies of the human spirit, and the resulting divisions, splits, and double-edged blessings and gifts:

With such wasted technique, which makes it really challenging to both gallop about and to love, the giraffe represents better than anyone the delirious ravings of the spirit; it looks in the heights for what others find on the surface of the earth. (a loose translation of a paragraph from “Girafa”).

Another of my favorite passages in Arreola is a discussion in a movie theatre about whether or not the devil got a good deal when he bought the soul of what the commentator in the story considers to be something of a ne’er do well spendthrift. It reminds me a bit of O. Henry’s “The Ransom of Red Chief”—kidnappers kidnap a child who is so annoying that by the end, instead of demanding ransom they pay the parents to take him back.

The instructional strategy is that of comparison and connection, along with collaboration. One sees a kind of conversation that the text has with other texts (in the manner of Bakhtin’s “carnavalesque”

which refers to the way that works interact with each other in the world). The activity encourages visitors to create categories of writing and to analyze them. For example, some of Arreola's most whimsical writing reminds one of Jorge Luis Borges, especially in the way that his stories explore transformative symbolism and metaphysics (Rodríguez Ruiz, 2018).

The instructional strategy involves intellectual contemplation, but it's also deeply experiential. I breathe deeply and enjoy the woody, slightly spicy aroma of the woods and flowers. I realize we're between the "sky islands" of mountainous pine forests, and then the chaparral scrub in the valley floor toward the Colima volcano. The volcano is active, the earth is capable of passion and violence, and, as in the Guerra de los Cristeros, is probably inevitable, but unpredictable in its impact.

4. Discussion

Artists' and writers' homes that have been converted into museums and monuments provide a unique opportunity for experiential and content-based learning about the artist's life work, his or her biographical and historical context. Instructional strategies can be developed for individual visitors, groups, and also online visitors, which can take full advantage of content (manuscripts, reproduction, critical and historical works) and possible group/collaborative learning. The learning strategies for the museums are most effective when they are framed in the unique experience of each museum, which could also incorporate the immediate community. Content-based contextual learning can be very engaging because it also can tie to prior learning, and can be used in many ways, ranging from the use of themes, classification and comparison, to collaborative or individual creative responses.

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