POST VISIT ACTIVITY
Observation and Imagination: Working with Shape

Review: Everything has a shape. Shape is one of the ways we describe things and talk about how they are different. Shapes can be arranged to create recognizable images. The term nonobjective or nonreferential refers to shapes derived from no single representational object or place. Circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles are examples of geometric shapes; free-form shapes are called organic shapes. A negative shape is a background or ground shape seen in relation to foreground or figure shapes.

Objective: To observe the presence of shape in our world and to consider the element of shape in the arrangement of the pictorial space.

Procedure: Have students make a simple blank book, such as the one in the Making a Simple Book activity. Explain that a sketchbook is like an artist’s tool box; the tools are the drawings and ideas recorded inside, ready to be used when needed. Using an object in the classroom as an example, ask students to describe the shape they see. Draw that shape on one page of the book. Instruct students to use their sketchbooks to record shapes that interest them at home or school. What shape is their dog’s ear? What shape is their bicycle seat? They should draw one shape per page, attempting to make the shapes fill each page.

Exercise: When students return with their “toolbox” of shapes, have them cut their shapes out of their book. Explain that these shapes are the “tools” for a new composition, and don’t necessarily have to represent the objects from which they were observed. Have students arrange shapes on a dark piece of 9”x12” paper. Students should have time to experiment with a few possible arrangements before receiving a glue stick to secure their composition. When gluing is complete, offer a light colored drawing material, such as a gold or silver crayon, to be used for additional shape or detail drawing.

Further Discussion:
Have students discuss what kinds of shapes they recorded in their sketchbooks. What kind of new pictures were made with the shapes? Did they describe something such as a creature or a building? Did they make a picture that does not describe anything? Do they see something different when they turn their picture upside down?

Variations/Extensions:
1.) Have students look at both the work done in class and the work done at the Museum. How would they choose to display the pictures together: side by side, one above the other, or in a class book?

2.) For younger students: Instead of using the sketchbook activity as the basis for shape collection, have students do a shape hunt in the classroom to match 5-6 paper shapes with objects in the classroom. These pre-cut shapes can be the basis for a collage following the exercise above. Try offering a background paper cut to a circle shape.

3.) For older students: Have students record shapes in their sketchbooks by observing negative shapes they see in-between and around the objects. Show them how to use the side of the pencil to darken the area of the paper that defines the negative space.

Related Picture Books to Explore:
Beautiful Blackbird by Ashley Bryan, A House for Hermit Crab by Eric Carle, It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles G. Shaw