

## Science Museum Research Summary: What parents want from a science show

*This summary is based on key findings from a Focus Group report by Tony Dent in May 2010 commissioned by the Science Museum's Outreach Team. Please contact us on [learning@sciencemuseum.org.uk](mailto:learning@sciencemuseum.org.uk) if you would like more details.*

### **Where should shows be held?**

Parents generally prefer shows to be held in small venues with a maximum capacity of 150. Although they understand that large theatres with better facilities may be more practical, they regard intimacy and audience participation as more important.

### **How long should shows be?**

Parents generally consider an hour and a half to be the maximum suitable length, although a significant proportion feel that shows should be no longer than an hour. Value for money is an important consideration - the show should be long enough to be worth the price, but not so long as to lose children's attention. Audience participation is also regarded as crucial - if children aren't involved, they may lose interest. Some parents felt too that longer shows should be split into two halves, perhaps with different subjects, either side of a ten-minute break.

### **What content and style are parents interested in?**

Parents like young, casually-dressed presenters, rather than the stereotypical white-coated 'nerd'; they feel an informal approach is important in removing barriers to children's appreciation of shows. They also want supporting materials to ensure their children gain maximum benefit from shows, perhaps in the form of a 'programme' or information pack, or by having downloadable information on a website.

The three words they felt would most attract their attention in descriptions of the show were Fun, Exciting and Interactive - but they were unsure of the meaning of the word 'outreach', so this should be avoided in material aimed at parents. Topics they felt would be of interest to their children included digestion, body parts (including the brain), explosions, electricity/power, space, weather, dinosaurs, technology, evolution and animal science, with body parts and space the most popular.

### **How much are parents prepared to pay?**

Much depends on content and length. Parents who have not seen a science show are generally prepared to pay less than those who have, with £5 regarded as the maximum in the former group and £10 in the latter. The consensus is that they will pay more if they are convinced of the show's quality and satisfied that it is sufficiently long to merit the price.

## **Further resources:**

Find out what teachers say they'd like to get from a science show by consulting a further sheet summarising Science Museum Research:

- Science Museum Research Summary: What teachers want from a science show

Find out about developing shows and workshops by reading sheets in our practical *What we've learned* series:

- What we've learned about writing and performing science shows
- What we've learned about developing workshops