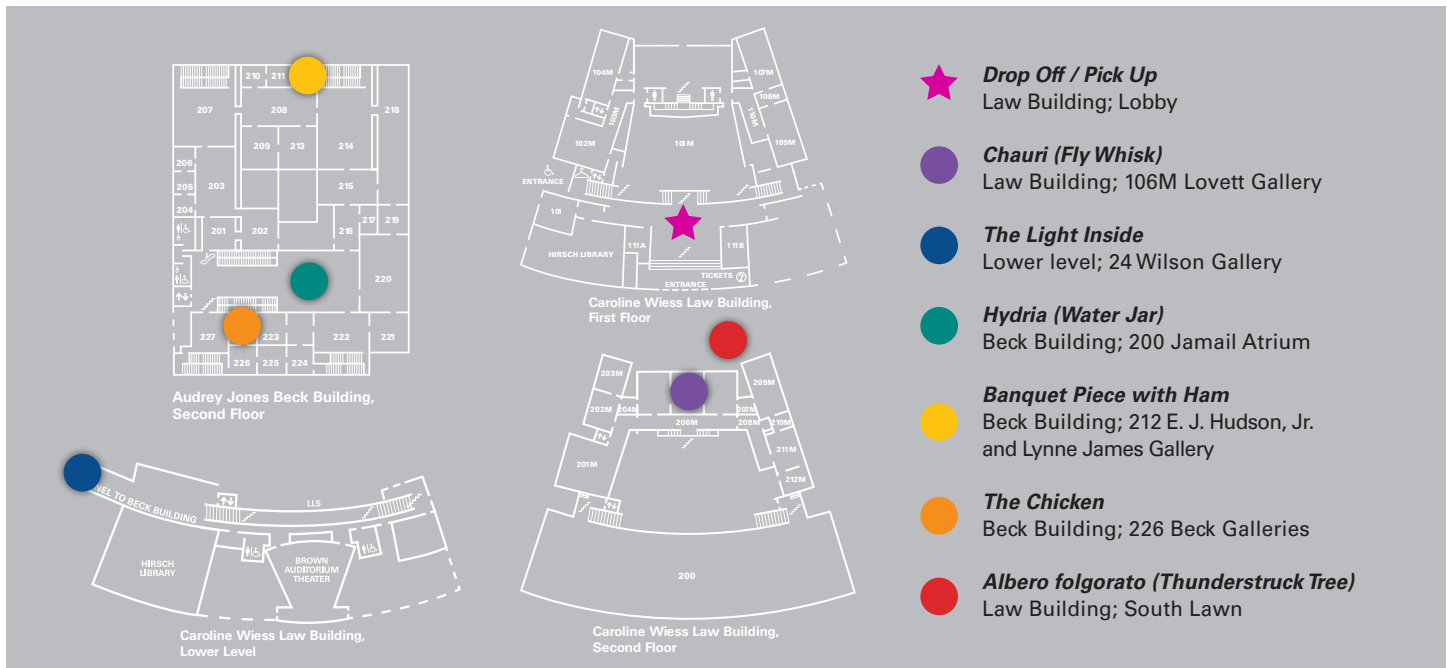


## Self-Guided Resource: Grades 6–8



### How To Use This Resource:

This resource will help you guide 6–8 students on an hour-long visit to the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for groups of up to 75. Each stop includes four parts.

#### Part 1: Art History

Before your tour, read about the works of art.

#### Part 2: Tour Tips

Because the Museum is often crowded and works of art may be off view, the back-up objects and tour tips will help you improvise along the way. The questions in this guide can be applied to nearly all works of art in the collection. Talk about what students are interested in, and encourage them to articulate and discuss their ideas, even if you do not have any art history information about an object.

#### Part 3: Questions

When you arrive at a new work of art, encourage students to spend a few minutes to look closely, ask questions, and think about what they see. Then, facilitate observation and discussion using these questions as your guide, sharing the art history from **Part 1** when relevant.

#### Part 4: Transitions

These transitions will guide the conversation from one object to the next, highlighting connections between artwork, collections, and ideas. The transitions are flexible, allowing the groups from your school to visit the objects in any order.

### Helpful Tips

- Before you visit, review How to Prepare for Your Visit attached to your confirmation email to learn about drop-off, pick-up, and check-in procedures, Museum policies, and more.
- Check the online collection module before you visit to confirm the works on view.
- Before you enter the galleries, split into groups of approximately 10–15 students and one chaperone. A chaperone must be with every group of students at all times.
- Please limit to one group per gallery, when possible.

### Looking for more information, or tips on how to make the most of your visit?

Visit the Museum's Learning Through Art online curriculum ([mfah.org/ltta](http://mfah.org/ltta)) with teaching videos and lessons, and the self-guided resources page ([mfah.org/selfguided](http://mfah.org/selfguided)) for more in-gallery activities!

## Art History Background

Fly whisks were often associated with religious ritual in both Hinduism and Buddhism, a symbol of brushing away troublesome thoughts and earthly worries. Ornate and beautiful fly whisks such as this one came to be associated with power, divinity, and royal authority in both Hindu and Muslim courts. This ornate fly whisk was carved from a single elephant tusk. From its shaved brush to the delicate bud that adorns the base of the handle, it exemplifies the creative and artistic flowering that characterized India's Mughal period. Though this fly whisk dates to the middle of the 18th century, just after the fall of the Mughal dynasty, it is covered with images and motifs often found in Mughal court art, such as blooming poppies and graceful cypress branches.

## Questions

- Spend a few minutes looking carefully. Walk around the case to view it from all sides. Notice the intricate carving, symbols, and material.
- Describe what you see. Have you seen anything similar to this before? If so, where?
- What symbols do you notice on the wand? Do you recognize images?
- Based on what you see, describe the person that might have originally owned this object.
- We discussed that the object is made of ivory. What associations do you have with ivory?



Indian, *Chauri (Fly Whisk)*, mid-18th century, ivory, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by the Brown Foundation Accessions Endowment Fund, 2009.1356.

## Tour Tip

Is this work of art off view or occupied? Visit another fly whisk in the Museum's African collection, Gallery 201, and apply similar questions to your conversation.

## Transition

As we move through the building, we will encounter a tunnel that connects the buildings underground. It is also a work of art. Pay close attention as you move through it and be aware of what you notice.

Along the way, students may notice . . .

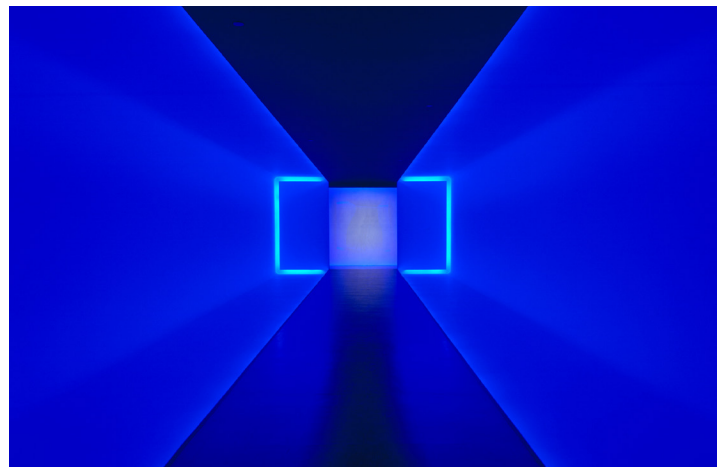
## The Light Inside by James Turrell

## Art History Background

Throughout his artistic career, James Turrell (born 1943) has focused on light and perception. In *The Light Inside*, concealed sources of neon light periodically change between magenta, cobalt blue, and crimson. Painted with highly reflective white paint, the ceiling, walls, and lowered area on either side of the raised black walkway capture and transmit the light, creating the illusion of boundless illuminated space.

## Questions

- What did you notice in the tunnel?
- How does walking through the space change your experience of the work? What if you stood still?
- How does color impact our view of the world?



James Turrell, *The Light Inside*, 1999, neon and ambient light, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum commission, funded by Isabel B. and Wallace S. Wilson, 2000.1. © James Turrell

### Art History Background

This ancient Greek water jar, called a *hydria*, is decorated with a scene of three women engaged in the daily activities of Athenian domestic life. The woman on the far left holds two *alabastrons*, small bottles used for oils or perfumes, one of which she passes to the woman on the far right. Both wear identical, plain *chitons* (tunics) and *himations* (draped cloths) and are probably the servants of the woman in the center, who holds a bundle of wool and bends over a wicker basket. Herons were often kept as pets in ancient Athens, and were sacred to the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The only examples of painting to survive from ancient Greece are on vases. Often these vases were made collaboratively by a potter and a painter. The style of painting on this vase is called “red-figure” because the unpainted figures retain the red color of the iron-rich clay after it is fired.

### Questions

- Look carefully at the scene on the center of the vase. Describe details of clothing, hair, and objects. How does the artist suggest different textures and materials?
- The parts of a Greek vase are named after the parts of a human body. Find the lip, the neck, the shoulder, the body, and the foot of this vase. How does the artist call attention to these different parts of the vase?
- Discuss the gestures of the women. What might they be doing?
- What does this reveal about the role of women in ancient Greece?
- What scenes would you paint to give people in the future information about domestic work today?



Attributed to the Painter of the Yale Oinochoe, *Hydria (Water Jar) with Domestic Scene*, 470–460 BC, terracotta with slip, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by General and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch, 80.95.

### Tour Tip

Is this work of art off view or occupied? Visit another painted Greek jar in the Museum’s antiquities collection and apply similar questions to your conversation.

### Transition

We’ve been analyzing works of art and making discoveries about the cultures that produced them. Keep these ideas in mind as we move to our next stop.

### Banquet Piece with Ham by Willem Claesz. Heda

212 E. J. Hudson, Jr. and Lynne James

### Art History Background

Willem Claesz. Heda (1594–1680) was particularly fond of including expensive foods, such as ham and oysters, in his still-life paintings. The luscious depiction of these foods as well as the expensive silver and crystal wares attests to the wealth of the upper-middle class portions of the Dutch Republic in the 17th century. The vessels seen here can be found in other paintings by Heda, such as the wineglass, beaker, potbellied decanter with its dragon spout, and bell-shaped salt cellar. Still-life paintings often conveyed a moralizing message. In *Banquet Piece with Ham*, the meal has been interrupted, emphasizing the ephemeral nature of life’s pleasures and wealth.

### Questions

- What do you notice about this painting? Look closely at and describe the objects on the table. Notice color, light, and object placement.
- Imagine yourself seated at this table. How many different materials and textures do you see?
- Consider the types of objects Heda has included. What associations do you have with these objects? What do they tell you about the type of people who might have owned them?
- This is a staged scene. Note the dramatic use of light and the extraordinary detail included in the composition. How would the effect change if Heda had not painted with such close attention to detail?



Willem Claesz. Heda, *Banquet Piece with Ham*, 1656, oil on canvas, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond H. Goodrich, 57.56.

### Tour Tip

Is this work of art off view or occupied? Apply similar questions to any of the other still lifes in this gallery.

### Transition

Through close looking and conversation, we’ve been able to carefully analyze this painting. Now, let’s apply those same skills to a different painting.



## Art History Background

Chaim Soutine (1893–1943), who was raised in a Jewish household in Lithuania, struggled with poverty and hunger from childhood into early adulthood when he lived quite meagerly as a student in Paris during World War I. In *The Chicken*, Soutine explores the important role food plays within Jewish culture in both religious and secular rituals. The large scale and close cropping of the composition elevate the otherwise common fowl. The emotion crafted through color and gestural brushstrokes honors the role of food in society as a symbol of nourishment.

## Questions

- Describe the painting. Be sure to notice color, brushstroke, and composition. What do you think the subject matter is?
- How would you describe the mood of this work? What elements in the work add to the mood?
- How does the artist create motion in the painting? Do you get the sense that the chicken is moving or still?
- Describe what atmosphere the thick brushstrokes add to the painting.
- The artist, Chaim Soutine, grew up in a Jewish household where food was scarce but still an important part of their traditional religious rituals. How does knowing about this relationship with food in Soutine's childhood change how we see this work?



Chaim Soutine, *The Chicken*, c. 1926, oil on canvas, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Mr. and Mrs. George R. Brown in honor of John A. and Audrey Jones Beck, 74.248.

## Tour Conclusion

At the end of the tour, ask students to reflect on their visit with any of the following prompts.

- What surprised you about your visit today?
- What are you still wondering about?
- What did you most enjoy about your visit?

## Tour Tip

Is this work of art off view or occupied? Apply similar questions to *The Toilers of the Sea* by Edward Manet in Gallery 222.

Extra time? Take a look outside . . .

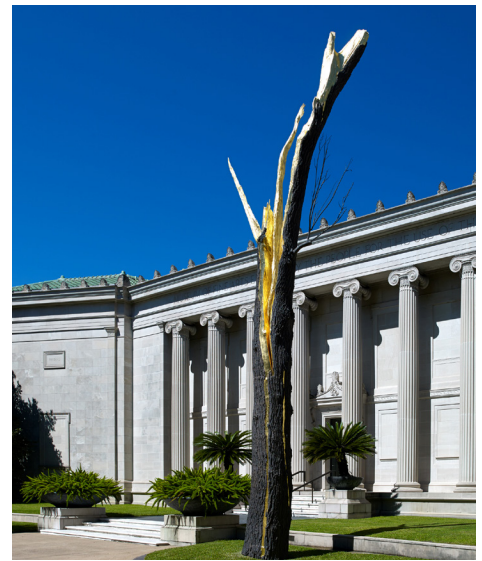
## Albero folgorato (Thunderstruck Tree) by Giuseppe Penone

## Art History Background

This tree's journey to Houston began two years ago in Italy, where Giuseppe Penone (born 1947) conceived and cast the sculpture in bronze from a lightning-struck oak, which he had shipped to his studio, gilding its core to capture the power and drama of a lightning bolt. Born in an agrarian community in the mountains of Italy, Penone became a part of the Arte Povera movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Artists associated with Arte Povera explored a range of unconventional processes and materials to challenge traditional artistic conventions. In *Albero folgorato*, Penone has created a dramatic sculpture with contrasts of positive and negative space, interiors and exteriors, and themes of change over time that suggest a human relationship with nature that is poetic.

## Questions

- Walk around this object, looking closely from all sides. Share what you see.
- Do you think this a real tree?
- Based on what you see, what do you think happened to this tree?
- What could it be made out of?
- What do you think about the gold? What associations do you have with gold?



Giuseppe Penone, *Albero folgorato (Thunderstruck Tree)*, 2012, bronze with gold leaf, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund, 2014.728. © 2012 Giuseppe Penone