

Lights, Cameras, Education!: Learning at Disney's Hollywood Studios

by Keely Hutton, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Keely previously brought us her insights into educational opportunities at the Magic Kingdom and Epcot. Here is her take on Disney's Hollywood Studios!

According to American novelist Gail Godwin, "good teaching is one-fourth preparation and three-fourths theater." While visiting Walt Disney World last year, I had to wonder if the Disney Imagineers used Ms. Godwin's formula when creating Disney's Hollywood Studios. For beneath its glitz and glamour, behind its bright lights and special effects are learning opportunities worth a standing ovation.

For smaller children, Disney's Hollywood Studios offers interactive lessons taught by their favorite stars at Playhouse Disney Live, where learning and fun are the "primary" goals. Guests are encouraged to sing and dance with the stars of Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, Little Einsteins, Handy Manny, and My Friends Tigger and Pooh. The 22-minute stage show also asks audience members to put on their thinking caps to create the best birthday possible for Minnie Mouse.

With your imaginations and creativity primed, take a lesson in art at The Magic of Disney Animation. Begin with a 10-minute segment about the importance of character development led by "the powerful, the pleasurable, the indestructible Mushu!" Eager artists can then study at the Animation Academy and create their own Disney character art under the tutelage of a Disney artist. Next, learn about the importance of our sense of sound at The Sound Stage, where guests create their own soundtrack for an animated series in this "ears-on" lesson. Color recognition and the moods each color elicit are important concepts at The Digital Ink and Paint workstations, where guests design the perfect atmosphere for their animated scene with an array of hues and shades. The "You're a Character" booths answer the one question on every Disney fan's mind, "Which character am I most like?" This fun quiz opens the door for interesting conversations on different personality traits and emotions.

Continue your education in the fine arts with a lesson in music with Belle and her hairy prince. Several times a day, the curtain rises on the breathtaking 20-minute show, *Beauty and the Beast*, performed at The Theater of the Stars. The catchy tunes are the perfect tool for a mini-lesson in rhythm and rhyme and how these poetic tools aid us in

memorization. Don't believe me? Be my guest, and put this theory to the test. Ask any person over the age of seven to finish this sentence: In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean _____.

If you are looking for music with a more contemporary beat, pop over to American Idol Experience, where guests live out their singing dreams on stage and judges render their verdicts, allowing for a lesson on manners. Discuss the difference between encouraging constructive criticism and cruel, insensitive remarks. What can we say and how can we act in order to treat family and friends more like Paula and less like Simon?

Move from musical numbers with Belle and Randy to mathematical numbers with Buzz and Woody at Pixar Place. In Toy Story Midway Mania, guests are encouraged to hurl pies, chuck eggs, break plates, toss rings and throw darts with only one caveat; shoot for the highest score. Like its predecessor, Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin, this 5-minute ride has guests sharpening their aim and math skills, but this time it is through a series of 4-D, virtual midway games. From recognizing numbers to differentiating between low and high values and calculating the difference between final scores, math has never felt more like playtime than it does with Andy's toys. An important component to education is the ability to listen and follow directions. Near the iconic Sorcerer Mickey's Hat, High School Musical fans can join the Wildcats in a choreography class during daily lessons in learning their famous footwork. Outside Star Tours, young Padawans must follow precise step-by-step instructions if they hope to defeat Darth Vader at Jedi Training Camp.

Time to shift gears and "Walk this Way" over to Hollywood Boulevard for a mind-blowing lesson in science with Aerosmith. On this popular thrill ride, the 3R's of education are no longer Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic; they're Rollercoasters, Rock and Roll. Before entering the ride, ask your child to keep a lookout for a common scientific tool that Rock 'n' Rollercoaster relies on to propel riders from 0 to 60 in 2.8 seconds. No, it's not a rocket, sling shot or catapult. It is the magnet, but to be fair, these magnets are a little more advanced than the Mickey one stuck to your refrigerator. Rock 'n' Rollercoaster is a LSM (Linear Synchronous Motor) launched coaster, using the concept of the attractive and repulsive properties of electromagnets. Have your kids discuss what happens when you try to force the sides of two magnets together. Do they pull together or push apart? How might this be used on a larger scale to pull or push a rollercoaster car forward if there are magnets built into the track and cars?

Now on to my favorite subject, language arts, let's take a quick peek at

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the educational stages Disney has prepared for lessons in literature. On Mickey's Avenue, step into the pages of a good book, in this case, C.S. Lewis's classic series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the exhibit, Journey into Narnia: Prince Caspian, guests can explore an exact replica of Aslan's stone table chamber movie set and view actual props and scenes from the film *Prince Caspian*. If your children have read the books and seen the movies, this exhibit sets the stage for an interesting compare and contrast lesson. In what ways did the movies differ from the books? Which did they like better? Why do they think the directors changed aspects of the books when making the movies?

When you return from Narnia, head over to the Hollywood Hills Amphitheater for the grand finale of literature lessons, *Fantasmic!* This 25-minute extravaganza including comedy, adventure, and romance is an eye-popping, jaw dropping opportunity for guests to learn about elements of a story. The storyline of *Fantasmic!* centers on Mickey Mouse and his band of do-gooders battling a mob of Disney ne'er-do-wellers. It is the classic tale of good vs. evil, heroes vs. villains, or as we English teachers say, protagonists versus antagonists. In addition, our protagonists must face several literary conflicts throughout the show, including character vs. character, character vs. nature, character vs. society, character vs. self and character vs. supernatural in the form of a 32,000 lbs fire-breathing dragon. But as with all great stories, *Fantasmic!* ends happily and even provides some spectacular fireworks to punctuate a perfect lesson in storytelling.

When it comes to discussing theater, one cannot ignore the genius of William Shakespeare. The Bard was right, "All the world's a stage!" And Disney's stage is set 365 days a year, so sit back and enjoy the show. I guarantee by the end of an exciting, educational day at Disney's Hollywood Studios, your family will be screaming "Encore! Encore!"

About The Author: Keely Hutton is a mother of two, writer of children's books, teacher of English and fan of all things Disney. When she is not planning her next Disney vacation or in front of her computer or class, she can be found at the local karate dojo, working out the stress brought on by a tough day of revising.

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