African Cosmos: Stellar Arts: Formative Evaluation with School Focus Groups

Abstract:

NMAfA Education Specialist Deborah Stokes requested OP&A to conduct focus groups with area middle and high school students to inform the development of a Gallery Guide for the upcoming African Cosmos exhibition that would be accessible to teens and address what most interests them and sparks their curiosity. Students from School Without Walls, Thomas Jefferson High School, and Howard University Middle School of Mathematics and Science participated. Methods were having small groups of students choose six images out of 30 provided and use them to tell a story about Africa; and a full group discussion about Africa, art, astronomy, and museum-going. The stories followed three thematic storylines – chronology from ancient to modern times, the diversity of the continent, and fable. Discussions showed that students, especially those who had been to Africa and/or had been exposed to current events or Africa-related movies, had a good general knowledge of Africa, its people, history, culture, mythology, and art. Students were museum-goers but viewed museums as traditional and not necessarily important to them.