

My Visit to the Hastings Museum

A Social Story



Updated: July 2026

How to use this tool:

New places can cause anxiety for some due to the unpredictability of the sights, smells, sounds, people, and unwritten rules that may be part of that new place.

This slideshow story can be read to, by, or with an individual who is coming to the Hastings Museum before their visit in order to help them anticipate what they can see, do, and experience.

To make it easier to navigate, we have added colored backgrounds: pink is arriving and leaving, yellow is main floor, maroon is upper floor, blue is the basement.

Sensory Packs

I can check out a backpack at the front desk to help me throughout my museum visit.

The backpack will have headphones, fidget devices, and putty I can use.

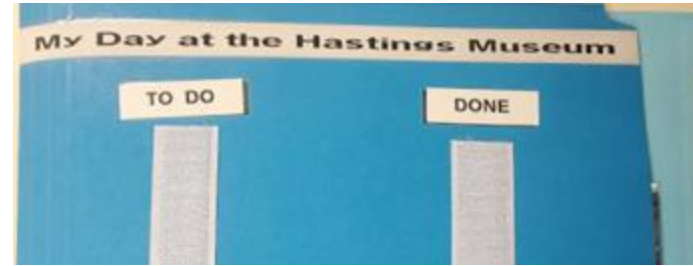
Items are cleaned after each use by Museum staff.



Visual Schedule

I can also check out a visual schedule to help me plan my day at the Museum.

There is also a map on the back of my chart that can let me know areas of the Museum that are loud or have a strong smell.



Family Restrooms

Family style restrooms can be found on the top floor by the elevator.

There are manual toilets in each restroom, a changing table, and a baby seat.

An adult or my family can come in with me if I need them to.



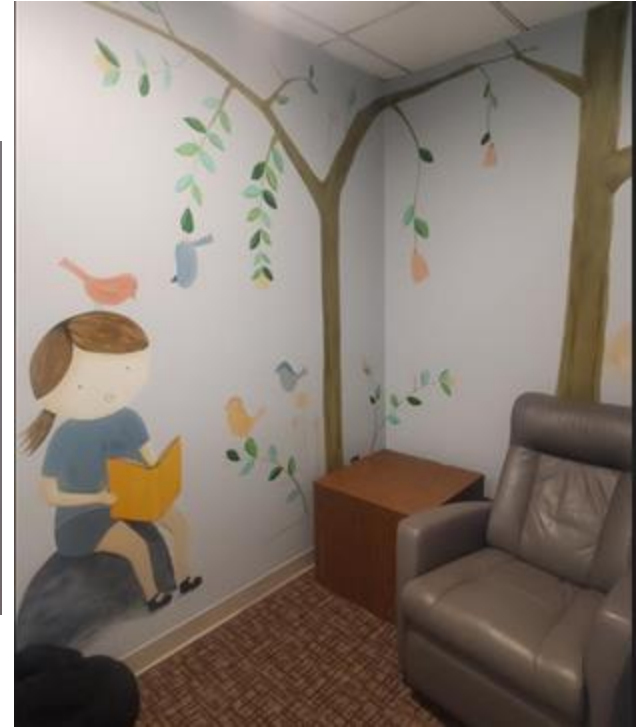
There are two family restrooms in this area.

Nursing / Calming Room

On the top floor by the elevators, there is a parent room I can use if I need a space to calm down.

I can control the lights in this room if I am experiences too much sensory input.

There is also a soft stool and a rocking recliner I can use to help me.



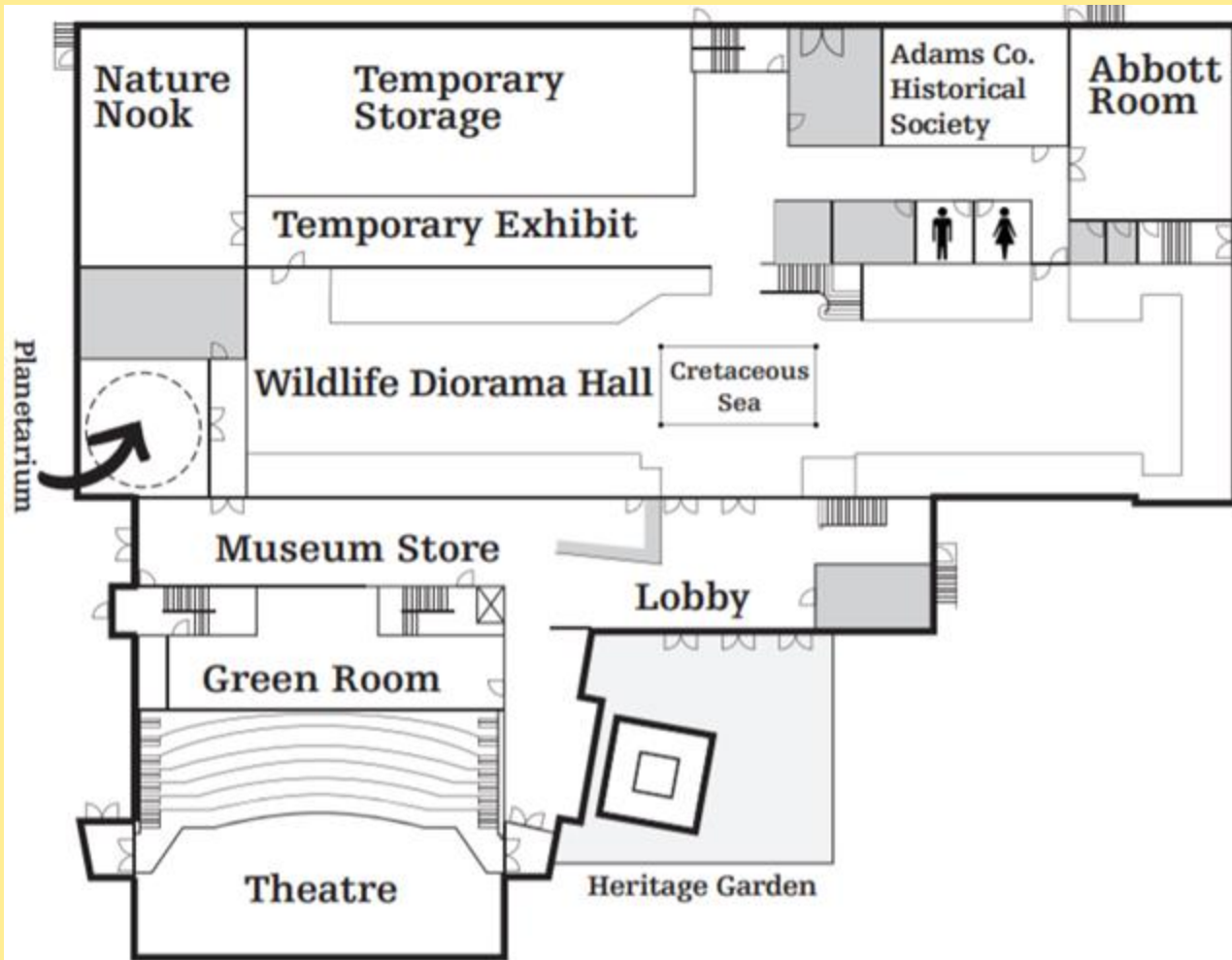
Arriving

I can go in the entrance doors and wait my turn to pay admission at the front desk.

Once I go through the doors, I use an inside voice.

I will wait at the front desk with the people I came with before going into the museum.





Main Floor

Museum Store

Before I leave the Museum, and if the person I am with says it is okay, I can visit the Museum Store.

There are souvenirs there to help me remember my visit to the Hastings Museum.

Once I select something, I go up to the counter to let the person working scan it and then I give them my money.



Super Screen Theatre

I can buy a ticket at the front desk to see a movie in the Lied Super Screen Theatre.

Inside the Theatre it will sometimes be dark and there may be some loud noises.

If I start to feel upset or sick, I should exit the Theatre quietly and take a break in the hallway.



Planetarium

Depending on the day I go to the Museum, I may be able to see a planetarium show. An adult can call the Museum to see what show is playing and when it is playing.

Before the show starts, the lights will be turned off and the room will be dark.

Once the show starts, I will be quiet and listen.

If I need to leave the show, I can exit the Planetarium with my family.

I will not be able to re-enter the planetarium if I leave during a show.



Wildlife Diorama Hall

On the main level, I can see the Wildlife Diorama Hall.

Animals are staged in their habitat, but they will not move or hurt me.

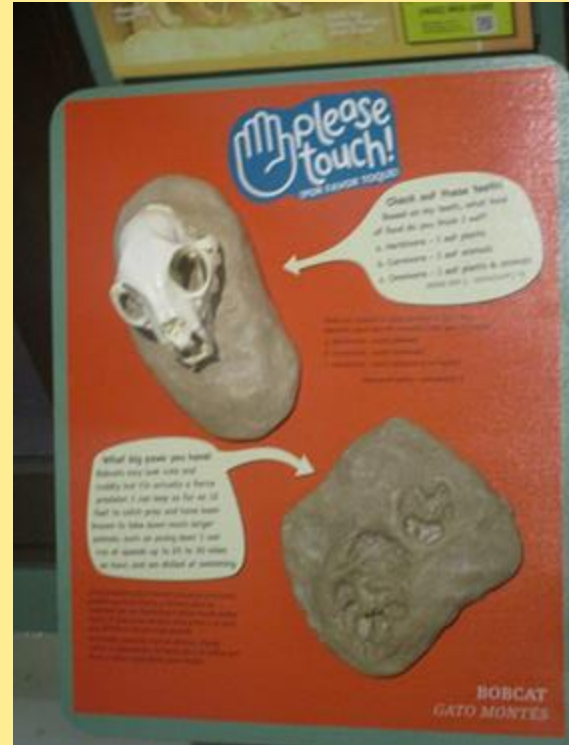


Wildlife Diorama Hall

I keep my hands off the glass.

If an adult says it is okay, I can gently touch the displays by the animals.

The displays are disinfected at least once a day by Museum staff.



Main Floor Restrooms

I will go through the Wildlife Diorama Hall and turn to find the restroom on this floor.

I can also follow the signs to the restrooms.



Flexible Seating

As I go around the Museum, I will see seating that spins and rocks.

If the adult I'm with says it is okay, I can rock and sit on these seats when I find them throughout the museum.

I can move them to a different location on the same floor if an adult says it is okay.

The seats are disinfected at least once a day by Museum staff.



Nature Nook

I can follow the stickers on the floor to find the Nature Nook.

In the Nature Nook I can see animals and prairie grass while learning about Nebraska ecosystems.

I will hear noises from nature. They could be animal sounds or other things I hear outside.



Nature Nook

Things in the Nature Nook are okay for me to touch.

For example, I can turn the pages in a book to learn more about what I see or twist the display to show different animals.



Nature Nook

If I want to, I can walk through or crawl inside of a tunnel to see what the prairie looks like underground.

It will be dark in there.

If I am afraid of the dark, I can walk around to the other side and see the exhibit from there.



Nature Nook

I can learn, play, and touch in these areas, too. There are activities and things to see.

If other children are using it, I will need to wait my turn.

Some areas may make noise or play a video if someone pokes the buttons.



Nature Nook

There is a pivot in this room that can have a bright strobing light if I or others push the button.

The light will spin three times and then turn off.

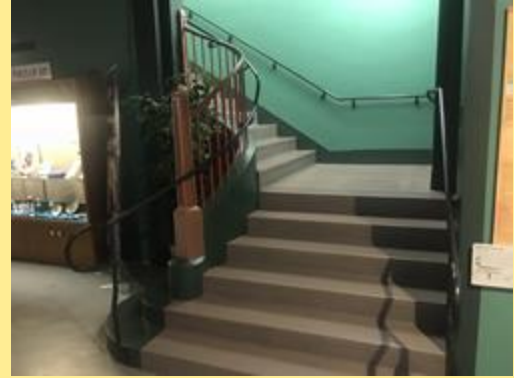


Going Up

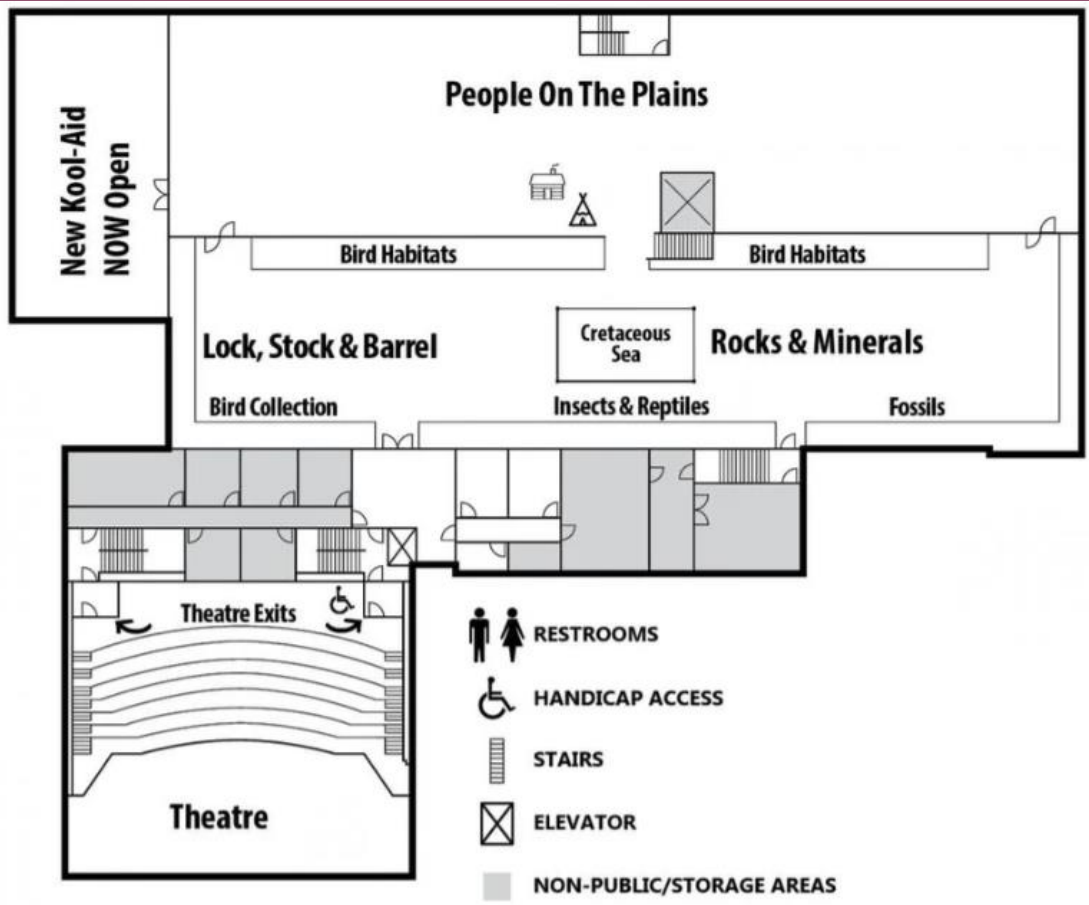
There is more to see on the upper floor.

I will walk carefully and use the handrail.

If I need an elevator, there is one in the lobby across from the desk that I can use.



Top Floor



People on the Plains Exhibit

At the top of the stairs I will see a big tipi. I can go inside to see what it's like.

I can use my imagination to play in this space. Any toys in this area must stay in this area.



People on the Plains Exhibit

Just past the tipi there is a cabin.

I can use my imagination to play in this space. Any toys or items in this area must stay in this area.



Kool-Aid Exhibit

Past the cabin, I can see the Kool-Aid exhibit.

I may smell cherries as I walk through the exhibit. There is an air freshener to make the exhibit smell like Kool-Aid.



Kool-Aid Exhibit

I can continue through the exhibit and play at different spots.
Any toys or dress up items at each spot must stay in that area.



At the General Store, I can pretend to work or shop there.



At the lab station, I can pretend to be a scientist and wear a lab coat if I want to.



At the Kool-Aid stand, I can pretend to sell Kool-Aid.

Kool-Aid Exhibit

There is a computer that will play past commercials. I can watch them by clicking on the pictures.

On the other side of this tower, I can submit my favorite Kool-Aid memory.



People on the Plains Exhibit

Other displays show me items that people used on the plains, what they wore, and what other types of homes looked like.



People on the Plains Exhibit

There are other houses that I cannot go in to see or touch.

I can look through the windows to see what it was like to live there.

I might see people inside. They are just statues and do not move or talk.



People on the Plains Exhibit

On the other side of the exhibit, I can see how people moved around and communicated on the plains.

These are things I can look at while I keep my hands to myself.



Bird Habitat Diorama

I can see bird dioramas.

These birds are not alive, but I can see what they would have looked like when they were living.

I keep my hands to myself in this area.



Serial Bird Collection

I can see other birds in cases.

These birds are not alive, but I can see what they looked like when they were living.

I keep my hands to myself in this area.



Lock, Stock & Barrel Exhibit

Lock, Stock & Barrel is an exhibit that has a lot of different types of guns.

They are behind glass and cannot hurt me.



Lock, Stock & Barrel Exhibit

Some cases have drawers below that I can open.

Each drawer has more guns and information inside.

When I am done, I close the drawer, unless someone else is still looking at what's inside.



Lock, Stock & Barrel Exhibit

I may hear some banging sounds when I enter this exhibit.

There is a machine that will play gun sounds if I push the buttons.



Rocks and Minerals Exhibit

Rocks and minerals are also on this floor.

There are a lot of glass cases to look into.

I keep my hands away from the glass so I don't leave fingerprints.



Rocks and Mineral Exhibit

Some cases have drawers below that I can open.

Each drawer has more rocks and minerals examples.

When I am done, I close the drawer, unless someone else is still looking at what's inside.



Rocks and Minerals Room

There are special rocks inside that fluoresce, or glow.

I can go inside to see the rocks. It may be dark in there when I first enter.

There will be UV lights used in this room. I will not look directly at the lights as they can hurt my eyes.



Rocks and Minerals

Once I push the green button, the lights will go off and the rocks will glow.

After a minute, the lights will go back on. I may hear a buzzing sound as the lights turn back on.

If I get scared, I can walk out at any time and there will be light in the big room.

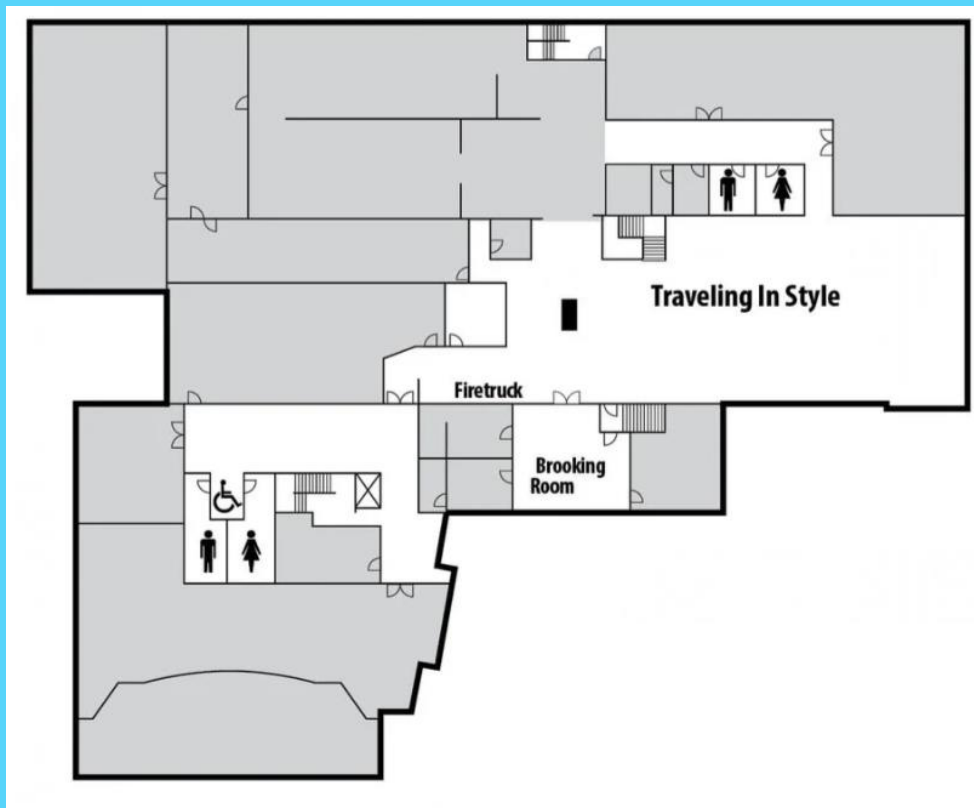


Fossils

I can see fossils along the wall.

These are all in glass cases. I will keep my hands to myself so I do not leave fingerprints on the glass.





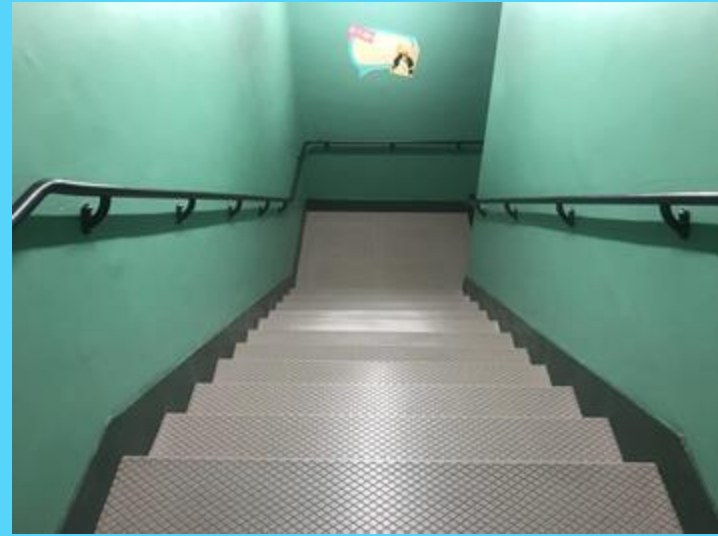
Basement

Going Down

If I go down both flights of stairs, I will be in the basement.

There are great things to see here, too.

I can also take the elevator that is in the lobby by the Lock, Stock & Barrel exhibit.



Traveling in Style: Antique Vehicles Exhibit

Antique vehicles are at the bottom of the stairs.

These vehicles are not for sitting in or driving.

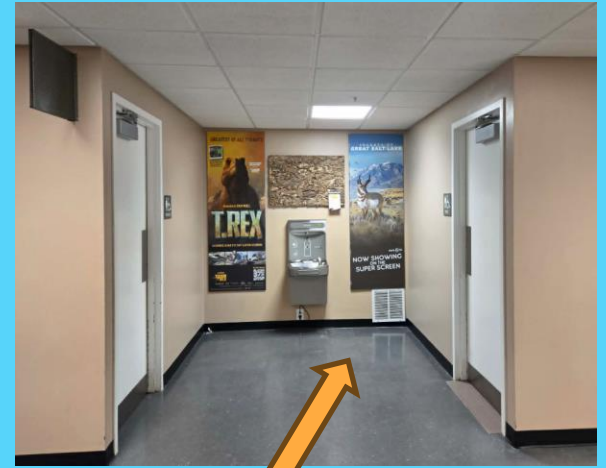
I can stay on the walkway and keep my hands to myself.



Basement Restrooms

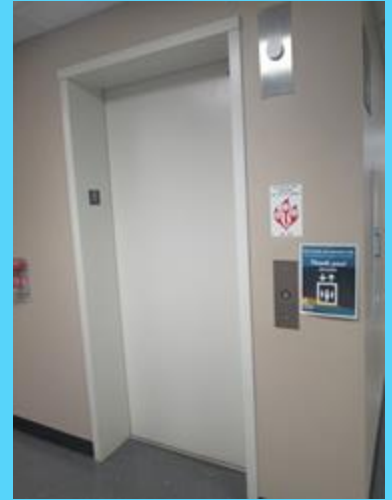
Restrooms can be found through the double doors by the fire truck.

I can follow the signs to find them.



Going Up

To get back up to the main floor, I can take the stairs by the fire truck, through the white double doors.



Leaving

On my way out I can say goodbye and thank you to the person working behind the front desk.

I leave through the same doors that I used to enter.

I walk carefully in the parking lot and watch out for cars.

I have great memories and think about all that I learned.

