

# Students get a real feel for museums

By KATHY PARRISH

As a child, Ellen Zak loved museums. But she remembers how frustrating it was not to be able to touch the fascinating things there.

So as coordinator of education programs for a special Japanese exhibit touring the United States, the former Avon Township resident is making sure youngsters get to touch the things they see.

"I think it's frustrating to go into a museum and see a lot of interesting ar-

tifacts and not be able to understand their context; to just see them sitting in a case," explained the Seattle resident while visiting two Rochester schools with items from the exhibit.

"A hands-on approach is the best way to get a feel for what things were like. It makes static objects come alive a lot more."

A UNIVERSITY of Michigan graduate in Asian studies and anthropology, Ms. Zak is working on her master's in museology at the University of Washington.

She is also education coordinator for "Image and Life: 50,000 Years of Japanese Prehistory," an exhibit of ancient Japanese artifacts being shown through Nov. 4 in the University of Michigan Art Museum, Ann Arbor.

The exhibit, which has never been outside Japan before, includes pieces of 10,000-year-old pottery.

Jointly sponsored by U-M and the University of British Columbia, it has been displayed at three Canadian museums and at Yale Peabody Museum and University of Texas Art Museum in

the U.S. After leaving Ann Arbor, it will go to the Field Museum in Chicago and to the West Coast before returning to Japan in April 1980.

MS. ZAK travels to each city where the exhibit will be seen and works with museum education coordinators to help them use the materials in it. She also put together a kit designed to help teachers explain the artifacts and Japanese history to their students.

"I tried to put myself in the teachers' and students' place," explains the 25-

year-old, whose aim was to work Japanese prehistory into other disciplines like art and social studies.

Making up exercises was the easiest part of the job.

"I based it on the kind of things I would have liked to do. It was fun — just making up little games."

She also goes into classrooms with slides and full scale replicas of Japanese artifacts. Showing pottery, tools, floats, sinkers and fishing net to youngsters at Brooklands and Meadow Brook schools, she asked them to guess what the items were and how they were used.

"Archaeology is a science, but it involves a lot of speculation," said Ms. Zak, who spent a summer on an archaeological dig in Tokyo. "I like to encourage them to speculate on what it might have been used for."

"And the kids are really good. It's amazing how they pick up on the information I give them, even though the information is brand new."

TEACHERS are given the kit if they can come to the exhibit. Most tours are now booked up, but they can still borrow the teaching kit and use the material in their classes.

Ms. Zak has been surprised at the success of the exhibit. "People are just as receptive to Japanese prehistory as they are to Egyptian," she said, obviously pleased. "We don't want to compete with Egyptian archaeology, but to just let North Americans know there is another culture civilization just as rich and interesting."

Ms. Zak's own interest in Japanese civilization goes beyond her studies. When she was a senior at Adams High School in Rochester, her father was transferred to Japan by Chrysler Corp. At first the move was "very traumatic" for the teenager.

"The first two weeks were complete culture shock," recalls Ms. Zak. "To live in a small town like Rochester and move to one of the largest cities in the world was really hard."

"But all of a sudden, everything changed and I became very enthusiastic. Our whole family became fascinated with the culture."

AFTER A year at an American school in Japan and traveling around the country to learn more about it, she came back to Michigan to study. Summers were spent in Japan, teaching English and doing archaeological excavation.



Students in David Hurst's sixth grade class at Brooklands School examine replicas of ancient Japanese vases. Guessing what the arti-

facts were used for are (left to right) Darcy Anderson, Jeff La Londe and Scott Romas.

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