Information for accompanying adult
Welcome

The Little Orphanage is for children aged between 4 and 10 and their (grand)parents and other accompanying adults. The presentation gives an impression of life at Amsterdam’s Civic Orphanage in the 17th century. Today’s museum complex housed the municipal children’s home for four hundred years. Children aged 7 and older discover the amazing story of Jurriaan, a real boy who actually grew up at the orphanage. For children under 7, the main characters are animals. Many of the displays are for touching, there are lots of activities and some of the exhibits whisper their story.

What to do

• Collect a wristband at the reception desk: one per person.
• Log in at the entrance of the Little Orphanage.
• Wait until it’s your group’s turn to enter.
• Where you see this symbol in the exhibition hold up your wristband and the orphanage will come to life! They whisper, so stand close.
• For an overview, see the activity guide on the back page.
Introduction

Amsterdam was bursting at the seams in the 17th century. Poor hygiene and a series of plague epidemics left the city with a huge number of orphans. These found refuge in Amsterdam’s various children’s homes. The Civic Orphanage had never been so full: as many as 900 children at one point in the 17th century. Our orphan Jurriaan was a real person. He lived from 1665 to 1745.

Entrance

No one could walk in or out of the orphanage without permission. Inside, residents had everything they needed: dormitories, refectories, kitchens, schoolrooms, infirmaries - with a house doctor, workshops, a brewery, a cowshed (until 1632), a bakery and more. In fact the orphanage was a tiny village inside the bustling city.
Porter’s Lodge
Children could not leave the premises without permission. Older boys were allowed: those who were apprenticed to masters elsewhere in the city. As they left, the porter would give them a work token. Fewer girls were allowed out. Some might be sent on errands, these would receive an errand token as they left. The porter also took in deliveries. The notes show what came into the orphanage. All the rooms in the orphanage buildings are listed on the inside of the key cupboard.

Shit House
There was no central water supply in the 17th century, and no sewers for waste. The toilet was a seat over a bucket, or over a ditch, as here. Without proper sewers it was easy for disease to spread, especially diseases carried by rats.

Governors Room
The orphanage was run by governors and governesses. These wealthy burghers controlled the money and set the rules and punishments. Governors met in the boardroom, the grandest room in the orphanage. A reproduction on the wall in the Little Orphanage shows how new children were registered. The Civic Orphanage was well regarded. Compared to other homes, the children who lived here had little to complain.

Classroom
The school was run by a schoolmaster who lived in the orphanage. Children learned far less in those days than they do today: reading, writing, arithmetic and scripture. And punishments were no joke! Yet school was still a luxury. Children in poor families outside the orphanage would often start working at the age of six. Orphans started work when they were twelve.
**Refectory**

The children ate in huge refectories. In the afternoon they were had a hot meal. The meals were nutritious and varied from day to day. Orphans would eat four to a bowl. Each child had a spoon - there were no forks at the orphanage. Since the water was too polluted to drink, the children drank small beer. Silence reigned during mealtime, except for the recitation from the Bible.

**Kitchen**

Cooks prepared the meals for the 900 orphans in enormous pots. There was a standard menu for the week. A matron ruled over the kitchen. There are only native Dutch herbs in this kitchen. Exotic spices such as cinnamon and cloves were available, but far too expensive and used only by the rich.

**Water Pump**

Rainwater was the only clean water pumped from the ground. Children washed no more than once a week. And not their heads, since doctors considered that water damaged the brain. Soap was used, but there was no shampoo. No one brushed their teeth, sometimes people cleaned the worst dirt away with an improvised toothpick.
**Dormitory**

Children slept together in large dormitories. When the orphanage was full, there were not enough beds. When Jurriaan was an orphan, children often slept three to a bed. All the children wore a standard uniform: red and black, the colours of Amsterdam’s emblem. They hardly needed any space to keep things, since they had no possessions. Lice was a common problem. The older children would help the matrons comb the youngsters’ hair.

**Cowshed**

The orphanage had its own cowshed. Yet children drank far less milk than they do today. With its own cow, the orphanage could supply cheese and meat. The city was still small enough for the cow to be let out to graze in the nearby meadow in the summer.

**Surgeon’s Room**

Many of today’s medicines did not exist in the 17th century and little was known about hygiene. In 1664, around ten percent of Amsterdam’s population died of the plague, around 25,000 people. The orphanage was full of children whose parents had died of the fatal disease. There were separate infirmaries where a nurse looked after children who were ill. Sometimes the surgeon would visit. He examined the children’s urine in a glass against the light.

**The Gate**

The orphanage was divided into sections: the children’s home had a section for girls and for boys, each with its own courtyard. Youngsters remained in the children’s house until they were about ten. Then they moved to the boys’ home and the girls’ home. Children were forbidden to leave their section, even to see a brother or sister. If they were lucky they might see each other at church on Sunday, or when relatives visited.

**Stockroom**

This was where everything was stored. Some children inherited possessions from their parents: these were sold at auction. The governors managed the proceeds and when the child left the home the money was returned. Most of the children left when they reached eighteen. Every first Sunday in May their departure was celebrated.
Exit
Please return your wristband at the right of the exit when leaving the Little Orphanage. If you followed the older children’s story, you can listen to Jurriaan’s tale here together. There is a picture here painted by the real Jurriaan in the 17th century, with a self portrait in medallion.

Careful
Remember, this is the adult part of the museum: the exhibits you see here are actual historical objects and paintings which you may not touch.

Visit the virtual Little Orphanage online.
There is an orphanage game for children to play, and an activity pack to download: see hetkleineweeshuis.amsterdammuseum.nl

Museum Shop
Our museum shop has a wide selection of books about the history of Amsterdam and Dutch art. Special products for children are also available, including children’s books.

Mokum Museum Café
The museum café is beside what used to be the orphanage boy’s courtyard. A special children’s menu is available. Enjoy!

This project was made possible by

See our website amsterdammuseum.nl for activities for children.
Overview of activities

= Speaking Object
= Activity
= Historical Object

INTRODUCTION
1. Collection box & Mouse

PORTER’S LODGE
1. Inkpot
2. Token box

Play the token game.
The tokens light up in the token box.

SHIT HOUSE
1. Toilet

GOVERNORS ROOM
1. Register
2. Clothes chest
3. Mirror
4. In the pigeon nest

- Go and lie on the bed.
- Dress up as an orphan and take a photo in the mirror.
- Visit the pigeon nest.

KITCHEN
1. Piece of bread
2. Bellows
3. Kettle
- Smell the herbs.
- Pump the bellows.
- Stir the porridge.
The kitchenware above the draining board.

CLASSROOM
1. Dunce
2. Writing desk
- Write with a quill and discover a secret message.
- Crawl through the hole and spy on the governors.

REFECTORY
1. Pile of plates
2. Beer jug
3. Lectern with Bible
Crawl through the tunnel to the mouse’s nest. Look out for a way into the kitchen.
Pile of plates and other pewter in the corner showcase.

PUMP
1. Pump
2. Chicken

DORMITORY
1. Bed
2. Clothes chest
3. Mirror

COWSHED
1. Fly on cow
2. Swallow

Touch the cow’s udders and start milking.

SURGEON’S ROOM
1. Chair
2. Stove
3. Skull

Find the cause of the plague on the rat.

THE GATE
1. Gate

STOCKROOM
By the stockroom door:
Play an old Dutch game.
On the cupboard: 1. Owl
Through the cupboard: 2. Chest

After leaving the Little Orphanage:
Painting by Jurriaan.