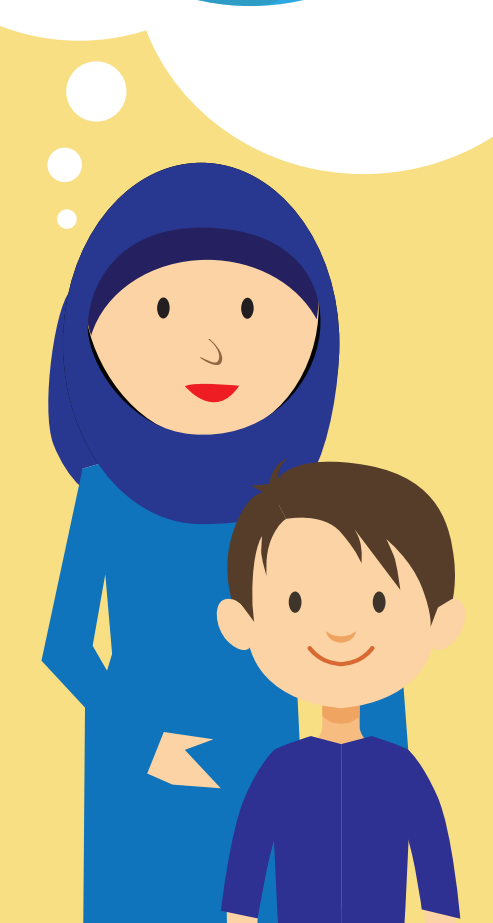


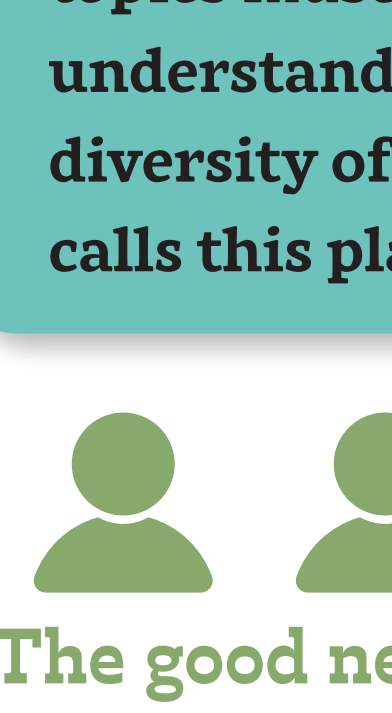
"We strive to be better people, showing more humanity and kindness. We often lack the skills or knowledge on how to do this. Museums can guide us to these realizations."



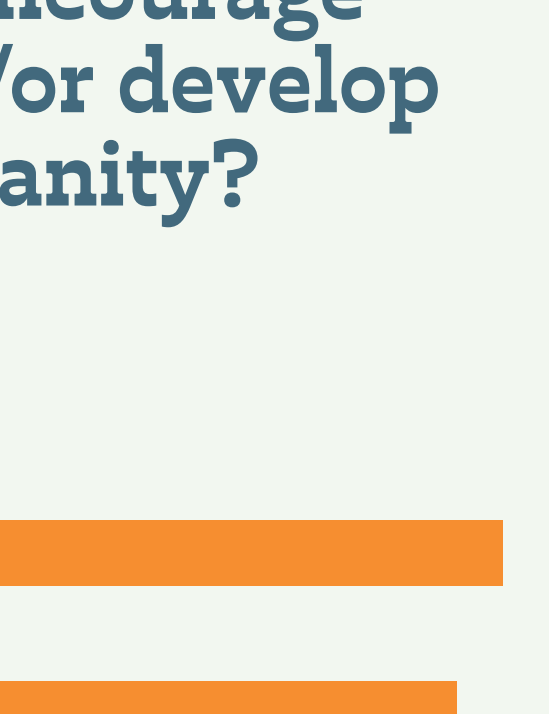
Over the past several years, especially in our qualitative work, we've noticed some museum-goers have provided thoughts about our shared humanity, the human experience, and connecting to humanity. In 2022, the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers gave us a chance to slip some of these ideas into our research. Overall, we found that people who chose answers that considered our connections to others were much more likely to be inclusive and to support climate action.



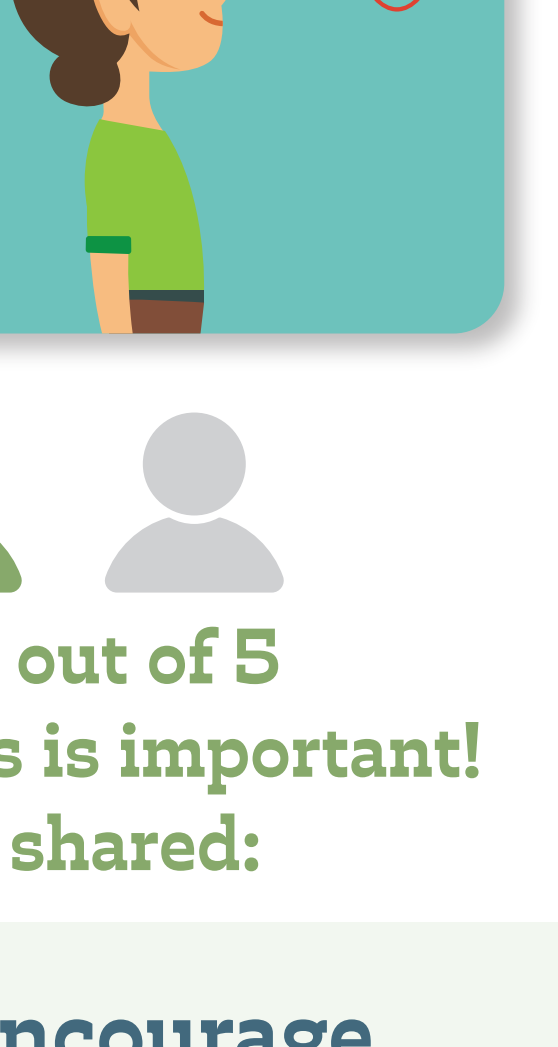
"Hmmmmmm, that's curious" we said, and promptly made "connection to humanity" a theme of the 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers.



The 2023 results were both encouraging (most people want human connections!) and saddening (there's a "Resistant" segment of people that feels deeply uncomfortable about exploring ideas around our shared humanity).



For many of us, the purpose of art, history, science, and other topics museums share is to understand our world and the diversity of humanity that calls this planet home.



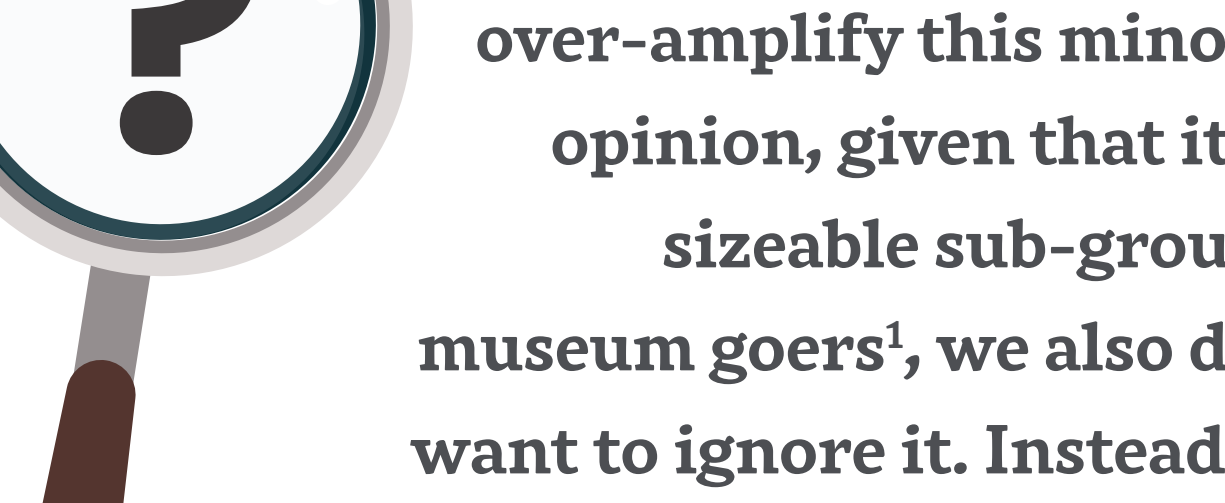
The good news is that over 4 out of 5 museum-goers agree that this is important! Here's what they specifically shared:



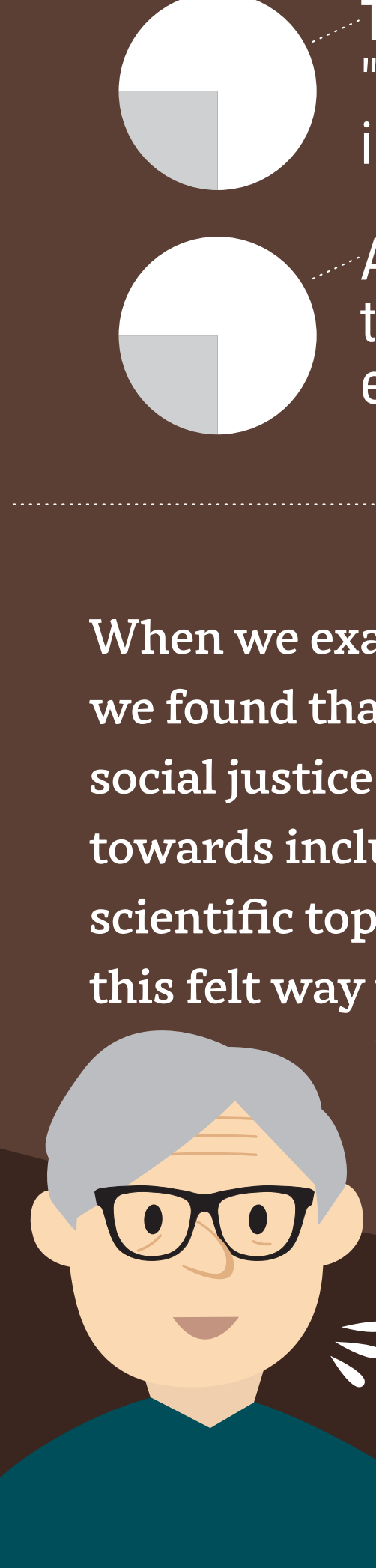
"Museums give us an opportunity to step back and examine how we arrived where we are ... but I believe that by only showing one side, we force less understanding of how things work ... And many times, our perspectives are ONLY influenced by our own bias based on what and who we know ... Let someone SEE someone else, and maybe, just maybe, they'll see the humanity of someone new or different."

But there is some not-so-good news here as well. 18% of frequent museum-goers said "to be honest, I don't think this is the role of museums."

Nearly one out of five.

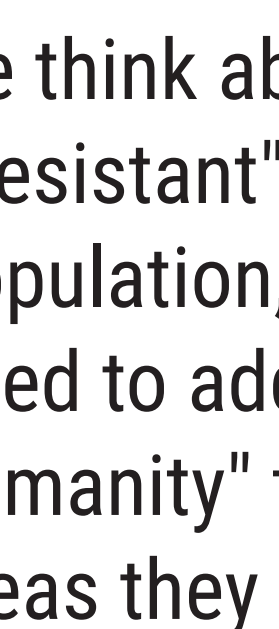


For many of us, this response might feel perplexing, confusing, perhaps even shocking. After all, isn't this what museums do through the art, history, and science we share?



While we don't want to over-amplify this minority opinion, given that it is a sizeable sub-group of museum goers¹, we also don't want to ignore it. Instead, we need to better understand the why behind this response.

To figure out who these respondents were that disagreed with the question, we dug deeper. We found:

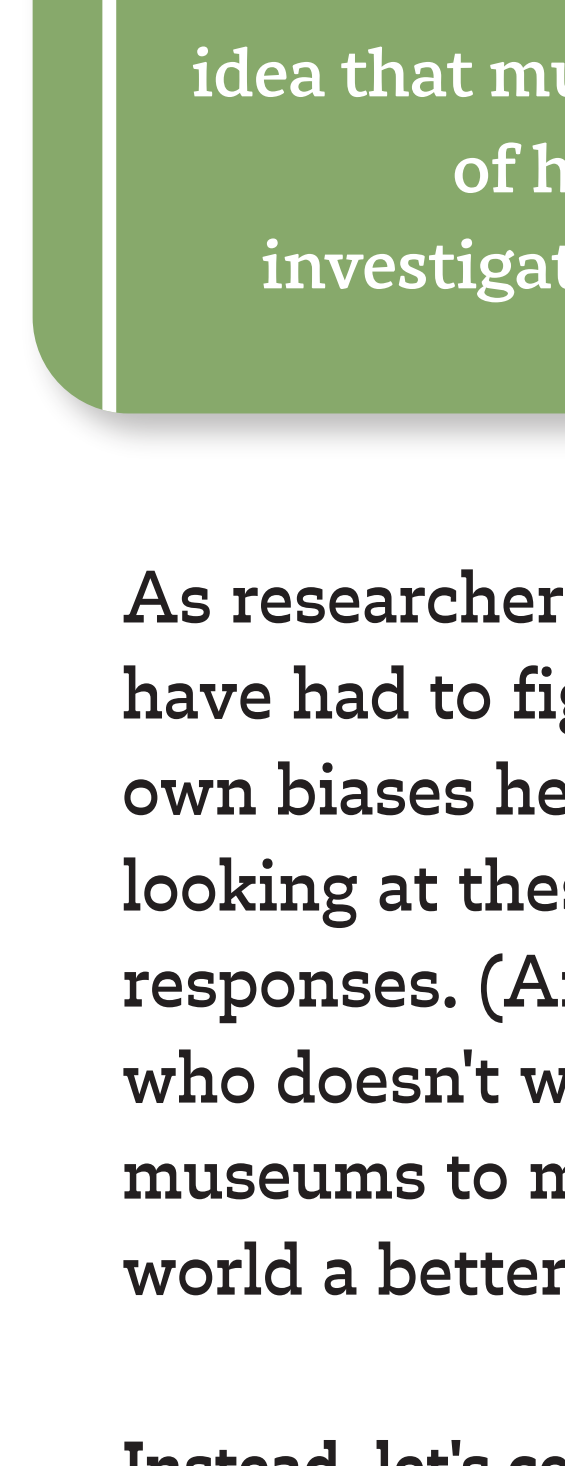


Three-quarters fell on the "anti-inclusive" side of the inclusion spectrum.²



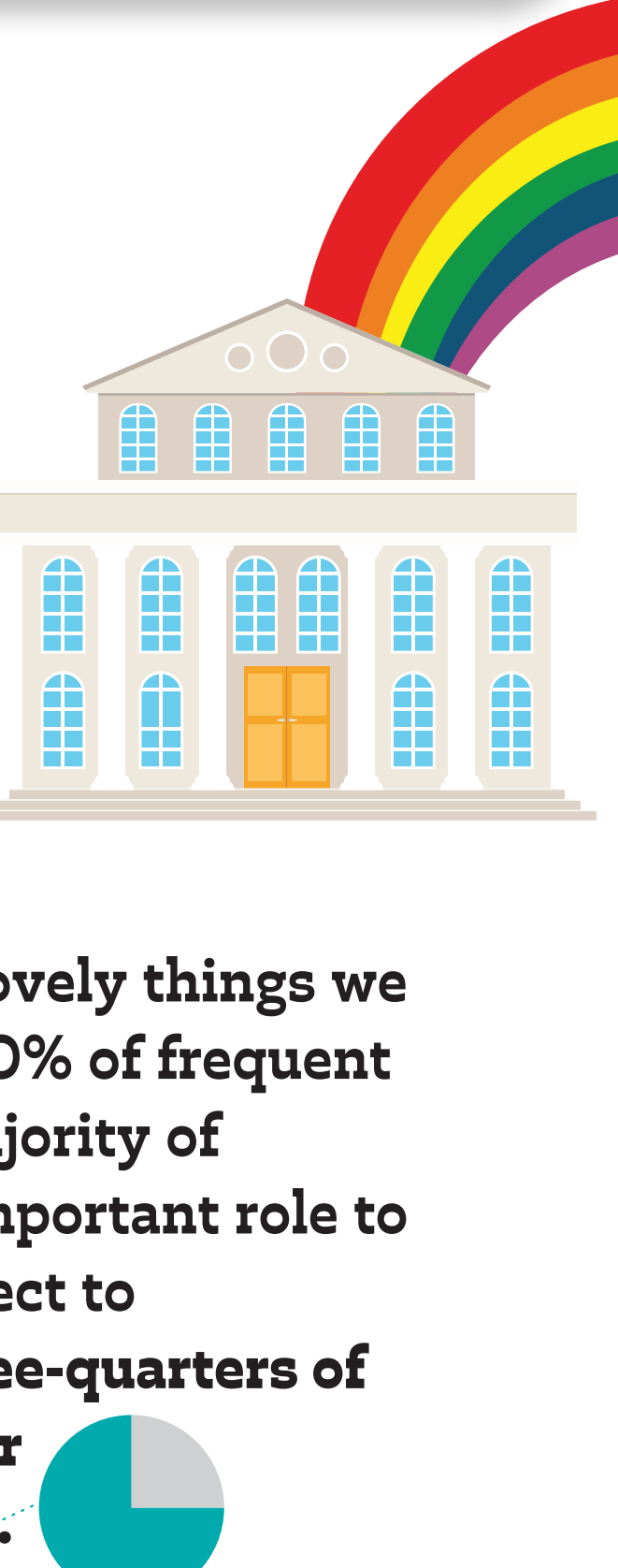
And three-quarters also fell on the "anti-civics" side of the civic engagement spectrum.³

When we examined their written-in responses, we found that they tended to link these ideas to social justice movements, including efforts towards inclusion, civic engagement, and scientific topics like climate action. For many, this felt way too political and partisan, largely because of where their own values and worldviews lie.



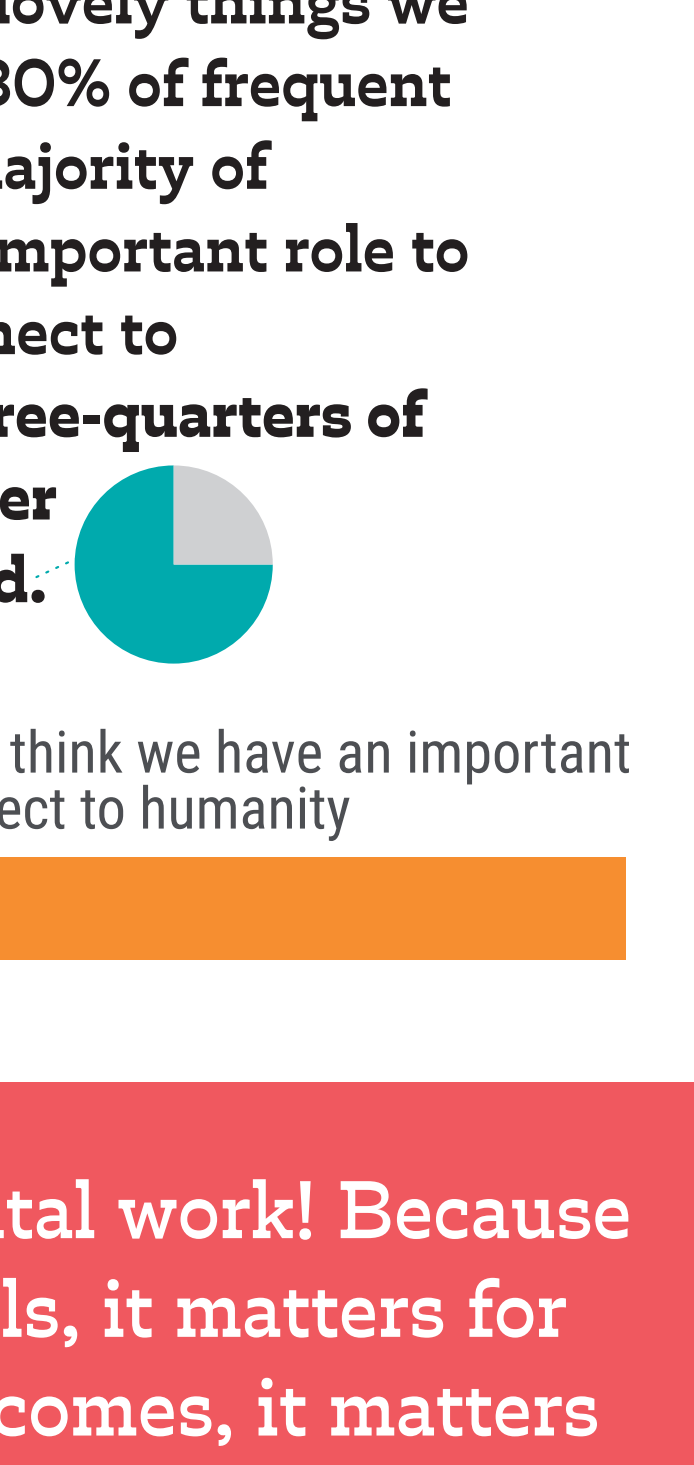
"If museums start driving the ESG or DEI agenda, you can count me out. I'm not empathetic towards these agendas or the people that are currently driving them."

Which means that when we think about the "Resistant" segment of the population, it appears we need to add "connection to humanity" to the list of ideas they are resisting.⁴

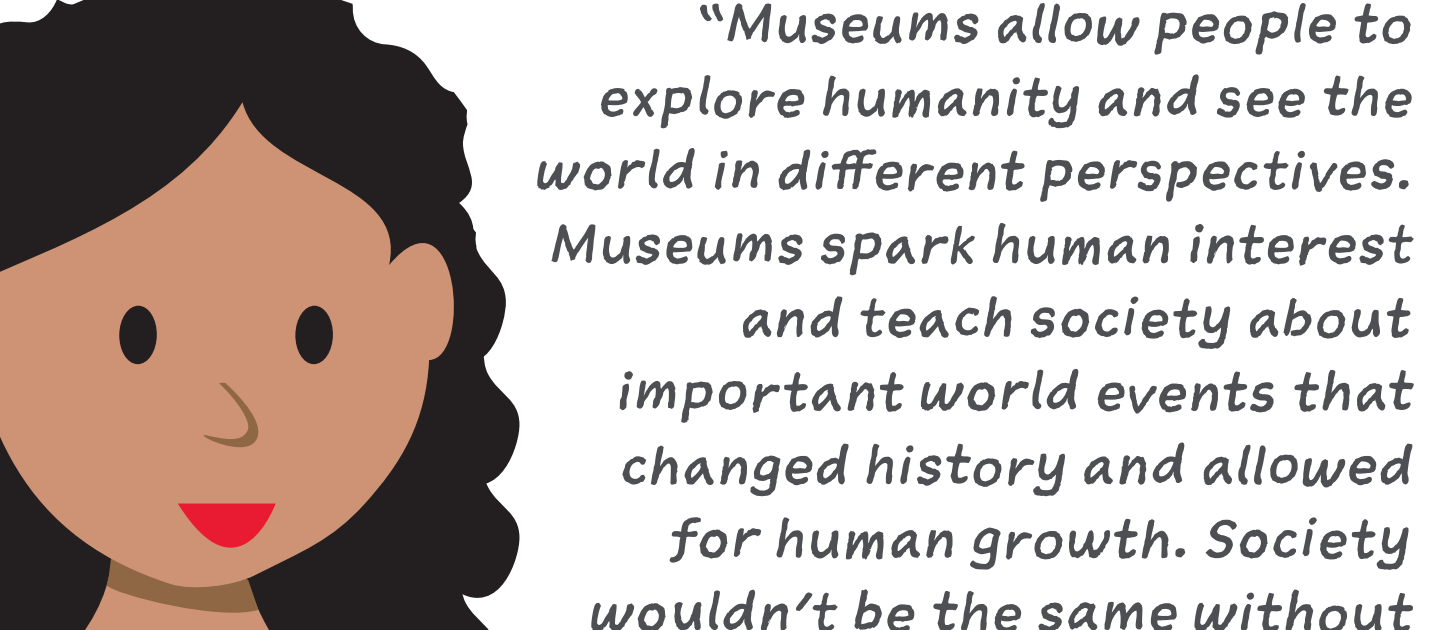


Additionally, preliminary results from the 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers indicates that "Resistant" people are also resisting the idea that museums can cultivate a sense of hope in visitors—a topic we'll investigate thoroughly later this year.

As researchers, we have had to fight our own biases here when looking at these responses. (After all, who doesn't want museums to make the world a better place?)



Instead, let's celebrate the lovely things we see in this research. Over 80% of frequent museum-goers—the vast majority of people—think we have an important role to play in helping people connect to humanity. Additionally, three-quarters of U.S. adults from our broader population sampling agreed.



This is important and vital work! Because it matters to individuals, it matters for improved prosocial outcomes, it matters to our communities, and it matters to our civic society and democracy.



"Museums allow people to explore humanity and see the world in different perspectives. Museums spark human interest and teach society about important world events that changed history and allowed for human growth. Society wouldn't be the same without museums, and maybe humankind wouldn't be either."

