Introduction:

Hello, and thank you for joining us for this special Mother’s Day themed tour of the museum of art. This audio guide will take you on an exploration of five different paintings featuring mothers. You’ll be given discussion prompts to talk over as a group along the way. To pause the audio, simply tap your screen. When you’re ready to move on to the next prompt or painting, simply tap the screen again to resume.

Maybe you’re lucky enough to be here at the museum with your mom… or, you might be missing your mom today. Maybe you have someone close to you who is like a mother figure, or maybe you’re a mom yourself! No matter your situation, this tour will celebrate the strength and compassion that it takes to be a mother.

Our first stop will be in Gallery 1, which is the large gallery to the right as you enter the museum’s main lobby. Find the huge painting of a woman surrounded by babies, and we’ll begin.

Gallery 1: Divine Love

This massive painting is all about love – see if you can find symbols like a cupid’s bow and arrow, hearts, and the fiery flames of love. And at the center of it all is – you guessed it – a mom! In this context, she represents the personification of Charity - a motherly figure whose milk was plentiful enough to nourish all her children. She has three children clinging to her, while the other winged chubby babies, called putti, encircle her.

As the putti fly around her, she tenderly kisses one baby, and the other two children grasp at her for attention. Not only does this painting represent the immense love a mother has for her children, it also reminds us that being a parent can be pretty chaotic at times! We’ve got a kid riding a lion, one waving away evil snakes with a flaming torch, and another holding up a flaming heart. The swirling energy of the composition all circles around the woman at the middle, who seems totally unperturbed by everything surrounding her.

While this painting was created in 1625 specifically to spread a message of Catholicism, it has a universal appeal to us still today. Let’s take a moment to think about how themes in this painting relate to your own family dynamic. Remember,
you can pause the audio by tapping your screen as you stop to discuss each of these prompts.

- The first question is for the whole family: What seems most relatable about this scene to you? If you all magically jumped into the world depicted in this painting, what role would each of you play?
- If you’re a mom, this one is for you: was there ever a time you found yourself in a totally chaotic and overwhelming situation with the kids? Which kids were the biggest troublemakers? How did you handle it? Did you keep your cool, or did you lose it?
- If you’re a child: can you remember a time you were naughty and caused your mom a headache? What do you appreciate about how your mom dealt with you when you acted up?

When you’re done talking through those questions, we’ll move into Gallery 3. Tap to pause the audio until you’ve reached that gallery.

_Gallery 3: Madonna of the Cherries:_

When you enter gallery 3, turn to the left wall and find a painting called of a mother holding a nude baby against a gold and green backdrop. This is a painting that depicts the Madonna, or the Virgin Mary, of the Christian tradition, holding the infant Jesus. Although neither mother nor child has a halo, we get a sense of their holy status by the artist’s copious use of the color gold, as well as the throne on which they sit. The cherries held by the mother, as well as the apples and grapes on the ledge at the bottom of the painting, have special symbolism relating to Christian theology.

Despite the regality of the scene, this fleshy nude baby definitely has squeezable chubby thighs. And we can all relate to the idea of sloppy baby kisses! Although the top left includes a window to the outside world, the mother and infant seem totally in their own realm as they lovingly embrace. Take a moment to study this painting, and then think through the following questions:

- To the mothers in the group: what do you remember most about having a new baby at home? Is it all a sleep-deprived blur, or do any particular moments or memories stand out to you?
• In this painting, we can see the physical resemblance between mother and child. Do you share similar traits with your mother, either in appearance or in behavior? What habits have you noticed yourself adopting as an adult that mirror those of your mother?

• Do you have a favorite photo of you and your mother? Describe it to the group. Why is it your favorite?

Our next stop will be in gallery 7. Tap the screen now to stop the audio until you arrive. Once you’re in gallery 7, find the painting Judgment of Solomon, hanging on the wall opposite the exterior door.

*Gallery 7: Judgment of Solomon*

This painting, although small, packs an emotional punch! The man at the top left, dressed in blue, is King Solomon, known for his wisdom. He was called upon to mediate a conflict between two women who lived together in one house. Both women were claiming an infant child as their own. As a solution, King Solomon announced that the child should be cut in half so that each woman could have part of it. The child’s real mother could not stand the idea of her child suffering, so she agreed to let the other woman have the baby. Through this, the false mother was exposed and Solomon returned the baby to its proper mother, who is depicted here wearing blue.

This painting centers around the theme of sacrifice, and the lengths a mother would go to ensure her child does not suffer. After you’ve observed the details of this painting, consider the following:

• What sacrifices did your mother make for the sake of her children?
• If you are a mother: did you give up anything so that your child could have a better life?
• What other acts has your mother (or any other important figure in your life) committed that demonstrate how much they loved you? Do you think they know how much it means to you?

When you are ready, we’ll move into Gallery 9. Tap to pause until you arrive there.
Gallery 9: Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist

The painting we are going to look at in this gallery is called Virgin and Child with Young John the Baptist and it is by an artist known as Sassoferrato, who, although he was working about 100 years after the high Renaissance period, painted in a similar style as the famed Renaissance artist Raphael. That style is evident in the very polished and smooth brushstrokes; the rich, saturated colors; the solidity of the figures, and the composition’s strong sense of order and balance. In this painting, the Madonna, the infant Christ child, and his cousin, the young John the Baptist, all form a pyramid-like structure connected by physical touch. The tenderness between all three figures, as well as the idealized beauty of their bodies and their fresh-faced youth, make for a sweet painting that would have appealed to a collector who felt nostalgic for the works of art produced during the Renaissance.

As we consider nostalgia, think about your fondest memory of your mother. Is there a particular moment that stands out, or is it a routine that you had together, a favorite story she always told, or a general sense of who she was as a person? Share this memory with your group.

As you sift through memories of your mother, consider this as well: what’s the one thing that you instantly associate with your mother? Think about all of your scenes: is it a particular food? A scent? Or maybe it’s an object, or a certain flower, or a place you spent time together.

We’ll move now into Gallery 10, just the next gallery over. Walk into the room and tap the audio to begin when you are ready.

Gallery 10: Judgment of Paris

“Mommmmm – stop, you’re embarrassing me!” Does that sound familiar to anyone?

Take a look at the large painting hanging on the south wall called the Judgment of Paris. In this scene, we can imagine the little Cupid in the front, holding up a cloth to cover his mother’s rear end, saying just that! So, what’s the story here?

The male figure on the left, draped in purple and looking overwhelmed, is the mortal man Paris. Paris has been tasked by the god Zeus with determining who of the three goddesses before him is the fairest – that is, the most beautiful. Paris is clearly
having a hard time choosing between the three, so they each offer him bribes: the goddess on the far right is Hera, who offered him riches, land, and power. In the center is Athena, who offered Paris wisdom and skill in battle. Closest to Paris is Aphrodite, who offered him the love of Helen of Sparta, the most beautiful mortal woman in the world. Ultimately, Paris chose Aphrodite as the fairest. In return, he received the love of Helen, which inadvertently kicked off the Trojan War when Helen’s husband sought revenge.

Here, Aphrodite seems totally unconcerned by her nakedness, but Cupid ensures that she is not completely exposed by keeping her covered. Fair to say we would all probably feel a bit embarrassed if our mothers were parading around naked!

- So, we have to ask: what’s the most embarrassing thing your mom did?
- And, to be fair, think of a time when you embarrassed your mom – what happened? Share your stories with your group.

Conclusion:

As we conclude the tour today, we invite you to continue exploring the museum galleries and reflecting on your family's story. The last prompt we have for you is to seek out a work of art that, for whatever reason, makes you think of your mother. If she’s with you, share it with her and tell her why you made that choice. If your mother lives elsewhere, text her a picture of the artwork. And if your mother is no longer with you, text the photo to someone who knew her well and would appreciate hearing from you.

We hope that you’ve been able to use this tour today to reconnect with favorite family memories and to cherish the connections you share.

Thanks for joining us, and happy Mother’s Day.