

Exploring Literary History and Programs at the Rosenbach



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Located in the heart of Philadelphia, up the street from Rittenhouse on Delancey Street, the Rosenbach Museum & Library brings literature and history to life through its world-class collections and dynamic public programs. It is home to rare manuscripts, first editions, and personal writings from authors such as Lewis Carrol, Bram Stoker, and Jane Austen. The Rosenbach offers visitors a chance to engage deeply with the written word through exhibitions, readings, and community collaborations. The museum continues to inspire curiosity, creativity, and a love for storytelling in all its forms.

The institution traces its origins to the early 20th century, when it was founded by rare-book-dealing brothers Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach and Philip Rosenbach. The brothers were among the most influential collectors and dealers of their time, helping to shape major literary and historical collections across the world. Their 19th century townhouse in Philadelphia became the museum's home after their passing and preserves their extensive collection of rare books and manuscripts. Since opening to the public in 1954, the Rosenbach has remained a vibrant center for literary and cultural history.

Itzel Sosa spoke with Emilie Parker, Director of Education and Community Engagement at the Rosenbach, about the opportunities the Rosenbach has to offer.



Itzel Sosa: What can first-time visitors expect from their initial visits to the Rosenbach Museum?

Emilie Parker: The main idea that I want to express is that we're just a regular museum. I think, when people see that we're a collection of rare books and manuscripts, they think, *oh gosh you're going to have to make an appointment, they're only open, like, an hour a week, or something like that.* That's not the case. To clarify, we're open Thursdays through Sundays, and you can just wander like you would at any museum. You can buy tickets ahead of time online, or you can just buy a ticket when you walk in. Once you enter, you can wander those special exhibition galleries, for example the Jane Austen exhibit. Currently we have two of those special exhibitions

open. In June, we're going to have a third open, and they are really meant to be an introduction to the museum. These three [special exhibitions] are our permanent exhibitions. Although, they do change a little bit—we swap in different books just so that they're not open to the same page all the time and get damaged by light. But the sort of themes that we cover in those exhibitions are the same. Overall, the museum is like a self-guided experience. You can also download an app from Bloomberg Connects; they create apps for museums all over the country. It's free to download, and that includes a few different additional stops at the Rosenbach besides the special exhibition, including a stop in our garden and our historic library. Visitors can also choose to do a guided tour. For a first-time visitor who wants to see what we're all about, but maybe can't visit in person for whatever reason, we have a variety of virtual programs, many of them are accessible on our website. Visitors can even access previous programs through the website as well.

IS: Which program do you recommend?

EP: The program that I think is really exciting for people, and especially for literature lovers, is called BiblioVentures. I would describe it as a book talk show. Each program, we do a different theme. The first two we ever did were during the pandemic. We did *Frankenstein*— and *Dracula*—

themed programs. Basically, you can choose to read the book and then participate in each session run by one of our staff members, who are all amazing. They usually bring on special guests that are experts in their fields but are also very entertaining, so it doesn't feel like your everyday lecture—it's a very informal event. We run about two sessions every year, but we do have all of our previous programs on YouTube, as easy access for anyone who's interested in seeing them. We've covered Sherlock Holmes, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Jane Austen.

IS: Does the Rosenbach host events for a variety of different audiences? For example, kids versus college students?

EP: Definitely. Our focus now is grade-school and high-school students as we've found that there is a strong connection between courses such as AP English and the collections that we have. For college students, we like to connect with professors depending on the curriculum of their course; for Drexel we held a visit highlighting our Jane Austen collection. Our app is targeted towards college students as students have found it most appealing.

IS: What do you think is special about the Rosenbach?

EP: I think it's a really nice place for people that may have either been English majors in college, or were readers and continue to be readers, but their current field doesn't necessarily connect with that passion. I think it's a great place for people that just miss having literature in their lives. I definitely count myself in that category, because I remember when I graduated from college, my first job was at a science publication in Boston and I missed that exploration of books within specific themes. I really feel like the Rosenbach does that in a whole variety of ways. Our reading courses feel like a college literary club and book club combined. The Rosenbach provides people with an outlet to have meaningful conversations with like-minded individuals about the themes and literature they are passionate about. That can vary anywhere from Harry Potter to Jane Austen; there's connections everywhere. Lastly, there's something exciting about finding a community at the Rosenbach. If you're new to Philly it allows you to meet other people. We always like to joke around about starting a dating app because we can't count the number of times a love match has been made or even a friendship initiated. It's a social event and it's amazing to see people coming together. I think that differs from larger museums, where it ends up being anonymous in that you're given the microphone, and you ask the speaker a question, and they answer, and then you're done. There's not a conversation. I think that's what's unique and exciting about the Rosenbach; it's much more people-centered.

IS: Do you have a final message to the audience who are going to read this?

EP: Everyone should come in and just check us out and give us a try. I am so confident that they will love us. You can stop by for just 15 to 20 minutes, on your way to brunch, or before dinner. We're in such a great neighborhood, so I think it's a package for a visit to the Rosenbach along with something else around Center City.

To learn more about the Rosenbach click here (https://www.rosenbach.org/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22314866878&gbraid=0AAAAA-DlrjkrGAc4lhSVtyDmmgZqaOjMu&gclid=CjwKCAiAt8bIBhBpEiwAzHlw6V-f1L4QuJvtWs2M4o23zQz8p-fx6STI5j7kELfgjpfEkNwFubfJ9RoCKXcQAvD_BwE)!



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Itzel Sosa is a graduating senior earning her BA in English with a writing concentration and minor in Law as well as a certificate in creative writing and publishing. When she isn't at school or studying, she enjoys cozying up with a book and exploring Philadelphia. After graduation she plans on attending law school.

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