

A Parent's Guide to Making Universal Studios Hollywood an Educational Adventure

Universal Studios Hollywood • Universal City, California

A theme park can be a place to ride roller coasters, meet favorite characters and eat great food. But every park also has its own personality, stories and lessons hiding in plain sight.

Look a little closer, and **Universal Studios Hollywood becomes a place to explore the history of Hollywood and filmmaking, along with science, engineering, animation, architecture, special effects, storytelling, technology, music, culture and even the art of making the imaginary feel real- all while you're having fun.**

That is the idea behind the **HEART Method**.

The goal isn't to make children memorize facts while they're on vacation. It is to teach them to **notice, question, predict and investigate while they're having fun.**

When your child asks:

How did they make that movie scene?

How does this ride move?

How can they make something look real when it isn't?

Why does this building look like that?

How does animation create movement?

How does a stunt performer stay safe?

How can a video game become a physical world?

You have an opportunity to learn together.

THE HEART METHOD

H — History & Humanities

History, geography, people, civilizations, literature, film history, traditions and the stories that shaped a place.

Ask:

"What real people, places, stories or events inspired this?"

E — Engineering & Exploration

Engineering, mathematics, transportation, architecture, design, navigation, discovery and problem-solving.

Ask:

“How does this work? What can we discover if we look closer?”

A — Arts & Culture

Architecture, music, food, costumes, visual art, animation, filmmaking, theater, design and storytelling.

Ask:

“How do the artistic choices shape this experience?”

R — Reading & Research

Books, movies, original stories, historical references, real locations and questions worth investigating.

Ask:

“What do I want to know more about?”

T — Technology & Science

Physics, biology, chemistry, motion, sound, light, robotics, computer science, animation and special effects.

Ask:

“What science or technology is making this possible?”

THE HEART RULE

Parents don't need to know all the answers.

One of the best things you can say is:

“I don't know. Let's find out.”

The goal isn't to turn children into walking encyclopedias.

It's to teach them to:

LOOK → ASK → PREDICT → INVESTIGATE

You don't have to do everything in this guide.

Pick a few moments. Follow your child's curiosity.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

BEFORE YOU GO

Choose one question or challenge.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE

Look, listen, compare and make predictions.

AFTER AN ATTRACTION

Ask:

“What did you notice?”

WHEN YOU GET HOME

Choose one thing worth researching.

That's it.

A single question can turn into a movie, book, experiment, map, museum visit or family conversation.

THE FIVE-QUESTION METHOD

Use these questions at almost any attraction.

1. WHAT?

What type of experience is this?

Roller coaster? Dark ride? Simulator? Live show? Interactive game? Studio tour?

2. WHY?

Why did the designers choose this particular experience?

3. HOW?

How does it actually work?

4. WHAT IF?

What would happen if we changed something?

5. WHAT NEXT?

What do you want to learn more about?

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOLLYWOOD

Your HEART Field Guide

Universal Studios Hollywood is different from a traditional theme park because **the making of entertainment is part of the experience.**

Think of the park as a giant laboratory for **film, television, animation, engineering, technology and storytelling.**

1. HOLLYWOOD

Film History, Architecture, Design & The Art of Place

Before your child gets on a ride, they're already surrounded by things worth investigating.

LOOK FOR

- Buildings
- Storefronts
- Signs
- Movie posters
- Cars
- Costumes
- Cameras
- Music
- Technology

ASK

“What makes this place look and feel like Hollywood?”

Then ask:

- What time period does it represent?
- How does the architecture create a sense of place?
- What would Hollywood look like in the future?

TRY THIS

Find **five details** that help tell the story of Hollywood without using words.

2. THE WORLD-FAMOUS STUDIO TOUR

Filmmaking, History, Engineering, Special Effects & Storytelling

The Studio Tour is one of the best HEART opportunities at Universal Studios Hollywood because you're seeing how entertainment is actually created.

LOOK FOR

- Movie sets
- Props
- Cameras
- Sound stages
- Costumes
- Special effects
- Lighting
- Vehicles

ASK

“What's real- and what's designed to look real?”

Look for:

- Forced perspective
- Scale
- Lighting
- Sound
- Camera angles
- Set design

FILMMAKING CHALLENGE

Choose one scene or set.

“What three things make this place look believable on camera?”

Then ask:

“What would the audience never see?”

KING KONG 360-3D

T + E + A

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Motion-based film experience

Ask:

“How can a screen make your brain feel like you're actually inside the action?”

Explore:

- Motion
- Sound
- Perspective
- Digital imagery
- Synchronization

BIG QUESTION

“Which parts are actually moving- and which parts only appear to move?”

JAWS LAKE

H + A + T

Ask:

“How can a movie set make us believe a shark is nearby?”

Look for:

- Water
- Sound
- Camera perspective
- Special effects
- Timing
- Performance

FILMMAKING CHALLENGE

Imagine filming the same scene without showing the shark.

“What could you use instead to make the audience believe it is there?”

WAR OF THE WORLDS

A + T + E

Look closely at the set.

Ask:

“How can designers make destruction look real?”

Explore:

- Scale
- Lighting
- Props
- Sound
- Set design
- Special effects

BIG QUESTION

“What does the camera show- and what does it leave to your imagination?”

PSYCHO HOUSE & BATES MOTEL

A + H + T

Ask:

“Why can a building make us feel something before anything happens?”

Look for:

- Architecture
- Lighting
- Color
- Sound
- Scale
- Familiar objects

Then ask:

“How does a filmmaker use a location to tell part of a story?”

FAST & FURIOUS

T + E + A

Ask:

“How can a movie make a car chase feel faster than it really is?”

Explore:

- Camera movement
- Sound
- Editing
- Motion
- Perspective
- Special effects

BIG QUESTION

“Does a movie have to actually move fast to make you feel like it is?”

THE BACKLOT

H + A + E

The backlot itself is a lesson in how one location can become many places.

Look for:

- Streets
- Buildings
- Signs
- Vehicles
- Props
- Architecture

Ask:

“How could the same street become New York, Chicago or somewhere completely imaginary?”

That's **set design + geography + storytelling.**

3. THE WIZARDING WORLD OF HARRY POTTER

Literature, Architecture, Storytelling, Language, Design & Technology

The Wizarding World is a perfect example of how a book becomes a physical world. What children first imagine while reading can become a place they can actually walk through.

LOOK FOR

- Architecture
- Shop windows
- Signs
- Costumes
- Language
- Food
- Music
- Props
- Books & references
- Details from the films

ASK

“How do you make a fictional place feel real?”

Then look closer:

“Which details help convince you that this place has a history, even though it doesn't actually exist?”

HOGSMEADE

R + A + H

Hogsmeade turns the world of the Harry Potter books into a physical environment filled with details that reward careful observation.

LOOK FOR

- Hogwarts in the distance
- Snow-covered architecture
- Uneven rooftops
- Shop signs
- Windows and doors
- Wizarding objects
- Costumes
- The language used throughout the village

ASK

“What details came directly from the books, and what did the designers have to invent?”

Then ask:

“What does the architecture tell us about the people who live here?”

BOOK-TO-WORLD CHALLENGE

Choose one detail you recognize from the Harry Potter stories.

Can you find it in the physical world?

Then choose one detail you *don't* recognize.

“What do you think J.K. Rowling might have imagined here?”

That's **reading** → **observation** → **imagination** → **research**.

HARRY POTTER AND THE FORBIDDEN JOURNEY

T + E + A

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Motion-based dark ride / simulator

Ask:

“How can a ride make your brain believe you're flying?”

Explore:

- Motion
- Screens
- Physical sets
- Sound
- Perspective

BIG QUESTION

“Which parts are actually moving- and which parts are created through technology?”

FLIGHT OF THE HIPPOGRIFF

E + T

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Family roller coaster

Ask:

“What makes a roller coaster exciting even when it isn't the fastest?”

Look for:

- Turns
- Hills
- Speed
- Braking
- Height

PREDICT

Where will you feel the biggest change in motion?

4. SPRINGFIELD, U.S.A.

Animation, Satire, Architecture, Food & Popular Culture

Springfield is an interesting lesson in **fictional geography**.

Ask:

“How can a place that doesn't really exist feel familiar?”

Look for:

- Businesses
- Signs
- Characters
- Architecture
- Food
- Humor

DESIGN CHALLENGE

Create your own fictional city.

Give it:

A name + landmark + restaurant + transportation system.

THE SIMPSONS RIDE

A + T + E

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Motion simulator

Ask:

“How does animation become an attraction?”

Explore:

- Motion
- Digital animation
- Sound
- Perspective
- Storytelling

BIG QUESTION

“What makes something feel different when you experience it instead of simply watching it?”

5. ILLUMINATION'S MINION LAND

Animation, Character Design, Physics & Storytelling

Minion Land is a chance to investigate how a **2-D animated character becomes a physical world.**

ASK

“What makes a character recognizable even when you take it out of a movie?”

Look for:

- Shape
- Color
- Movement
- Sound
- Architecture

- Food
 - Props
-

DESPICABLE ME MINION MAYHEM

T + A

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Motion simulator

Ask:

“How can animation and motion work together to make you feel like you're inside a movie?”

Explore:

- Screens
- Motion
- Sound
- Perspective
- Timing

CHALLENGE

Choose one moment.

“What is your body doing- and what is your brain being told is happening?”

THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS: OFF THE LEASH

R + A + T

Ask:

“How does a movie character become a ride character?”

Look for:

- Character design
- Sets
- Animation
- Music

- Movement

STORY CHALLENGE

“How would the story change if it were told from the human's point of view?”

6. SUPER NINTENDO WORLD

Game Design, Technology, Engineering & Interactive Storytelling

Super Nintendo World turns a video game into a physical environment.

LOOK FOR

- Interactive elements
- Screens
- Sensors
- Sound
- Movement
- Characters
- Game mechanics
- Technology

ASK

“How do you turn a video game into a real place?”

Then ask:

“What is physical, and what is digital?”

MARIO KART: BOWSER'S CHALLENGE

T + E + A

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Interactive augmented-reality ride

Ask:

“How does the ride know what you're looking at and doing?”

Explore:

- Sensors
- Tracking
- Motion
- Screens
- Augmented reality

CHALLENGE

Choose one interactive element.

“What do you think is happening behind the scenes to make it respond to you?”

POWER-UP BAND

T + E

Ask:

“What makes a game respond when you do something?”

Look for:

- Sensors
- Targets
- Lights
- Sounds
- Feedback
- Scoring

GAME DESIGN CHALLENGE

Invent your own interactive game.

What would players have to:

SEE → DO → EARN?

LOWER LOT

7. JURASSIC WORLD

Paleontology, Biology, Geology, Engineering & Storytelling

Jurassic World is an opportunity to separate **science from science fiction**.

ASK

“What do we actually know about dinosaurs- and how do we know it?”

Look for:

- Dinosaurs
- Fossils
- Plants
- Water
- Landscapes
- Animal behavior

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Choose one dinosaur.

Find out:

- When did it live?
- Where did it live?
- What did it eat?
- How do scientists know?

JURASSIC WORLD- THE RIDE

T + E + A

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Water ride / dark ride

Ask:

“How do they make a dinosaur appear alive?”

Explore:

- Movement
- Sound
- Lighting
- Programming
- Water

- Special effects

Then ask:

“What is the difference between a real dinosaur and a theme-park dinosaur?”

8. TRANSFORMERS: THE RIDE-3D

T + E + A

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

3-D motion simulation

Ask:

“How can technology make you feel like you're moving when you're not actually traveling through a city?”

Explore:

- Motion
- Screens
- Sound
- Perspective
- Simulation
- Timing

BIG QUESTION

“What does your brain use to decide that something feels real?”

9. REVENGE OF THE MUMMY

E + T

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

Indoor roller coaster / dark ride

Ask:

“Why can a ride feel fast even when you can't see what's coming?”

Explore:

- Acceleration
- Gravity
- Darkness
- Motion
- Sound
- Braking

PREDICT

Where will you feel the biggest change in motion?

Then compare your prediction with what you actually felt.

10. FAST & FURIOUS: HOLLYWOOD DRIFT

Physics, Engineering, Cars & Motion

TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

High-speed outdoor roller coaster

Ask:

“What happens when the ride vehicle can rotate while the coaster is moving?”

Explore:

- Acceleration
- Gravity
- Inertia
- Momentum
- Friction
- Rotation

PREDICT

Before riding:

“When will you feel the biggest change in motion?”

After riding:

“Did your prediction match what you felt?”

11. WATERWORLD

Stunt Performance, Engineering, Physics, Fire & Theater

WaterWorld is a live-action lesson in **how Hollywood creates controlled chaos.**

ASK

“How can performers make something look dangerous while controlling the risk?”

Look for:

- Stunts
- Boats
- Fire
- Water
- Sound
- Timing
- Special effects

STUNT CHALLENGE

Choose one stunt.

“What could go wrong- and what would the performers need to control?”

That's **physics + engineering + performance + safety.**

12. SEASONAL EXPERIENCES

Halloween Horror Nights, Holidays & Special Events

Universal changes throughout the year, creating new opportunities to explore **storytelling, technology, music, costumes, food and special effects.**

HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS

A + T + E

Ask:

“How do designers make something feel scary?”

Look for:

- Lighting
- Sound
- Costumes
- Makeup
- Sets
- Fog
- Special effects

Then ask:

“Why can something scare us even when we know it isn't real?”

That's **psychology + theater + technology**.

HOLIDAYS

H + A + R

Look for:

- Decorations
- Music
- Food
- Characters
- Traditions

Ask:

“What can we learn about a culture through the way it celebrates?”

13. CITYWALK

Architecture, Food, Entertainment, Economics & Urban Design

The HEART Method doesn't have to stop at the park gates.

LOOK FOR

- Restaurants
- Shops
- Signs
- Architecture
- Entertainment
- Public spaces
- Advertising

ASK

“What makes people want to stay here after they leave the theme park?”

FOOD CHALLENGE

Choose one food.

Ask:

WHERE did it originate?

WHY is it popular?

HOW is it prepared?

Food becomes a lesson in **geography + history + culture + science**.

THE UNIVERSAL FILMMAKING CHALLENGE

Choose **one scene, ride or show**.

Find:

- ☐ Something physical
- ☐ Something digital
- ☐ Something mechanical
- ☐ Something created with sound
- ☐ Something created with light

Then ask:

“Which one made the biggest difference in making the experience feel real?”

THE ULTIMATE HEART SCAVENGER HUNT

You don't have to complete every activity.

Choose one mission.

H — HISTORY & HUMANITIES

Find something inspired by:

- ☐ A real person
- ☐ A real place
- ☐ Hollywood history

E — ENGINEERING & EXPLORATION

Find:

- ☐ A machine
- ☐ A moving system
- ☐ A vehicle
- ☐ A special effect

A — ARTS & CULTURE

Find:

- ☐ A movie set
- ☐ A costume
- ☐ Distinctive architecture
- ☐ A piece of visual design

R — READING & RESEARCH

Find:

- ☐ A story adapted from another source
- ☐ A character you want to learn more about
- ☐ Something you want to research

T — TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCE

Find:

- ☐ A simulator
- ☐ An interactive system
- ☐ An animatronic
- ☐ A projection
- ☐ A special effect

Then ask:

“Why did you choose it?”

AGE-LEVEL ADAPTATIONS

You don't need a different activity for every age.

Change the question.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

"What do you notice?"

"What moves?"

"What's real and what's pretend?"

ELEMENTARY AGE

"Why do you think they designed it this way?"

"How do you think they made that?"

"What do you predict will happen?"

TWEENS & TEENS

"What evidence supports your explanation?"

"What technology is being used?"

"What problem were the designers trying to solve?"

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL

This is not a 12-hour lesson plan.

Pick one or two HEART moments.

For example:

Hollywood → Film history & architecture

Studio Tour → Filmmaking & special effects

Wizards World → Literature & world-building

Springfield → Animation & popular culture

Minion Land → Animation & simulation

Super Nintendo World → Interactive technology & game design

Jurassic World → Paleontology & animatronics

Transformers → Simulation & technology

Revenge of the Mummy → Physics & motion

Fast & Furious → Cars, rotation & engineering

WaterWorld → Stunts, physics & safety

Seasonal Experiences → Storytelling, culture & technology

That's already an extraordinary amount of learning.

THE FAMILY HEART CHALLENGE

At the end of the day, don't ask:

“What did you learn?”

Ask:

“What surprised you?”

Then:

“What do you want to know more about?”

And:

“What did you notice today that you didn't notice this morning?”

These questions encourage curiosity rather than memorization.

TAKE IT HOME

Choose **one thing** your child found fascinating.

Spend 15 minutes researching it.

Maybe it's:

How movie sets are built.

How animatronics move.

How dinosaurs are reconstructed from fossils.

How roller coasters accelerate.

How augmented reality works.

How stunt performers stay safe.

How animation creates movement.

How special effects make something look real.

One question can become:

a movie → a book → a science experiment → a design challenge → a museum visit → a family conversation.

That's the HEART Method.

ONE-PAGE HEART CHEAT SHEET

AREA	HEART CONNECTION	TRY THIS
Hollywood	Film history, architecture, design	Find five clues that make it feel like Hollywood
Studio Tour	Filmmaking, engineering, special effects	Find what's real vs. what was created for the camera
Wizarding World	Literature, architecture, storytelling	Find details that came from the books
Springfield	Animation, popular culture	Identify what makes a fictional city feel real
Minion Land	Animation, design, simulation	Find how a character became a physical world
Super Nintendo World	Technology, gaming, engineering	Identify what is physical vs. digital
Jurassic World	Paleontology, biology, technology	Separate dinosaur science from science fiction
Transformers	Simulation, motion, technology	Figure out what makes the experience feel real
Revenge of the Mummy	Physics, motion, engineering	Predict where you'll feel the biggest change
Fast & Furious	Physics, cars, rotation	Notice how the vehicle changes direction
WaterWorld	Stunts, physics, engineering	Figure out how one stunt is made safe
Seasonal Experiences	Culture, technology, storytelling	Find what makes the experience feel different

THE HEART METHOD IN ONE SENTENCE

Don't just experience the attraction. Investigate it.

LOOK → ASK → PREDICT → INVESTIGATE

You don't have to turn vacation into school.

You just have to teach children to see **the questions already hiding in the experience.**