

Tangible in a Digital World
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There is no substitute for experience. “You should have been there!” “You have to see it with your own eyes!” “It’s so much bigger in person!” “You have got to try it yourself!” These are common exclamations when we engage in conversation to share experiences and try to describe something to someone who has not experienced it. Here’s a good example. Imagine you meet someone who has never tasted salt before. They ask you to explain to them the taste. How do you describe the taste to them without using a word with “salt” in it or just referring to what it is not? It would be quite the challenge, and could you know whether they really grasped the idea of it or not? A friend of mine installed a virtual reality setup in his home last year. He meets up with friends from across the country in a virtual space and they socialize and play games together. Technology is constantly evolving to make it easier to connect to people farther away. Maybe someday we’ll be able to send things or even ourselves across those distances in the blink of an eye but not yet. For now we resign ourselves to the pace of packages and airplanes. There is a tangible – literally – bright side though. The benefits of tactile interaction with both objects and other people are well established for both the development of children and the emotional health of all ages. I recently read a study where researchers did brain scans on individuals touching three small triangles with only slight variations in their texture. The results were interesting because even those small differences showed consistent differences in brain activity level and area across the participants. The slight differences in texture evoked different physiological responses. This is no surprise if you’ve ever watched the way small children explore their surroundings. Toddlers often explore the world through the sense of touch – whether it be clutching hair and fur or putting everything in their mouths. When I first started working in a library shelving books and helping at the circulation desk, one of the things I noticed was that books had a variety of textures. It’s not something you would think about unless you literally got a feel for it frequently. Both covers and pages could feel so different from book to book! Some felt sleek and slippery. Some felt soft and smooth. Others felt ridged and raspy. Still others felt rounded and rough. Holding a book is a sensory experience. I’ve written before about how libraries can be your access point to the world. Every now and again it is nice to be aware of what is right in front of us too. As the air starts to cool when you step outside in the morning, the sound of the leaves on the trees starts to crackle in the wind, the smell of pumpkin spice starts cropping up everywhere, and the taste of autumn treats brings back memories – we hope you enjoy them in the moment. We also hope that you’ll consider all the wonderful sensory experiences you can have at the library such as the sounds of story time or musicians, the colors and lines of an art exhibit, or just the feel of the next book you read as you settle into your favorite comfortable spot. Whatever adventure brings you through our door from near or far, we’re always happy to see you! The library is located at 17 N. Broadway and is open to the public Monday to Thursday 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.