

# Education and Interpretation: Perfect Partners

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# Information, Education, and Interpretation, oh my!

- ▶ What's the difference?
- ▶ Information:
  - ▶ exactly as it sounds, straight facts, figures, and dates
    - ▶ ex: a field guide to birds provides information about bird species, but usually no interpretation
- ▶ Education:
  - ▶ the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits
    - ▶ Can be formal or informal in setting
- ▶ Interpretation:
  - ▶ A communication process that seeks to reveal meanings in the resource
    - ▶ This process can be used to interpret anything, in any subject

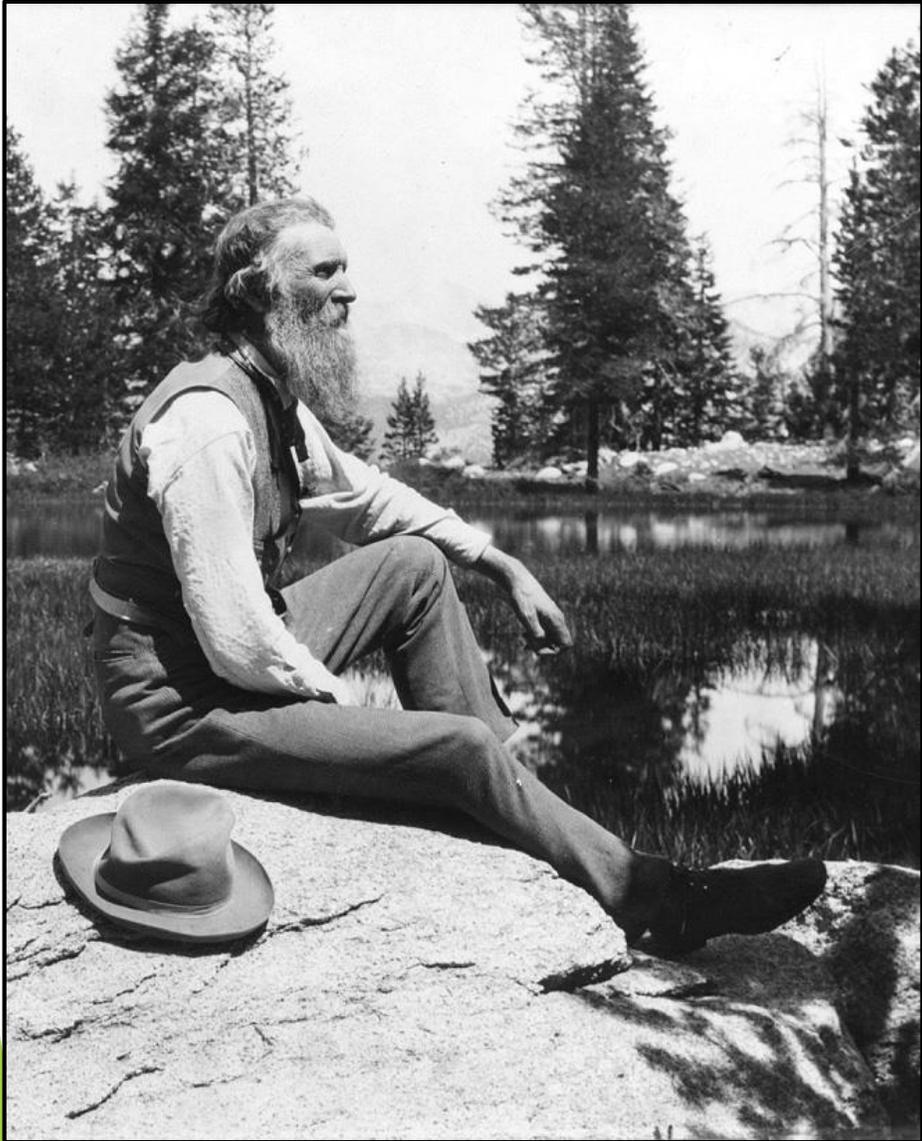
# What is Interpretation???

- ▶ "Interpretation is a communication process, designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage, through involvement with objects, artifacts, landscapes and sites."
  - ▶ - *Interpretation Canada*
- ▶ "Interpretation is a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource."
  - ▶ -National Association for Interpretation (NAI)

# What is interpretation???

- ▶ Interpretation connects hearts and minds to the resource.
  - ▶ David Larsen, NPS





“I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.”

-John Muir, 1896

# Why Interpretation?

- ▶ Resources possess meaning and have relevance
- ▶ Education/Information for its own sake likely won't be as memorable.
- ▶ Always strive to answer the almighty questions:
  - ▶ So What?
  - ▶ Why should I care?



# Interpretation must Provoke



- ▶ Interpretation should provoke curiosity, attention, and interest.
- ▶ If you can't get their attention, they won't stop at your exhibit, attend a program, or pay attention during a program.
- ▶ In planning how to provoke attention, consider:
  - ▶ Why would a visitor want to know this information?

# Interpretation must Relate



- ▶ Continuing with “Why would a visitor want to know this,” we must find a way to relate the message to the everyday life of the visitor.
- ▶ This is the part of the communication process that gives them a reason to pay attention, and fuels the desire to learn/know more.
- ▶ Example (left): Gulf Coast chapter of TxMN hosted a community wetland planting event, as it was something the citizens of Clear Lake were interested in.

# Interpretation should Reveal



- ▶ “Interpretation is revelation, based on information.”
  - ▶ Freeman Tilden
- ▶ The reveal tells the visitor why the message was important to them, or how they can benefit from the information that was interpreted to them.
- ▶ “ The purpose of interpretation goes beyond providing information to reveal deeper meaning and truth.”
  - ▶ Cable and Beck
- ▶ North Texas Chapter used this quarter to reveal the deeper meaning behind why we should use caution pruning in springtime.

# Interpretation should Strive for Message Unity



- ▶ Think of message unity as the stage setting and props for a theatrical presentation.
- ▶ This means using techniques to deliver our message in a way that's appropriate for the audience and topic:
  - ▶ Ex: humor during a presentation on the struggles of slavery is probably not appropriate
  - ▶ Ex: using storytelling during that same presentation would be more appropriate

# Interpretation should Address the Whole



- ▶ “Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.”
  - ▶ Freeman Tilden
- ▶ All interpretation should address some main point, or theme, the “big picture”, about what is important about our resource.
- ▶ It should answer the question, “When a visitor leaves this program, and they only remember one thing, it should be \_\_\_\_\_.”

# The raw material for Interpretation is information



# Interpretive Ingredients!

- ▶ The Interpretive Equation

- ▶  $(KR + KA)AT = IO$
- ▶ KR = Knowledge of the Resource
- ▶ KA = Knowledge of the Audience
- ▶ AT = Appropriate Techniques
- ▶ IO = Interpretive Opportunity



# Knowledge of the Resource

- ▶ Immerse yourself in the resource
  - ▶ Hike trails, listen to birds, etc.
- ▶ Study/research
- ▶ Books
- ▶ Internet
- ▶ Take classes
- ▶ Peers/supervisors
- ▶ Local park rangers/interpreters



# Knowledge of the Audience

- ▶ Understanding of different learning styles
- ▶ Visitor demographic studies
- ▶ People watch
- ▶ Chit chat/small talk prior to program start



# Appropriate Technique

- ▶ Interpretive Techniques must be appropriate for the site/resource, the audience, and the interpreter.
- ▶ Examples of techniques:
  - ▶ Questioning
  - ▶ Storytelling
  - ▶ Compare and contrast
  - ▶ Hands-on activity
  - ▶ Analogy
  - ▶ Anecdote
  - ▶ Humor
  - ▶ Living History



# Drawing meaning and making connections

“The nature guide [interpreter] is at his best when he discusses facts so that they appeal to the imagination and to the reason, gives flesh and blood to cold hard facts, makes life stories of inanimate objects.”

-Enos Mills



# Drawing meaning and making connections

## ▶ Tangibles

- ▶ Physical elements of a site/resource
- ▶ Material qualities that can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted.
- ▶ Examples:
  - ▶ A tree, a boat, a battlefield, a mountain, a coyote, an ecosystem
- ▶ Important people, events, and processes (biologic, geologic, historic) are not necessarily concrete, but are still tangible.

## ▶ Intangibles

- ▶ abstract concepts and ideas represented by resource
- ▶ Include processes, relationships, ideas, feelings, values, and beliefs
- ▶ Examples:
  - ▶ Freedom, survival, family bonds, death
- ▶ Connecting tangible resources to its intangible meanings can make the resource more personally relevant and important to the visitor

Practice!



# Practice, part two!

- ▶ Brainstorm your specific resource.
- ▶ Come up with some tangibles and intangibles for that resource.
- ▶ How can we forge connections between visitors and your resources?