

The Name of the Game: THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

Based on the belief that the aware interpreter motivates rather than educates, the following steps should be followed:

I. SELECT THEM (Message)

This is the WHY, the often unspoken idea. It is the link that unites Lincoln Memorial to Old Faithful, the Liberty Bell to Lassen Peak, the Indian mummy in Mammoth Cave to Half Dome. When knowingly and purposefully used it unifies the Service and moves us all (NPS communicators and the public) toward our common goal of Environmental Conservation. Without themes we practice "Park Awareness" rather than "Environmental Awareness." With themes we assist our audiences to arrive, on their own, at a predetermined (though usually unannounced) destination. Once all roads led to Rome; now we want all roads to lead to Environmental Conservation. Your local roads, or themes, might be: "Man's Dependency on the Environment (nature)," "Interdependency of all Life," "Similarity of All Men," "Similarity of All Life," "Change," "Man's Adjustment (or maladjustment) to the Environment," "Cultural Order," "Natural Order," "The Food Chain," "War Is Hell," "War Is Necessary (or unnecessary)," "War Is Futile," "War Is Natural," "Adaptation," "Adjustment to Change," "Adjust (cooperate) or Die," "Courage (and reward)," "Greed (and price)," etc., etc., ad infinitum.

II. SELECT MEDIUM (Vehicle)

This is the WHAT, the "cast of characters." You will have little choice here because mediums are facets of the park story. Your choice is what part of the park story you will use. The medium is composed of "facts," which are subordinate to and much less important than your theme. Your subordinate (medium) may be: "The Battle of _____," "The Trees (forest)," "The Flowers," "The Birds (or one species)," "The Mammals (or one species)," "A Person," "The Actions of a Group or Individual (war, exploration, development, defense, progress or 'progress,' philosophy, struggle, belief, etc.)," "A Structure (building(s), bridge, road, etc.)," "The Seashore," "A Lake," "A Mountain," "A Bog," etc., etc., ad infinitum.

III. ACCOMPLISH RESEARCH

This does not mean original research (nor does it necessarily eliminate certain aspects of it), but it does mean you should gather together all the facts that others have discovered. You must know what you're talking about, and your interpretation (motivation) must be based on knowledge - your knowledge. Research can lead to other mediums (vehicles) and to themes galore. Evaluation of facts will enable you to explore all facets of the environment and help make life more meaningful for you and those to whom you interpret.

IV. PRODUCE AN OUTLINE

Sure, it's work, but it's part of the price you must pay if you want to produce good interpretation. Follow the usual pattern of outlines: Write out the major divisions (Roman numerals) before you tackle the supporting points. Then finally, fill in the finer details.

Your theme (Step No. 1) should guide your outline. In fact, the outline is not a tough chore if the theme is clear in your mind. If you're not in the habit of producing outlines you may not appreciate this step, but your audience will. For whom is the interpretation intended?

- I.
 - A.
 - B.
- II. A.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - B.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - a. (1)
 - b. (2)
- III.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

V. WRITE

Regardless of how the interpretation is to be presented - orally or in writing - it should be written out first. On this first writing, creativity should be your sole guide - letting yourself go with all the originality at your command. With theme uppermost in mind, and closely following the outline, ignore length at this time. Avoid direct use of facts as much as possible, remembering that interpretation is motivational, not educational.

VI. RE-WRITE

This is pruning and grooming. Recognize that brevity and simplicity are the basic requirements of clarity and effectiveness. Make sure of your timing. In the rewrite insist on accurate sentence structure, and settle only for the best words in relation to your theme. Avoid adjectives (especially double or triple ones), for they will weaken your product. Nouns and verbs are your most important and powerful tools of communication, and select with care, remembering that the theme should dictate your selection.

VII. GET CRITICISM

Before presentation have the courage to have your product criticized by as many people as possible. Remember - interpretation is for others, not yourself, so let others preview it critically before using it publically. Who makes a good critic? Almost anyone. So they'll react subjectively? So will the public.

VIII. UPDATE

Continue to improve the final product or get rid of it.

Remember - Anyone can be an effective interpreter if he:

- (1) Wants to be
- (2) Will pay the price of proper preparation.