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INTERPRETION:

Guiding to Inspire, Educate and Enjoy Nature

"I will interpret the rocks, learn the language of the flood, storm and avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers, and wild gardens, and get as near to the heart of the world as I can." John Muir

National Association of Interpreters.

Website: <https://www.interpnet.com/>

Book: Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources by Lisa Brouchu and Tim Merriman

Interpretation is an interactive stroll through nature, not a walking lecture. Not "Drag and Brag".

Interpretation Strategies – **COCOA**

Connections

Open-ended Questions

Creative Thinking

Observations

Amusement

CONNECTIONS

We remember and understand better when we connect new knowledge with something we already know. (Prior knowledge) Interpreters create opportunities for visitors to form connections between new info and prior knowledge and experiences.

Examples: Seeds with Velcro, Willows with pain & fever meds, Acorn to ecology (small to big)

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

They are questions without a yes or no answer and often have more than one answer. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Example: Children looking at the Oak of the Golden Dream.

Honor all answers. Make visitors feel safe enough to respond. Value participation over accuracy.

Gently correct misinformation. "I can understand why you might think that but ____." That's interesting, and it's also important to know ____."

Asking open-ended questions is a good way to find out what your visitors are interested in so you can customize your interpretation. Using this strategy encourages people to share their ideas, so if a visitor is dominating the conversation, invite him/her to continue while you're walking or after the hike.

CREATIVE THINKING

Photo – Kids at stream. "Interpreters provoke (stimulate) visitors into thinking creatively, to speculate and imagine."

What do you think it would be like...?

How do you think the children of the Tataviam tribe learned things? Did they go to school, too?

Photo – Kids at Sycamore trunk. “To think about things in a new way or discover a new aspect of nature.”

Example: Walker Cabin – Turn on the lights.

Types of Creative Thinking: Compare/Contrast, Speculation, Listing/Categorizing, Imaging, Theorizing

OBSERVATIONS

Encourage visitors to use their senses – sight, touch, smell, hearing.

PHOTO – Girl smelling flowers. “Interpreters create the time and space for observation and discovery.” Take time to let visitors observe nature. Don’t rush to show/cover everything.

PHOTO – Kids with magnifying glasses. **Teachable Moment**

“That golden moment when a person shows curiosity or interest and is open to learning and trying new things.”
Take advantage of a moments when visitors show interest and curiosity.

Example: Seeing a Red-tailed hawk soaring in the sky.

AMUSEMENT

You don’t have to be an entertainer or comedian. Tell stories. Example: Woodrats

Photo: Boy crushing acorns. Interpreters provide opportunities to do something new.

Example: Scat

Be enthusiastic! Share you passion and love of nature.

10 TIPS

1. Wait for everyone’s attention.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Explain your expectations. It’s especially important with children.
4. Explain what they’ll be doing.
5. Use COCOA.
6. Know your audience and adapt.
7. Be enthusiastic!
8. Thank your visitors and invite them back.
9. Afterwards, reflect on what worked and what you would like to change.
10. Remember – all docents and groups are different and unique and that’s great!



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Interpreting in Placerita Canyon State Park

Practicing Connections

Open-ended Questions

Creative Thinking

Observations

Amusement

With a partner walk to these 5 places and practice 2 COCOA strategies at each location.

1. The Hummingbird Garden
2. The Tataviam Camp
3. The big Oak tree and bench on the Ecology Trail
4. Walker Cabin
5. The Stream

CONNECTIONS hook new information onto prior knowledge and help hikers remember what they learn. When you grow and get bigger, do you need to get new clothes? What do you think a snake does when it grows bigger and its skin doesn't fit?

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS don't have yes or no answers, and begin with How? Why? When? Where? What?

CREATIVE THINKING encourages hikers to compare and contrast, to speculate, list similarities, theorize and to imagine things they experience in nature. What would it be like to live in a cabin without running water or electricity? How is the bark of an oak different from the bark of a sycamore? Why do you think an oak leaf is curved?

OBSERVATIONS allows the time and space for hikers to use their senses to discover and learn. Tell me what you see? Tell me what you smell? How does this leaf feel?

AMUSEMENT uses stories, jokes and novel ideas. If you drop a shiny coin or earring, the wood rat will take it home. What do you think its bedroom looks like?