

## INTERPRETIVE SKILLS I

**LESSON PLAN:** 2

**SESSION TITLE:** HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF INTERPRETATION

**SESSION LENGTH:** 2 hours **Orig. PREPARED BY:** T. Danton, 1/88

**Revised By:** Steven Seven 1/92

**OBJECTIVES:** At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. List at least three significant events and/or three significant past interpretive leaders in shaping the modern profession of Interpretation;
2. Write a personal definition of Interpretation;
3. Demonstrate an application in park interpretation of at least one of Tilden's Principles.

**TRAINING AIDS:**

Pre-Course Aid: The park library at each participant's park.

In-Course Aids: Flip charts, six small objects dealing with natural and cultural history. Bring six small objects (historic and natural) which may be used by students in the Tilden's Six exercise.

**HANDOUTS:**

Pre-Course: Book The National Parks: Shaping the System by Barry Mackintosh

Book: Interpreting Our Heritage by Freeman Tilden

Handout: Bibliography of Recommended and Supplemental Readings on the National Park Service: It's History and Mission.

Cover Letter from course coordinator, sent with the above listed materials.  
(sample letter attached)

In-Course: Handout: Family Tree of the National Park Service  
Philosophy of Interpretation  
Tilden's Six Principles of Interpretation

Tilden's Six Principles of Interpretation, as compiled from Gary Larson

Optional Course Handouts (or reference material for instructor):

Developing a Personal Philosophy of Interpretation

Enos Mills: Father of Modern NPS Interpretation?

Before Tilden: A Profession Emerges

Liberty Hyde Bailey and Enos A. Mills

NOTES TO THE INSTRUCTOR:

This session will require research and interpretive creativity by the instructor to make the learning process work. Nevertheless, it is an important foundation session. It should emphasize that as interpreters we are not just doing a job, but practicing an important PROFESSION.

**Session Title:** History and Philosophy of Interpretation

Memorandum

To: \_\_\_\_\_,

From: Interpretation Skills 1 Course Coordinator

Subject: Pre-Course Reading Materials

Congratulations on your recent acceptance into the Interpretive Skills 1 training course. I look forward to meeting you and working with you during the week of \_\_\_\_\_.

As you probably know, Interpretive Skills 1 fulfills the first 80 hours of the Summary Core Interpretive Training for career NPS interpreters.

The enclosed information is yours to read before you arrive at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_:

1. "The National Parks: Shaping The System" by Barry MacIntosh
2. "Interpreting Our Heritage" by Freeman Tilden

I have also enclosed a bibliography of "Recommended and Supplemental Readings on the National Park Service: It's History and Mission" books to give you other publications on these topics if you are interested in further reading. Your park's library will be a good place to start looking for these resources.

If you have any questions on your reading materials or assignments, please call me at \_\_\_\_\_.

Please travel safely and I will see you at \_\_\_\_\_.

Park Ranger

NOTE: As instructors (and long-time employees of the NPS), we often assume that all permanent employees have built a solid foundation of knowledge of our agency's history, mission and interpretive philosophy during their seasonal "formative" years. If your region's experience is that this assumption is false, this lesson plan is designed to combine pre-course reading and a first-day-of-the-course review session to kindle (or rekindle) the participant's interest in our agency's "roots" and "mission".

## SESSION TITLE: History and Philosophy of Interpretation

Content	Method	Time
<p>I. In-Class Introduction</p> <p>A. Self introduction. Give class a brief introduction and review of your career.</p> <p>B. Review the pre-course reading assignment. If students did not receive the books and handouts distribute them at this time.</p>	Lecture	10 Min.
<p>II. NPS History/Interpretive History</p> <p>A. Introduce the students to the <b><u>NPS INTERPRETIVE HISTORY TRIVIA GAME</u></b>. Divide class into two groups for this "fun competition" exercise. Explain game rules (see attachment A).</p> <p>B. Hand out the "Family Tree of the National Park Service", and "Tilden's Six Principles of Interpretation", to the students. Give them a few minutes to read and review the handouts.</p> <p>C. Play <b><u>NPS INTERPRETIVE HISTORY TRIVIA GAME</u></b> for the remaining time period.</p>	Game Lecture	40 Min.
<p>III. Interpretation, a Personal Definition</p> <p>A. Hand out the "Philosophy of Interpretation" to students. Explain the process you will be using to write a personal definition of interpretation. Write in the space provided what you see as the "<b>KEY</b>"/important words from each individual definition. Using these "<b>KEY</b>" words as guides, have the students write their personal definition of interpretation.</p> <p>B. One at a time, select students to read a quote to the rest of the class. Ask students to then share what they feel are some of the "<b>KEY</b>" words they have written for that quote. Record these key words on a flip chart. Repeat this process for all the capsules of interpretive philosophy. Post the key words you have written on your flip chart page where all students can see them.</p> <p>C. Using the space provided on the bottom of the handout, have students write their personal definition of interpretation. Ask for volunteers (4-5) to share with the rest of the class, their definitions of interpretation. Record these definitions on flip chart pages and post in the class room.</p>	Class Exercise	20 Min.

**SESSION TITLE:** History and Philosophy of Interpretation

Content	Method	Time
<p>IV. Tilden's Six Principles of Interpretation Applied.</p> <p>A. Hand out "Tilden's Six Principles of Interpretation as compiled from Gary Larson". Allow students to enjoy a contemporary/humorous interpretation of Freeman Tilden's six principles.</p> <p>B. Break class into six (6) separate groups. If there are individuals in your class who you feel have a stronger grasp of the interpretive principles then others attempt to scatter them into the individual groups. Otherwise groups may be formed in any random manner you choose.</p> <p>C. To each group you will then assign one of the six interpretive principles. In addition assign each group a particular object (bring small objects of both a natural history and a cultural history orientation for this exercise) to which they will apply their principle of interpretation.</p> <p>D. At the end of the allotted time period each group will present a short interpretation of their object to the rest of the class. Discuss each presentation to re-enforce the particular principle which was demonstrated.</p> <p>Option Assign each principle to the group in secret by handing out the assignments in sealed envelopes. Then as group gives their interpretation of that object allow the rest of the group to identify the principle demonstrated.</p>	Class Exercise	45 Min.
<p>V. Lesson Summary</p> <p>Re-emphasize the points that interpretation is an "art" that has been evolving over the last 60 years. The evolution does not stop here, they are now a part of the process and will in turn effect the interpretive evolution as it continues forward.</p> <p>Read the following "anonymous" quotation:          "Without history we have no idea who we are...or how we came to be... We are the victims of a collective amnesia... groping in the dark for identity."</p>	Lecture	5 Min.

## NPS INTERPRETIVE HISTORY QUIZ

### A. Officials and Ground rules

1. The contest should have at least three "officials".
  - a. an "MC" who asks the questions (instructor)
  - b. a "scorekeeper" who concentrates only on keeping score
  - c. a "judge" (or judges) who decide on border line questions
2. Here is one suggestion for ground rules, feel free to set up your own game or rules if you like.
  - a. Divide the class into two groups. The easiest way is to just split them down the middle.
  - b. Explain the scoring process for the game. The first person to raise their hand after the question is read will have the opportunity to answer the question. A correct answer will earn their team one (1) point, an incorrect answer will cost their team two (2) points. (+1 for correct, -2 for incorrect). If the first person answers the question wrong, give the first hand from the other team an opportunity to answer. If both teams miss the answer, then you can give the answer yourself. You may wish to offer some type of a small/token prize for the winning team to add a little competition to the quiz.
  - c. After the answer is given, repeat that answer to assure all students hear the correct reply. With specific "**key**" answers you have the option of elaborating upon the answer to teach a broader aspect of that topic. These expanded answers are a quick and dirty way to throw some actual teaching into the game.
  - d. Continue the game for the remaining time allowed. You may wish to prioritize the questions to assure that you cover all the information you consider to be most important. One excellent source in Interpretation in the National Park Service by Barry Mackintosh

### B. Question Foundations and Vision

- a. The preferred question format is a closed question requiring the student to name a person, location, date, etc. Open ended and true/false questions may be used sparingly.
- b. Questions should all support the first lesson objective. List at least three significant events and/or three significant past interpretive leaders in shaping the modern profession of Interpretation.
- c. Questions should focus on the following foundations of Interpretative History and Philosophy
  - \* 1st's in Interpretation
  - \* Leaders in Interpretation throughout it's history
  - \* Types of Interpretive activities
  - \* Awards in Interpretation
  - \* Trends in Interpretation

### C. Sample Questions;

The following questions are based on the information the student gained through reading the books and handouts given as the pre-course materials as well as from the course hand out material, "Family Tree of the National Park Service" and "Tilden's Six Principles of Interpretation". Please expand and update the questions so they may best meet the teaching needs of your course.

### TRIVIA QUIZ                      QUESTIONS

1. In 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed into law a bill which withdrew more than one million acres of public domain from settlement. That action created what park area. (Yellowstone)
2. For two points answer the following question. In 1957 a book, called by some the "interpreters bible" was written. What was the name of the book and the author? (Interpreting our Heritage/Freeman Tilden)
3. The first director of the National Park System once spoke these words, "A visit to a park teaches love of nature, of trees and flowers, the rippling brooks, the crystal lakes, snow-clad peaks, wildlife encountered amid nature's surroundings. He is a better citizen, with a keen appreciation of living here, who has toured the national parks." (Stephen Mather)
4. In 1906, congress gave blanket authority for presidents to proclaim and reserve "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic and scientific interest: on lands owned or controlled by the United States as National Monuments. What is the name of that act? (Antiquities Act)
5. What significant event occurred on August 25, 1916? (creation of NPS)
6. What Federal agency was responsible for protecting Yellowstone National Park from 1886 to 1919? (U.S. Army)
7. The first reasonably comprehensive interpretive programs directed by the Park Service began in 1920 at what two park service areas? (Yellowstone, Yosemite)
8. The first officially designated park naturalist worked at Yellowstone. What was his name? (Milton P. Skinner)
9. In 1920, Yellowstone hired what woman as a seasonal ranger to help inaugurate the interpretive program there? (Isobel Bassett)

## PHILOSOPHY OF INTERPRETATION

Over the years, it has become traditional for writers who write about the interpretive process to express their philosophy of interpretation by creating statements of what good interpretation should be. Several of these capsules of interpretive philosophy are present here.

STATEMENT	KEY WORDS
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"An educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information." **Freeman Tilden**

*Interpretation helps the visitor...*

"Learn about his natural environment and the laws of life.

*It is a program:*

- that helps to make education a continuous process;
- that emphasizes avocational pursuits,
- that stimulates the proper use of leisure time."

**Harold C. Bryant, 1936**

Interpretation is an attempt to recreate understandings.

**William Alderson & Shirley Payne Low**

"The helping of the visitor to feel something that the interpreter feels - a sensitivity to beauty, complexity, variety, inter-relatedness of the environment; a sense of wonder; a desire to know. It should help the visitor develop a feeling of being at home in the environment. It should help the visitor develop perception."

**Harold Wallin (a chief naturalist for Cleveland Metropolitan Parks)**

Is the translation of the technical and often complex language of the environment into nontechnical form with no loss of accuracy, so as to create in the listener sensitivity, awareness, understanding, enthusiasm and commitment.

**Dr. Paul Risk**

Far too many Americans live in walled cities from which nature is banished. We are the victims of a blatant misuse and misunderstanding of the energy of life. The barriers are our own pre-conceptions and prejudices, our fears, and our tenacious clinging to the familiar. As a result, most of our experience with the natural world resembles either a hasty glimpse across the barricade or an armed infiltration.

Interpretation must do more than explain. Explanation does not get rid of the barriers and disguises; it is playing the game by the rules of the barriers, for words themselves are often disguises...Our words are not the sounds, but what we call those sounds...Our mental voice gets between us and the way things really are. We are not our heads...

To succeed, interpretation must immerse the whole person in the "feelings" of his surroundings. Too often, words become the refuse of those who cannot feel...

**Steve Van Matre**

"It is an information service...guiding service ...an educational service...an entertainment service...a propaganda service...an inspirational service."

"Interpretation aims at giving people new understanding, new enthusiasm, new interests..."

"A good interpreter is a sort of Pied Piper, leading people easily into new and fascinating worlds that their senses never really penetrated before. He needs three basic attributes: Knowledge, Enthusiasm and A Bit of the Common Touch."

**Yorke Edwards (Canada)**

Interpretation seeks to achieve three objectives. The first primary objective of interpretation is to assist the visitor in developing a keener awareness, appreciation and understanding of the area he is visiting. The second objective of interpretation is to accomplish management goals. The third objective of interpretation is to promote public understanding of an agency's goals and objectives. **Grant Sharp**

Interpretation is a process by which the public is brought, in an easy and enjoyable way, to a greater awareness, understanding, and appreciation of a park; its values and uses; and, through the park, of the total environment in which it lives.

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Using the key words which have the most meaning to you, create your own capsule statements of what interpretation should be.

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# PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

(FREEMAN TILDEN)

Freeman Tilden in his *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957, 1967)\* defines interpretation as "An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information." He goes on to say:

"In the field of interpretation, whether of the National Park Service or other institutions, the activity is not instruction so much as what we may call provocation. It is true that the visitors to these preserves frequently desire straight information, which may be called instruction, and a good interpreter will always be able to teach when called upon. But the purpose of Interpretation is to stimulate the reader or hearer toward a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of facts."

"The National Park or Monument, the preserved battlefield, the historic restoration, the nature center in a public recreation spot, are exactly those places where Interpretation finds its ideal opportunity, for these are the places where firsthand experience with the objects of Nature's and Man's handiwork can be had."

"I find six principle bases that seem enough to support our structure. There is no magic in the number six. It may be that the reader will point out that some of these principles interfinger. It may be that he will feel that, after all, there is but one, and the others are corollary. On the other hand, since I am ploughing a virgin field so far as a published philosophy of the subject is concerned, some of my readers may be provoked into adding further furrows. Very well. This book pretends to no finality, no limitation."

"I believe that interpretive effort, whether written or oral or projected by means of mechanical devices, if based upon these six principles, will be correctly directed. There will inevitably be differences in excellence arising from varied techniques and from the personality of the interpreter."

"Here, then, are the six principles:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program."

\*University of North Carolina Press  
Chapel Hill, NC