How to Be a Sense of Place Sleuth: Creating Engaging Visitor Experiences

with Erica Wheeler

Erica Wheeler

Speaker
Trainer/Educator
Performer
Interpretation Specialist
Visitor Services Consultant

Clients Include:
National Park Service
State Parks
Conservation Organizations
Museums
Historic Sites
Nature Centers, Gardens etc.
Who This Is For:

- Your tours have become dry or stale.
- You're always looking for new techniques and creative ideas.
- You want to engage a more diverse audience.
- You want all visitors to feel included and find their visit enjoyable, meaningful & valuable.
- You want people to appreciate and care about your resource.

Poll

What We’ll Cover Today

- Sense of Place & What it Means
- How to Create Well-Balanced Programs That Engage
- Examples of Creative/Reflective Program Components
- Discuss How These Ideas Help Inspire Story-Making and Sense of Place Connections
Challenge One:
Information Giving vs.
Story-Making

Challenge Two:
Meaning Giving vs.
Evoking Connections

“Denkmal” Means Thought Object

Challenge Three:
Guiding Visitors vs.
Having them Lead

“If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”

Henry Ford (1863-1947)
Sense of Place

"Those things that add up to a feeling that a community is a special place, distinct from anywhere else."

The National Register of Historic Preservation

Sense of Place: My Definition

- Facts
- Information
- Knowledge
- Sense of Place
- Feelings
- Stories
- Experiences

Personal Meaning

“If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.”
Wendell Berry
“Heritage interpretation is 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.” Freeman Tilden
The Soulful Stewardship Method™

1. Welcome
2. Information
3. Experiences
4. Reflection/Integration
5. Articulation/Sharing
6. A Call to Action
7. Wrap-up & Resources

Includes Reflection

"Reflective practice is essential to convert knowledge into understanding and eventually, wisdom."

Tom Wessels from “The Myth of Progress”

Includes all learning styles
How to Be a Sense of Place Sleuth™

Sleuthing

To carry out a search or investigation in the manner of a detective.

Sleuthing Around
Great Mentors: Help You See & Ask Questions

Three Tools

- No. 1 Mentor Dialog Skills
- No. 2 Build Sensory Awareness
- No. 3 Find a Story

No. 1: Mentor Dialog Skills
Foster Personal Relevance

Fumee d’Ambre Gris by John Singer Sargent

No. 2: Build Sensory Awareness

Check your Earthmail™
What’s the Story?

“Coming to Know”

Conclusion:
Pull One Thread,
Find Many Stories
Facts are one layer of the story.

Mentor visitors to have a dialog with the resource.

Design well-balanced programs to include discovery.

Offer narratives for visitors that create context.

Encourage multiple perspectives.

What ideas has this sparked? What can you add or change?
Thank you!

Thank you to NEMA, Heather Riggs and B.J. Larson

Also to Jay Miller, Brian Forist, Domenic Cardea and Lisa Murphy and William Hosley.