

Supplemental Activities for TORE™ Workshop Participants

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Activity 1 – Theme Writing

Alone or with one or more thematic interpretation colleagues, make a list of the most important topics you interpret at your site or in your business.

- √ For each topic, write at least 3 *strong* themes. Remember, a strong theme is a theme that matters to the audience it is intended to impact. So you might start with a draft of each theme and then apply the principles reinforced in Activities 2 and 3 to strengthen them.
- √ Exchange themes with your thematic interpretation colleagues and help each other to make them even stronger.

A REMINDER!

In writing themes, remember to think “Big Deal!” by completing the following sentence:

When it comes to this audience and my topic, I think it’s really, REALLY, REALLY important that this audience understand that _____

_____.

(complete the sentence with your theme).

Activity 2 – Analyzing Strong Themes

Like a good story, strong themes sometimes draw on some sort of tension, conflict or dilemma that needs to be resolved. Other times, they may invoke something that is astounding or extraordinary to the audience. And still others capitalize on our fascination with mystery, uncertainty and intrigue.

Below are nine themes related to the topic of wildlife. Each applies one or more of these three principles (i.e., tension/conflict, astounding/extraordinary, or mystery/uncertainty). For each theme:

- √ Try to determine which of these principles is being applied.
- √ Is it possible for some themes to apply more than one of the principles?
- √ Analyze each theme and identify what you think the really key words are that give the theme its power.
- √ See if you can develop your own set of principles for writing strong themes. Are there other ways to do it besides applying the three principles listed here?

Here are some themes to analyze:

- Every animal is designed to survive. But some make it, and some don't.
- One of nature's most successful experiments was its creation of the slug.
- Nowhere is the mystery of nature's design more apparent than in a freshwater marsh.
- There are no "good guys" and "bad guys" in the animal kingdom.
- Forests are a kind of life insurance. They hold answers to questions that science isn't yet capable of even asking.
- Losing a species, even a seemingly unimportant creature, is a tragedy.
- This landscape wasn't always the serene and peaceful place it seems today. Violence and upheaval were a necessary part of the beautiful creation.
- The moose may be the most amazing animal on earth, simply because of the way nature designed it.
- The history of wildlife conservation is a story about villains, heroes and the will of a people.

Activity 3 – Strengthening Your Themes

Imagine that one of your thematic interpretation colleagues has given you the following four draft themes. S/he is concerned that they just aren't strong enough yet.

Applying the principles at the bottom of the sheet, see if you can help your colleague out by strengthening each of the draft themes.

Here are the draft themes your colleague gave you:

"Colorado's history is really interesting."

"Life on a river's edge can be fascinating."

"Scavengers serve a lot of underappreciated functions."

"Nocturnal wildlife have adapted well for a life without light."

Remember, you can often strengthen a theme by doing one or more of the following:

1. *Making it more personal*
2. *Connecting it to things of intangible, symbolic importance*
3. *Incorporating an analogy in the theme statement*
4. *Incorporating a metaphor in the theme statement*
5. *Substituting visual, active-voice verbs for dead and dull passive ones*
6. *Avoiding where possible the verb "to be"*

Activity 4 – Planning a Thematic Interpretive Activity

Here's a template to guide your thinking:

- √ First, write a *strong* theme for a guided tour or talk.
- √ Now develop a *detailed* outline of the body of the guided tour or talk (including all the information and "color" you'll use to develop the activity's theme, as well as the sequential techniques you'll apply to add interest and hold things together).
- √ Finally, develop a conclusion and an introduction (in that order)
- √ Try it out on a real audience
- √ Revise and refine it based on your first dry-run.
- √ Change the theme and repeat the process for a new activity.

Remember, the group can put magic in the message. So be sure to ask your thematic interpretation colleagues for their reaction and input into your draft theme. Their reaction, and of course, the reaction of your audience, will tell you unequivocally whether you have a strong theme.

Activity 5 – Brainstorming the R & E

The final two qualities of the TORE™ model are being *relevant* (R) and *enjoyable* (E). Alone or with one or more thematic interpretation colleagues, brainstorm ways to make your interpretive activities relevant and enjoyable for each of the audiences you typically try to reach. If you do this in a group, work in pairs and ask each pair to present (or if you prefer, role-play) their ideas.

Things to bring out in the discussion:

- √ Be sure to note that what makes an interpretive activity relevant or enjoyable for one audience may not work so well for a different audience. In interpretation, all things are 100% audience-dependent.
- √ Be sure to note how being more relevant will also make any interpretive activity or device more enjoyable, but not necessarily vice versa.

Activity 6 – Applying TORE™ to Non-personal Interpretation

This activity is intended to take you from the application of the TORE™ model in face-to-face thematic interpretation to situations in which you can't be present. In these situations, we usually rely on posters, signs, exhibits or other non-sequential communication devices to communicate our themes for us.

For this activity, you'll need the "Worksheet for Activity 6: Planning an Interpretive Poster or Sign" which is provided on the next page.

If you've completed a TORE™ workshop, you're now ready to put into practice everything you've learned about the TORE™ Model. In this activity, you'll identify an intended audience (e.g., adult visitors or bushwalkers, etc.) and write a theme that you want to communicate to that audience in order to achieve a particular result or desired outcome. Then you'll design a poster or sign with a title and text that communicate that theme (T) and in way that is organized, relevant and enjoyable (O, R and E).

Since posters and signs are non-sequential interpretive devices (where the audience controls the order of information it gets), you'll need to capture the theme in the *title*. Such titles are called "theme titles." (For a full explanation behind the use of theme titles, see Chapter 2, 8 and 9 of Ham (1992).

Remember that this activity isn't an "art project." Its purpose is to give you a chance to practice applying TORE™ from the standpoint of message construction. So you shouldn't worry if you don't have well developed drawing or other artistic skills

When you've produced a basic mock-up of your poster or sign, give it to others to critique. Ask a designer to give you suggestions on how your conceptual thematic plan for the device might be enhanced and strengthened visually.

Worksheet for Activity 6: Planning an Interpretive Poster or Sign

STEP 1: Who is/are your audience(s) _____
(Remember, in communication all things are 100% audience-dependent!)

STEP 2: What is your behavioral objective? In other words, what is the specific behavior you want to promote?

STEP 3: What is the theme of this poster or sign? _____

(Remember, powerful interpretation begins with a strong theme!)

STEP 4: Theme title: _____

STEP 5: Main text:

Activity 7 – Planning a Thematic Self-Guided Tour

This activity asks you to combine your knowledge about sequential and non-sequential theme development by producing the conceptual design for a hypothetical self-guided tour (SGT). SGTs are unique among conventional interpretive media in that they require both sequential and non-sequential problem solving. When “stops” on an SGT are chosen with an overall theme in mind, they lend themselves to sequential theme development (with an introductory stop, a series of body stops, and a conclusion stop). Some stops may even include transitions to the next stop, foreshadowing or mystery – sequential techniques you can use only when you control the order of the things. However, each stop also presents a non-sequential communication problem. It must be designed with a 1-3 second audience in mind and quickly communicate the essence of its theme or sub-theme through well-crafted theme titles and thematic sub-titles.

In this exercise, you are asked to envision a hypothetical communication corridor (whether it be a trail, a waterway or road or rail system, an historic home, cultural setting, or various exhibits in a museum or visitor center, or even different galleries). The hypothetical environment doesn't matter. What does matter is that you apply both sequential and non-sequential theme development principles to developing your design. Assume that each stop consists either of a panel, sign, exhibit or wayside exhibit.

1. Select an environment or physical context for your SGT.
2. Decide on a strong global theme to be developed by the SGT.
3. Apply the “2-3-1 Rule” to decide first on the location, theme and content of the body stops and a strong theme title for each one. (Plan for no less than 3 and no more than 5 body stops). Then develop the theme and content of the conclusion stop. Finally, decide on how you will introduce the SGT in an introductory panel or exhibit. Remember that the introductory panel doesn't necessarily have a theme title. Often, the title of the introductory panel is simply the name of the trail, feature or tour corridor (e.g., “Trail of the Solitary Pine” or “Welcome to Miner's Cottage.” In such cases, the highest level main text (usually in larger or otherwise more conspicuous font) introduces the theme.
4. Develop strong theme titles, ideas for supportive visual illustration, and at least one level of main text for *each* body stop and conclusion. If you wish, you may develop a hierarchy of text for each stop, but the main text that develops the theme of the stop is the minimum requirement.
5. Develop transitions (including foreshadowing and mystery) between the stops.
6. Finalize your introductory panel.