



# EcoLeaders Interpretation

## Past Work: *Heritage Interpreter Workbook*



### Description

This training manual was developed by EcoLeaders and Ann Finlayson and Associates for the Canadian Tourism Human Resources Council (CTHRC). It is based on the Canadian Heritage Interpreter Performance Standards.

Our writing team produced all text and many diagrams and maps. The CTHRC did the final proofing of text as well as the layout and design to fit their standard workbook format.

The following pages include the table of contents and one sample chapter from this document.

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# Interpretation: Magic or Method?

## Chapter 1

**By the end of Chapter 1,  
you will be able to:**

- define interpretation
- describe the job description of an interpreter
- describe how interpretation works
- describe two interpretation models used by interpreters
- recognize three reasons why agencies and individuals do interpretation.

Interpretation as a profession is relatively new. In 1957, Freeman Tilden, the godfather of modern American interpretation, defined interpretation as, '... an elective education ...' chosen by site visitors '... that is superior in some aspects to that of the classroom, for here he meets the Thing Itself ...'.

However, this type of learning was not invented in the 1950s. The educational use of first-hand experience with real things from human and natural history is very old. For example:

- It is said that Edward Gibbon, writer of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, in the late 1700s spent time sitting among famous Roman ruins before he wrote his great works. He was trying to 'feel' what it was like to be a Roman in those times.
- Louis Agassiz, the Swiss-American naturalist who founded the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, revolutionized the study of natural history in the 1800s with his doctrine of 'Study Nature Not Books.' He took university students out of the lecture halls into natural areas to study botany and zoology first hand.

This chapter is an introduction to the philosophy of interpretation. It is the foundation for all following chapters.

It can start you on your way as a heritage interpreter, or it could be a short review of the philosophies that you are already following.

## Getting Started

To see whether you have the knowledge covered in this chapter, test yourself by answering the following questions. An answer key for these questions is found at the end of the chapter. If you miss an answer, or your answers are incomplete, turn to the information that follows and do as many of the activities as necessary to learn the material and meet the objectives.

1. What does an interpreter do?
2. Where does an interpreter work?
3. What is interpretation?

## What an Interpreter Does

Part 1

### Job Definition

*Heritage interpreters* are individuals who help others understand and appreciate cultural or natural heritage through the use of various communication processes designed to reveal meanings and relationships. Interpreters can work at, but are not limited to, the following sites: parks, museums, aquariums, historic sites, art galleries, zoos, industrial sites, interpretive centres, botanical gardens, cultural centres, adventure travel sites, nature sanctuaries and tour companies.

# What Is Interpretation?

## Part 2

### Introducing Interpretation

#### What Interpretation Is Not

One way to start defining interpretation is to look at what it is not.

- Interpretation is not merely naming things.
- Interpretation is not merely telling the age, weight or length of something.
- Interpretation is not merely showing a picture of an object, place or landscape.

Interpretation includes information like this, but it is much more.

#### What Interpretation Is

Even though interpretation has taken place since the 1930s in Canadian and U.S. National Parks, and even longer in some museums, the profession of interpretation is not defined in conventional dictionaries. Some agencies have their own definitions. Some interpreters use their own personal philosophies. However, most current definitions are based on the ideas of the three established authorities of interpretation. These definitions are in the following Heritage Interpreter National Standard.



#### Occupational Standards

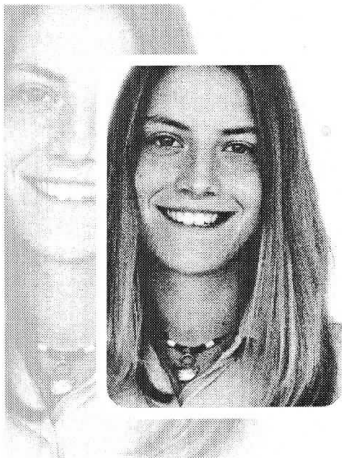
##### A. Fundamentals of Interpretation

##### Skill 1: Describe Interpretation

##### A1.1 describe interpretation

##### a) define interpretation, for example:

- 'any communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of cultural and natural heritage to the public, through first-hand involvement with an object, artifact, landscape or site' (Interpretation Canada, 1976 cited in Veverka)
- 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience and by illustrative media, rather than to simply communicate factual information' (Tilden, 1957)
- 'an information service ... a guiding service ... an educational service ... an entertainment service ... a propaganda service ... an inspirational service ... interpretation aims at giving people new understanding, new insights, new enthusiasms, new interests.' (Yorke Edwards, 1979)



#### Exercises

1. From the definitions of Tilden and Edwards, check three key elements that make up interpretation.

- communication
- money
- meaning and relationships
- using real things
- large numbers of participants

### The Interpretation Experience

Read the following case study of the experience of a family that visits a heritage interpretation site. The case study illustrates many of the interpretive ideas that are discussed in this chapter.



#### The Journey Family's Trip to Pioneer Village

The Journey family, on holiday from New Brunswick, is visiting Ontario. They happen upon the Blackcreek Pioneer Village. At the visitor centre, the family is made welcome by a middle-aged woman dressed in clothes of the 19th century. She tells them that the site is a replica of a typical 1860s Ontario farm village. About thirty heritage buildings have been restored so that visitors can step back in time. Interpreters in period costumes of farmhands and artisans demonstrate old skills, such as blacksmithing and milling. Through demonstrations and hands-on activities, the interpretive staff illustrate Ontario rural life of four generations ago. Today there are several interpretive activities to drop in on, including:

- a fiddle contest featuring the music of the 1800s
- a strawberry social featuring foods and picnic games of the late 1800s
- a hands-on children's activity where participants card wool, mix dyes using natural ingredients, and dye samples of wool to take home.

The Journey family decides to wander about the village to get a sense of the time and place. Denise, 8, and Bernard, 12, dash off, and when their parents, Murray and Justine, follow, they are drawn to a makeshift stage where a fiddler is playing jigs, reels and waltzes that were popular in the 1800s. At a break in the playing, one of the site interpreters, Stephanie, a fiddle player herself, approaches the Journeys. She asks how they are enjoying the music. In the ensuing conversation, Stephanie discovers that:

- the Journeys are from New Brunswick
- Murray has an old fiddle at home, a gift from his Uncle Alphonse
- when Murray was a teenager, Alphonse taught him to play
- Murray no longer plays but the sound of the fiddle has brought back old memories of music sessions around Alphonse's kitchen table.

Stephanie is delighted. She tells Murray that kitchen music is a tradition from the 1800s. 'People of the 1860s had to depend on themselves for entertainment. Many townfolk played some type of instrument. Kitchen parties were popular. Neighbours gathered to trade tunes and news. Can you remember any of the tunes your uncle taught you?' she asks.

Stephanie and Murray continue to talk about the Maritime music traditions. During the next set of tunes, she tells Murray where each tune originated. She explains how tunes were passed from fiddler to fiddler through generations of kitchen music, fiddle contests and dances. She points out that many of the people that moved to Upper Canada in the 1860s were from Atlantic Canada. Many of the songs contain Maritime place names. 'Songs from this time tell of special events or relate the hardships and challenges of everyday people.'

Stephanie illustrates the idea by singing *Peter Emberley*, a New Brunswick folk song of the time. When she finishes, she explains that, although the song is about pioneer life in New Brunswick, life in Upper Canada was almost identical. Farming and lumbering were the major industries. Life was often dangerous and short.

# Real life

Case Study



## Peter Emberley - a traditional song from Canada's east coast

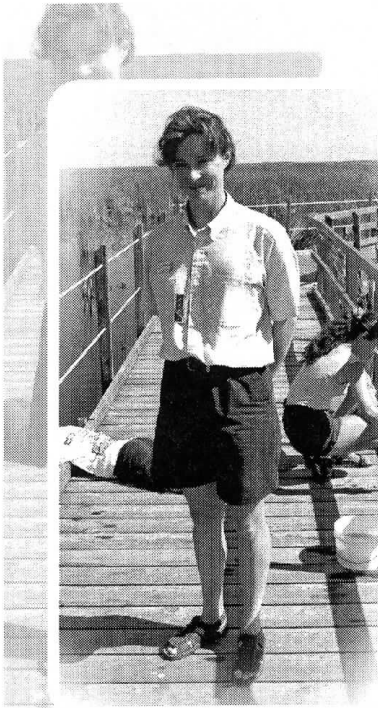
*My name 'tis Peter Emberley, as you may understand.  
 I was born on Prince Edward's Island near by the ocean strand.  
 In eighteen hundred and eighty-four when the flowers were a brilliant hue  
 I left my native counterie my fortune to pursue.  
 I landed in New Brunswick in a lumbering counterie,  
 I hired to work in the lumber woods on the Sou-West Miramichi.  
 I hired to work in the lumber woods where they cut the tall spruce down  
 While loading teams with yarded logs I received a deadly wound.  
 There's danger on the ocean where the waves roll mountains high,  
 There's danger on the battlefield where the angry bullets fly.  
 There's danger in the lumber woods, for death lurks sullen there,  
 And I have fell a victim into that monstrous snare.  
 Here's adieu to Prince Edward's Island, that garden in the seas,  
 No more I'll walk its flowery banks to enjoy a summer's breeze.  
 No more I'll view those gallant ships as they go swimming by,  
 With their streamers floating on the breeze above the canvas high.  
 Here's adieu unto my father, it was him who drove me here,  
 I thought he used me cruelly, his treatments were unfair.  
 For 'tis not right to oppress a boy or try to keep him down.  
 'Twill oft repulse him from his home when he is far too young.  
 Here's adieu unto my greatest friend, I mean my mother dear,  
 She raised a son who fell as soon as he left her tender care.  
 'Twas little did my mother know when she sang a lullaby,  
 What country I might travel in or what death I might die.  
 Here's adieu unto my youngest friend, those island girls so true.  
 Long may they bloom to grace that isle where first my breath I drew.  
 For the world will roll on just the same when I have passed away,  
 What signifies a mortal man whose origin is clay?*

The music is powerful and Stephanie's information and questions awake in Murray a new interest in his Maritime traditional roots – the music, the lives of his ancestors and how the landscape shaped their culture. He begins to think of himself as a link in a chain that passes traditions and memories from generation to generation.

Throughout their visit to the pioneer village, Murray often returns to the fiddling demonstration to listen and talk to Stephanie and the other musicians. Eventually, he even plucks up the courage to play one of his uncle's tunes on Stephanie's

fiddle. The music is a bit scratchy and he falters a few times but his family is delighted. Denise and Bernard have never heard their father play before. Some of the other site visitors crowd around with their own reminiscences and tune suggestions.

By the end of the visit, Murray is determined to return to fiddle playing and learn from his uncle more of his regional musical heritage, family history and stories. Stephanie is delighted and suggests several eastern Canadian heritage music and historic societies he can join, and recommends two collections of Canadian fiddle tunes.



## Exercises

2. Which of the key elements chosen in exercise 1 did Stephanie use in her interpretation of pioneer life?

# How Does Interpretation Work?

## Part 3

### Principles of Interpretation

#### Tilden's Six Principles

In 1957, Freeman Tilden wrote his six principles of interpretation. His principles provide a good description of the interpretation process and have been the cornerstone of interpretive philosophy in North America ever since. The six principles are a key part of the Heritage Interpreter National Occupational Standards, upon which this workbook is based.

#### *Tilden's First Principle:*

#### Occupational Standards

##### A. Fundamentals of Interpretation

##### Skill 1: Describe Interpretation

##### A1.1 describe interpretation

##### b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:

- according to Freeman Tilden:
  - '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.'

Interpretation requires an interpreter, a participant and something to interpret. William J. Lewis, in his 1981 book *Interpreting for Park Visitors*, calls these the 'interactive threesome'. Part of your job as an interpreter is to find ways to relate the information you are trying to communicate to the life experiences of the participants. A key skill of an interpreter is, therefore, the ability to learn about the participants with whom he is communicating.



### **Exercises**

3. How did Stephanie relate information to Murray's experiences?



### ***Tilden's Second Principle:***

#### **Occupational Standards**

##### **A. Fundamentals of Interpretation**

##### **Skill 1: Describe Interpretation**

##### **A1.1 describe interpretation**

##### **b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:**

- according to Freeman Tilden:
  - 'Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.'

### **Exercises**

4. What revelations did Murray come to?



### ***Tilden's Third Principle:***

#### **Occupational Standards**

##### **A. Fundamentals of Interpretation**

##### **Skill 1: Describe Interpretation**

##### **A1.1 describe interpretation**

##### **b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:**

- according to Freeman Tilden:
  - 'Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.'

### **Adding to your skills**

Interpretation combines the sciences of communication, natural sciences (biology, ecology, geology etc.), history, sociology, and others. The art is in the delivery, where the intuitive arts of drama, storytelling, illustration, photography, music and public speaking are combined in a package that is

unique to each creative interpreter. You, the interpreter, have a unique combination of talents and experiences that you can combine into an accurate story that engages the intellect and imagination of your participants.

### **Exercises**

5. What arts and information did Stephanie use to communicate with Murray?



### ***Tilden's Fourth Principle:***

#### **Occupational Standards**

##### **A. Fundamentals of Interpretation**

##### **Skill 1: Describe Interpretation**

##### **A1.1 describe interpretation**

##### **b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:**

- according to Freeman Tilden:
  - 'The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.'

This principle indicates that your job is not merely to tell participants the facts about a topic. You must provoke them to think about, feel and react to the subject, and perhaps even take action to learn more about the topic.

Provocation can be in the form of a controversial statement, an outlandish costume, a strange unexpected sound or any surprising, out-of-the-ordinary statement or action that grabs and holds the participant's attention. It can be the springboard for new information or new insight.

### Exercises

6. Look up the word 'provoke' in a dictionary. What definition do you think Tilden had in mind when he coined his fourth principle?



7. What part of the interpretive program provoked Murray?



### *Tilden's Fifth Principle:*

#### **Occupational Standards**

##### A. Fundamentals of Interpretation

##### Skill 1: Describe Interpretation

##### A1.1 describe interpretation

##### b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:

- according to Freeman Tilden:

- 'Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.'

Tilden makes two points in this principle. The first is that the stories should be about the whole subject in context with its time and place. The second point is that interpretation should address the whole person. This is a key point. Interpretation is aimed at reaching both the intellect and the emotions.



## Exercises

Check the correct answers.

8. Stephanie did which of the following?
- Interpreted individual folk tunes and techniques of fiddle playing.
  - Interpreted the big picture of the place of folk music in the 1800s.
  - Used physical force to make Murray sit through the fiddle contest.
9. Stephanie's interpretation engaged Murray using:
- the natural emotion of the folk music;
  - the connections of his life experiences to those of the pioneers;
  - both of the above.
10. Stephanie interpreted:
- just the facts about pioneer life;
  - just the feelings about pioneer life;
  - some of each.



### *Tilden's Sixth Principle:*

#### Occupational Standards

##### A. Fundamentals of Interpretation

##### Skill 1: Describe Interpretation

##### A1.1 describe interpretation

##### b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:

- according to Freeman Tilden:
  - '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.'

### **Adding to your skills**

Up to the age of twelve, children develop physically, intellectually and emotionally at a very rapid pace. With each year a child's ability to move, understand, concentrate, stand still and cope with information grows exponentially. Knowing this, many

interpreters develop tailor-made programs for children of specific age groups. Chapter Two of this workbook gives you detailed information about the developmental stages of children.



### Veverka's Principles

John Veverka is a more recent contributor to the understanding of the interpretive process. In his 1994 book, *Interpretive Master Planning*, he identifies two additional principles that are imbedded in the Heritage Interpreter National Standards.

### Occupational Standards

#### A. Fundamentals of Interpretation

##### Skill 1: Describe Interpretation

##### A1.1 describe interpretation

##### b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:

- according to John Veverka:
  - 'Interpretation can be delivered in a variety of means suitable to the audience.'

### Exercises

11. List the interpretive activities presented during the Journey family's visit.



### Occupational Standards

#### A. Fundamentals of Interpretation

##### Skill 1: Describe Interpretation

##### A1.1 describe interpretation

##### b) identify principles of interpretation, for example:

- according to John Veverka:
  - 'Interpretation is an interactive dynamic process.'

### Exercises

12. In what ways was Stephanie's interpretation dynamic and interactive?