

“Gorp And Good Jen/Bad Jen”

Ideas For Effective And Fun Interpretive Training

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Introduction

Interpretive training offered by Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ) has evolved and improved over time. A decade ago, training focused almost exclusively on providing interpretive volunteers with “content” – information on natural history and the collections. “Delivery” was covered only in a few cases, such as for scripted presentations or for particular exhibits. Recognizing that interpretation goes beyond simple transfer of information, FONZ Department of Education and Volunteer Services hired interpretive specialists and redesigned its trainings.

Now, FONZ’s interpretive volunteers are trained in interpretation philosophies, communication methods, and interactive techniques in order to ensure that their delivery of content information is meaningful and stimulating to zoo visitors. The materials and activities used in training draw upon the body of knowledge developed by academic and professional entities dedicated to interpretation and are tailored to the conditions and needs of the National Zoo. FONZ invites other programs to make use of the attached examples of materials, presentations, and exercises integrated into its interpretive training.

Attachments

- **Interpretive Section of a Training Manual**
 1. “Elements of Interpretation” (10 pages)
- **Trainer Presentations on Interpretation**
 2. “GORP” Presentation (2 pages)
 3. “Good Jen, Bad Jen” Presentation (3 pages)
- **Trainee Exercises**
 4. Draw an Interpreter (1 page)
 5. Think About Yourself as a Visitor (1 page)
 6. Word Choice Activity (1 page)
 7. Interpret a Familiar Object (1 page)
 8. Exhibit Interpretation (1 page)

Attachment 1

Elements of Interpretation

The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

Interpretation should capitalize on mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit.

[Interpretation defined 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, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957)

Freeman Tilden (1883-1980) was the author of the first book dedicated to defining the profession of interpretation. The above phrases note that interpretation is not simply an exchange of facts but an interactive sharing of experiences and knowledge between the interpreter and the audience. By blending a strong, accurate understanding of the topics, a love of the resource and a concern for the audience, interpreters are able to “reveal meanings and relationships” and “enrich the human mind and spirit.”

The primary elements of interpretation can be summarized as:

- Knowledge of the Resource
- Knowledge of the Audience
- Appropriate Techniques

Each of these elements is discussed in the sections that follow. However, please note that even expertise in all of these elements only produces an opportunity for, not a guarantee of, interpretation. Successful interpretation requires a receptive audience and this variable can never be completely controlled by the interpreter.

Knowledge of the Resource

Volunteers in the Reptile Discovery Center Program are expected to develop and share their knowledge about the natural history, individual history, Zoo management practices and conservation issues associated with the species in the exhibit. Knowledge about reptiles and amphibians and the exhibit’s collection is based on training and experience as well as personal background and education. This manual provides some basic information on reptiles and amphibians.

You should develop your knowledge to a point where you can offer layers of interpretive information — from the basic “what” and “how” to an explanation of the “why.” You will want to tailor your information to your audience.

It is important to mentally prepare for an interpretation shift. Review your notes, if necessary, and consider the direction your interpretation will take. Review the resources available to you and consider what you might offer to the visitors. If you choose to share a hands-on item, try to tie in broader themes such as conservation, behavior, or animal management. Preparation will keep conversations and demonstrations lively and positive and give interpretive objects more meaning.

Interpreters should develop a professional attitude about their volunteer work and have a respect for accuracy. Learn the information and facts and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know," to a question beyond your knowledge. Visitors will appreciate an honest, “I don’t know,” over a guess any day. However, make sure to find the answer. Discuss the question with other volunteers or staff or try to find the answer in the resources available in the Resource Room. Finding the answer will allow you to provide the information the next time you are asked.

Choose your sources of information with care. Information changes quickly in the fields of biological research and conservation. Most of the books in the Resource Room and SNZP library are accurate and up-to-date, but there are some there and elsewhere that may not be. The Reptile Discovery Center staff are an excellent source of information, but remember the expertise of individual staff members does not extend to all topics. Other volunteers may also be an excellent source of information. Ask around. Read a little. Obtaining good current information is one of the challenges of volunteering.

During the Reptile Discovery Center Interpreter Program monthly meetings, FONZ and SNZP staff provide updates about the RDC and Zoo as well as information and in-service training regarding the topics and issues surrounding the animals in the House. Monthly meetings are a great place to extend your Knowledge of the Resource, receive updates about the exhibit, and get to know your fellow volunteers and staff.

Knowledge of the Audience

One of the key elements of successful interpretation is assessing and adapting to the audience. Visitors vary greatly in age, geographic origin, knowledge level, perceptions and expectations. They also vary in their desire for interactions with human interpreters. Some may want to be left alone, preferring to listen quietly to your discussion or browse through the house. Others may have just a few questions while others may have numerous questions and really like to interact.

Let visitors dictate the degree to which you interact with them. Make them feel welcome in the exhibit, but do not overwhelm them. If visitors seem receptive, you can try to assess their interest, capabilities and knowledge level by asking a few questions about them and their interests. Do not overestimate the visitors' knowledge nor underestimate their intelligence.

Although you must learn about your audiences as you go, there is some basic information available about the general Zoo visitor. The majority of visitors are families, teenagers or adults. Families are by far the largest group (60%) within the general visitor category. Families can be further broken down into two groups: families with non-school-age children (children under five), and families with school-age children.

Families with non-school-age children - In general, families with children under five spend less time in any one place due to the short attention span of young children. Keep this in mind when interpreting with them. Quick observations of animals interacting or eating are interesting to these groups; even three-year-olds will enjoy watching the Aldabra tortoises being fed. Young children are experiential learners and will also welcome an opportunity to examine bright or otherwise attractive interpretive objects, and may find the opportunity to touch a snakeskin exciting.

Families with school-age children – Families with school-age children should be encouraged to work together and discuss possible answers amongst themselves. This group is an excellent audience for feeding demonstrations and might be interested in the details of animal care or behavior. In addition, this group enjoys using science tools and other manipulatives. Remember, children often like to be challenged, to brainstorm ideas, and to make discoveries. They rarely like to be quizzed.

Teenagers - In general, teenagers like to travel in peer groups. If you are not used to being around or working with teenagers, you may feel a bit uncomfortable interacting with them. The only way to get to know this group better is to just start talking to them. They like to be treated as adults, not kids, so ask higher-level questions that will force them to think. This age group is usually fascinated with bizarre and unusual facts, but try to lead the conversation back to points about conservation issues or natural history. Working with teenagers can be a very rewarding experience.

Adults – Adults unaccompanied by children might be tourists, people on business trips, or couples on an outing. Occasionally, you will run into Zoo aficionados as well. Adults show a wide variety of interests and tend to appreciate intelligent discussions and learning new things.

Groups – Aside from general visitors, interpreters will encounter organized groups, such as school groups, scout troops, docent groups, day-care classes, and senior-citizen groups. Visits by school groups are frequent on weekdays during the school year. School groups can also reserve time for a staff/volunteer assisted experience on Tuesday or Thursday mornings. These and other groups vary widely in age, purpose, and expectations. Like all visitors, group members will enjoy exploring and experiencing new things. As an interpreter, be sensitive to the group dynamic and aware that group members may often be preoccupied with interacting with one another as well as with you. If the group is largely composed of children, use the teachers or chaperons as your aides. Adults can encourage proper behavior and can repeat and emphasize important information to younger children.

Never overestimate the visitors' knowledge nor underestimate their intelligence!

Appropriate Techniques

The interpretive technique is the manner in which knowledge is shared. The Reptile Discovery Center uses a number of interpretive techniques including written and illustrated graphics, a video display about the komodo dragons, various hands-on interactives and live interpretation by volunteers. Conversation is the primary interpretive technique used by volunteers. It allows personalized interaction with visitors and enriches their experiences with the living animals on exhibit. Interpreters should use several interpretive approaches, such as asking questions of a group, encouraging close observation of the exhibits, sharing hands-on objects, and role-playing. Be sure to explore the variety.

A skillful interpreter demonstrates a personal interest and enthusiasm, delivers accurate information and communicates well. The personal interest and enthusiasm come from within, while accuracy is based on your knowledge of the resource. A description of the elements of effective communication is given below, followed by an analysis of conversations, suggestions for interpretive approaches, and tips for sharing interpretive objects.

Effective Personal Communication - To communicate well is to convey and/or receive information from others in a manner that creates and/or maintains a relationship that is acceptable to everyone involved. Effective communication not only conveys meaning or content, but also makes the most of structure and style to convey that information. A good communicator is able to tailor content, structure and style according to the audience's needs. A large repertoire of skills and characteristics, including flexibility, receptivity, perspective-taking, active listening and self-monitoring are key attributes of an effective communicator.

Personal communication is made up of three important elements: *words, voice and body signals*.

Words - Effective communication involves choosing appropriate words. Remember, words can make a person feel great or terrible and can make a huge difference in shaping the attitudes of your audience. Choose words carefully. Consider the difference between telling someone they are "wrong" versus saying "Actually, a lot of people think that but ¼" or the difference between describing an animal as "not very smart" versus "having behaviors that are set genetically rather than thought out." Also, be sure that listeners understand the vocabulary you use.

Voice - This is a vital tool in spoken personal communication. The character of voice involves tone, vocal variety, volume, rate and articulation. Is your tone raspy, soft, excited, critical? A lower-pitched voice is generally more effective in interpretation. Do you emphasize certain syllables as in a question, speak in a monotone or with "sing-song" effect? These are all part of vocal variety. In general, a voice should include a variety of swings in emotion with variations in pitch. The volume of your voice should be loud enough for visitors to hear you clearly without straining. The rate of speech depends on several things — the vocal attributes of the speaker, the mood that is being created, the composition of the audience and the nature of the occasion. Avoid speaking too slowly or too quickly. Articulation involves producing your sounds clearly without slurring or mumbling.

Body signals - These are nonverbal cues that are part of the communication repertoire and can be more important than what is spoken. They include:

Facial expressions — for example, lowered eyebrows convey anger, whereas a smile and raised eyebrows express enthusiasm;

Gestures — too many can be distracting but a few for emphasis are effective;

Posture — reveals what you think of yourself and of your listener. For example,

slouching conveys indifference to the world, crossed arms place a barrier between you and the visitors. Try for the happy medium of being poised and comfortably relaxed;

Eye contact — thought by some to be the most important body signal. A relaxed and steady gaze at the other person, looking away occasionally, helps to make conversation more personal, shows interest in and respect for the other person, and enhances the effect of your message.

Research indicates that only seven percent of our verbal message is communicated through words; 23 percent of our message is communicated through voice; and amazingly, body signals account for 70 percent of our message!

The Conversation - Much of the interpretation in the Reptile Discovery Center is conducted through conversation. This technique lets the visitor lead the way but allows the personal style of the interpreter to shine. The basic conversation is the foundation of human communication. It is an informal exchange of ideas between two or more people. They are usually so fluid, natural and frequent that people rarely stop to analyze the rules or structure of a conversation. Yet, there is structure; every conversation is composed of a beginning, a middle and an end. These elements are discussed below.

Conversation Starters - It is often up to the interpreter to initiate the conversation. The conversation can begin in a number of ways:

Simply greet visitors - A warm “Hi! Welcome to the Reptile Discovery Center” may open the way to conversations and interactions. A non-spoken nod or smile may have the same effect. Once visitors realize they can talk to you, they usually will.

Open with a question - This is perhaps the best conversation starter of all; for example, “Did you notice how long and skinny the nose of the gharial is?” Questions are excellent tools for initiating conversations because they ask the other person to respond. There are several levels of questions — from a simple yes or no question, to higher levels of integrating, open-ended, valuing and feeling questions. Beware of the yes or no question — it may not lead you into a conversation. Questions can also help you “read” your audience to determine at which level to aim your conversations.

Try a positive personal statement like, "Great hat!" This type of compliment makes the visitor feel special and recognized. It can often lead into a conversation because, like the greeting, an opportunity has been created. But be sure your positive personal statement is sincere.

Try a self-disclosing statement such as "I love watching the turtles swim. They're so fascinating." This is a nice way to equal out roles. A visitor may be intimidated by someone who is viewed as an "expert."

Listen for visitors' comments that might provide you an entree into a conversation. If you break in with an unassuming, unobtrusive manner, most visitors will welcome an answer to the questions asked among themselves. “I overheard you wondering if that snake is venomous ¼” Visitors who are having difficulty with an interactive display, appear confused, or perhaps are just having trouble locating something on the Zoo map will definitely welcome your input.

Share an interpretive object. Most people are interested in taking a closer look at an object like a skull or a skin. This experience can easily lead into a conversation. Use of interpretive objects is elaborated on in the Interpretive Objects section of this manual.

Continuing a Conversation - The middle of a conversation involves two activities: talking AND listening. These activities should be shared by the participants or the conversation may end quickly. For example, if one

person does all the talking, the other person may feel they are being lectured to; or if one person only listens and doesn't join in, the other participant may believe there is a lack of interest and the conversation will end. Try not to do all the talking and ask questions to keep your audience involved.

Remember to use the all-important pause in your conversation. It can signal the end of a thought, give an idea time to sink in, and also provide impact to a statement and give time for the listener to respond.

This is your time to share information. Try to incorporate various interpretive techniques to keep the information exciting for yourself and your audience. Don't reveal all the answers right away. Get your audience to examine objects, examine the animals or observe behaviors. Having visitors discover information for themselves will greatly enhance the impact of your interactions.

Interpretive Approaches - Learning is a complex process and people learn in many different ways. It is influenced by perception of the subject matter, memories of previous experiences, prior knowledge, the physical and social context and motivation. Moreover, people learn in many different ways and demonstrate various types of intelligence (e.g., verbal, logical, spatial, musical, movement-related, social). Thus, interpreters need to be creative and incorporate a variety of approaches. Your interactions with visitors can involve asking them to solve problems or express opinions, sharing your personal experiences, or incorporating multiple senses and body movement, as well as relying on a simple show-and-tell approach. Listed below are examples of different approaches that you can use in your interpretive repertoire.

Multi-sensory approach - Direct visitors to odors and sounds as well as things they can see. "Do you hear that grunting noise? That's the Aldabra tortoises mating." You can also compare the smell of the Reptile Discovery Center to other exhibits, like the Small Mammal or Great Ape House. What is different about them and why?

Anecdotal approach - Kept short, a positive, personal story can be an entertaining and effective way to convey information. "Toads are able to store water and release it as a defense mechanism if threatened by a predator. I discovered this ability firsthand when I picked up a toad near my house the other day."

Cooperative approach - Encourage your audience to work together. In front of the chameleon exhibit, for example, you might ask a family to find the animal or to identify the colors that the animal is displaying. Once they find the chameleon or describe the color pattern, you can discuss camouflage coloration or how the adaptation to change color is useful to the chameleon.

Problem-solving approach - Visitors may find information more meaningful if they discover it themselves. "You found a turtle in your back yard? Let's have a look at this guide book and maybe we can figure out what species it was." Or "Why do you suppose this is called the poison arrow frog?"

Kinesthetic (related to body movement) approach - Interpretation should involve movement other than with the feet and mouth (walking and talking). Have a child try to move like a snake on the carpet of the Resource Room. Or have them hop like a frog. Acting out animal behaviors is a great way to get kids involved in the information you are sharing.

Valuing approach - Explore the emotions and opinions of the audience. "Do you think snakes are appealing? Why or why not?"

Ending a Conversation. Endings provide closure to an interpretive encounter. The best endings encourage visitors to see another exhibit or part of the Reptile Discovery Center that builds on the topic or interest of the visitor. For example, you might direct them to the Eggs and Babies exhibit or suggest they visit the animals located around the back of the building. Another simple method to ending a conversation might be, "Bye, hope you enjoy the rest of your day at the Zoo." Let people know that you enjoyed conversing with them and leave them hoping for more interpretive encounters along the way.

Questions — The Foundation Of Interpretation

Tips on Using Objects - Volunteers in the Reptile Discovery Center Program have a large number of interpretive objects to draw on. Objects are powerful tools that are used to promote interpretation in many ways. As previously mentioned, they can be used to initiate a conversation. They heighten curiosity, especially when they are used creatively. Objects can also help you explain or illustrate a point. For example, it is much easier to explain amphibian metamorphosis when you have the time-line model of tadpole to frog to show. Finally, many visitors may find their Zoo experience more memorable if they have the opportunity to touch or closely examine an object not typically accessible to the public. Effective interpretive objects can be familiar things used in innovative ways. For example, a ruler can help a visitor relate to the extreme length of a chameleon's tongue. They can also be unusual things visitors seldom see, like the teeth of the Komodo dragon.

Here are some tips for object use:

Stimulate different senses with objects – Most of the objects used at RDC are intended for visitors to touch or scrutinize closely. Encourage them to examine them closely, smell them, and touch them. “Can you feel the serration on this crocodile tooth?”

Relate objects to living animals in the exhibit - Use objects to support your interpretation of the exhibit's living resources. This in turn will make objects more fascinating. Most objects can be taken from the Resource Room and shared in front of a related living animal's exhibit. Use these objects to point out features or behaviors of the animal. Be sure that visitors can see both object and animal. “Here is a skull of a Komodo dragon. You can see that the animal in front of you has very sharp and specialized teeth.”

Involve people with objects - Encourage visitors to examine and discuss the objects you share. Present a question that requires close scrutiny. The visitor who handles a turtle shell will have a better understanding of the texture and structure of both the interior and exterior of the shell. Remember to take a break from speaking to give your audience a chance to observe and handle objects. Let visitors make discoveries. For example, a comparison of amphibian and reptile eggs can be a straightforward exercise for a young child, or a lead-in to a discussion of reptilian adaptations for terrestrial living for an adult.

Use objects to elaborate on a theme. For example, a reptile-skin purse or belt can dramatically illustrate the threat of the skin trade. These are the concrete objects these species are hunted for. There are multiple directions this conversation can take—local economies, international cooperation, personal commitment, and the like. Objects should support a cohesive conversation, rather than act merely as eye-catchers.

Use props to support live animal use. If appropriate and feasible, use objects like photos or maps to support your interpretation of a live animal.

Living animals are in a sense the ultimate interpretive objects. They directly portray how beautiful or fascinating reptiles and amphibians can be. Many of the tips given above for object use apply to live animal demonstrations as well; invite visitors to closely examine the animal and tie your interpretation to relevant themes at many levels. **Animal encounters should stimulate, not startle** - When offering a live animal encounter, set up the stanchion between yourself and the visitors. Some visitors may not be comfortable being near a live reptile or amphibian outside of its enclosure, so invite the visitors to come look closely and ask questions - but remind them not to touch the animal. Do not persist in encouraging a visitor to come closer if that visitor has declined your offer.

Display animals effectively. Live animals can be so interesting that they may distract audiences from your interpretation. To minimize this, try to avoid jiggling or moving the animal excessively. If it is very restless,

return the animal to its enclosure then continue your interpretation. More guidelines for animal handling are provided in the section Activities Guide.

A Final Tip for Interpretation - If you are lucky enough to find a curious visitor, don't feel you have to tell everything you know. Let the visitors lead the way! Ask them questions, let them answer and give them the opportunity to ask for more!

Skills Checklist for Interpreters

Are you...

Interested in the visitor?

A good listener?

Smiling?

Tactful, avoiding sarcasm and criticism?

Able to communicate with people of diverse ages, economic status, race, ethnicity or with groups of varying makeup and size?

Can you...

Be flexible in order to capitalize on the visitors' curiosity?

Make the experience relevant to the visitors' everyday lives?

Use transitions to lead visitors from one discovery to another, from one exhibit feature to another?

Encourage the visitors to participate and ask questions?

Do you...

Know when silence is golden?

*Tell me, and I forget,
Show me, and I remember,
Involve me, and I understand.*

Attachment 2:

Trainer Presentation:

Gorp And Elements Of Interpretation

Gorp is another name for trail mix. The point is that each dried ingredient is good, but eaten all together, the mix of tastes and textures makes a really great snack. In this activity for new interpreters, the trainer takes 3 ingredients (M&Ms, raisins, peanuts), uses each to explain an element of interpretation, and in the end makes an “Interpretive Opportunity” – and snack for the break! This activity is intended to be lighthearted and involve some humor, but make important points about interpretation.



Knowledge of the Resource (M&Ms.) Trainer explains that it’s important for an interpreter to have knowledge about the natural history, individual history, Zoo management practices and conservation issues associated with the species in the exhibit.

Examples:

A red M&M might be a flamingo.

A blue might be how the flamingo is cared for at the Zoo.

A brown might be the Bird Keeper, and the kind of education he/she has. Visitors are interested.

The yellow might be the way the flamingo eats^{1/4}or it might be the directions to the nearest restroom: what information is your audience interested in?

The bag of M&Ms might have a lot of reds: maybe you are a volunteer that knows a LOT about the birds on exhibit. Maybe not many reds: you might not be the most knowledgeable, but you know enough to provide visitors with a good encounter.

There might be a cracked M&M: maybe you’ve forgotten some important information or remembered it wrong. Interpreters are human. But it’s important to have quality control.

Knowledge of the Audience (raisins)

Trainer explains that one of the key elements of successful interpretation is assessing and adapting to the audience. Visitors vary greatly in age, geographic origin, knowledge level, perceptions and expectations. They also vary in their desire for interactions with human interpreters.



Examples:

This raisin is from California^{1/4}on Spring Break. This raisin might be a tourist from New York. Most raisins are from our local area.

This raisin is a little kid who LOVES elephants; this raisin may be a little kid who needs a nap.

This raisin might be a microbiologist, this one a lawyer, this one a retired schoolteacher.

A raisin might be shy, this one might be gregarious.

You need to get to know your raisins as you encounter them. (Eat a few!)

We do know that most raisins come in families^{1/4} (give what is known about your facility’s visitors).



Appropriate Techniques (peanuts)

Trainer explains that technique is the manner in which knowledge is shared. Conversation is the primary interpretive technique used by volunteers. Interpreters should use several interpretive approaches in their conversations, such as asking questions of a group, encouraging close observation of the exhibits, sharing hands-on objects, and role-playing. .

Examples:

Each peanut is desirable.

Here's one that represents a smile and "hello." Here's one that says "Good question, I'm glad you asked!"

This handful is a group of students you've invited into the Touch Tank.

This peanut is a great anecdote about the animals!¼kind of salty, but healthy!

Speaking clearly, audibly and concisely!¼nutty!

Good peanuts taste of personal interest and enthusiasm.

A good listener is a good peanut.

These nuts are the interpretive objects you can bring out for people to see up close.

This nut is a 20 minute conversation you've had with a family about wild animals as pets.

This one knows that sometimes Silence is Golden: the exhibit can do the talking!

When the three elements have been discussed, the trainer invites the trainees to help mix these elements in a large bowl. The result:

Interpretive Opportunity!

Enjoy!

Attachment 3:

Trainer Presentation:

Script For "Good Jen, Bad Jen" Slide Show

A series of talking points using 27 images

Talking Point: Importance of Visibility

Image 1: Group of visitors and Jen are all in plain clothes.

Ask the question "who's the volunteer?"

Talking Point: Visibility/Uniform

Image 2: Same group but Jen is in uniform (shirt and name-tag).

Ask the same question as in Slide 1, and then expand on fact that uniform makes Jen recognizable as a Zoo Volunteer. This puts visitors at ease. Also, gives Jen credibility.

Talking Point: First Impressions – Grooming

Image 3: Uniform untucked, frumpy look, no name badge.

Explain that it's all visual! State must look presentable, shirt in, hair brushed, etc. Ask question "what's missing?"

Image 4: Same shot but Jen is holding name badge.

Explain why important to wear name badge.

Image 5: Jen is fully presentable, looking good.

Explain this is how Jen wants to present herself.

Talking Point: More First Impressions – Body language

Image 6: Jen's arms are crossed and expression is unfriendly.

Explain that crossed arms is usually negative body language. Note facial expression. Ask question, "Would you approach this volunteer?" Humans are a very visual species. What we see often means more than what we hear. Jen's look may have more impact than Jen's words: "Welcome to the Ape House."

Image 7: Jen looking bored.

Explain that looking bored is also negative body language. May be approachable, but not enthusiastic.

Image 8: Another negative facial expression.

Watch facial expressions too ... can turn off visitors.

Image 9: Jen demonstrating positive body language.

Point out the smile ... it's a good introduction, makes Jen friendly, also affects voice in positive way. Always smile and be genuine about it. Alertness, looking around for visitors to talk to.

[A note about words and voice: Not to say that verbal is not important. Use appropriate words and appropriate tone. Words must be understandable or at least, defined. Appropriate for situation (e.g., sexual terms can be seriously or lightly used.) Serious for "threatened with extinction;" light for "making friends." Tone: Again, part of Jen's message...excited, secret, worried, warning? Avoid the sing-song.]

Talking Point: More on Body Language

Image 10: Jen with finger to lips ... indicating shhhh.

Explain how body language can be used to accentuate what's being said. Visual cues are a good way to get visitors to follow Jen's lead on what to listen for, look for, smell, etc.

Example: point up and everyone looks! Body movements also a good way to explain anatomy or behavior.

Example: Ape Etiquette

Talking Point: The Conversation

Image 11: Jen working with a family.

Discuss how to interpret information and objects to whole family. Some people learn best in a group. Kids provide a powerful entrée because they are easily engaged, and often parents want them to learn. (Safety Note: kids up on railing not good.)

Talking Point. Remember the Animals and Exhibit!

Image 12: Family excitedly pointing to exhibit.

Explain how to connect information to animals. The animals are the stars (often they will take away the spotlight!). Always refer information to what's being seen. Closer observation is key to understanding.

Talking Point: Object use.

Image 13: Jen holding skull.

Explain that objects are a great way to start a conversation. Unique opportunity. Helps to make a point.

Explain to visitors what they can do with object .. can touch? hold?

Image 14: Child touching skull w/ one finger. Visitors will listen to the rules if Jen explain them.

Image 15: Kids poking and examining object.

In this case, docents hold, but kids touch and examine at will.

Image 16: Jen holding up skull next to a dad's head and asking him to show his heeth.

Explain how to use objects to illustrate at point. Again, tie to animal. Can also tie to other things...such as the visitors. Might need to draw on familiar concepts to better explain the exotic. Compare dentition of gorilla skull to dad's skull. Again, note how whole family drawn in. Learning in groups.

[Note on Conversation Starters: 1. Smile 2. Make an observation. 3. Sharing Objects

Others include... Ask a question – but don't quiz! Make a Positive Personal Statement – if appropriate, can be effective. Stealth approach– Listen in, then jump in. Be polite, but be a little obtrusive! Simple Greeting – "Hello!"

Talking Point: Safety and Security

Image 17: Jen conversing with a family.

Same concept ... working with family. Ask question, "Where's the gorilla skull?"

Image 18: Dad sneaks off with gorilla skull. (humorous portrayal)

State that this doesn't happen maliciously but if Jen's not careful visitors will accidentally walk off w/ objects. Explain importance of keeping eye on objects.

[A note on Policing the Public. Kids on the railing. Banging on the glass. Item dropped in the yard. Briefly explain that Jen can police but not primary duty and to use judgment on what's dangerous and what's not.]

Talking Point: Be appropriate to content

Image 19: Jen goofing w/ skull.

Explain that it's generally not good to goof or joke w/ objects or info. If Jen gives the impression that Jen doesn't respect the property, animals, or exhibit, then visitors will get the same impression and not care as much for the animals or the Zoo.

Of course, sometimes humor or a joke is needed (e.g., cover awkwardness, or anecdote).

Talking Point: Working the Crowd

Image 20: Jen working w/ two visitors.

Tell audience to watch the woman in pink.

Image 21: Jen still interpreting w/ two visitors – her back to other visitors.

Point out that there is good interaction ... lots of info exchanged etc. Assume that there's back and forth.

Questions. Pauses. Watch woman in pink shirt.

Image 22: Jen waving goodbye to the two visitors.

Ask question, "Did the woman in pink get to ask any questions? Receive the full benefit of volunteer?" Answer is no. Explain that nothing wrong with the interpretation but on busy days, which are most days, positioning is key. Talking to visitors w/ back to rest of visitors means Jen only hit a select few. Nothing wrong with this but can reach more if back is to exhibit and facing visitors. Reiterate importance of eye contact and smile.

[A Note on Saying goodbye. It's socially polite. Dismisses audience. Links to another opportunity.]

Talking Point: Be opportunistic.

Image 23: Jen is facing exhibit, visitors with back to exhibit, and gorilla going by in the background.

Image 24: Same thing as above ... but positioned reversed.

Ask question, "what should the correct positioning be?" Explain that its important to be flexible, moving positions and changing subjects if something is happening in the exhibit. You can switch subjects if something happens. Can go back to stream of talk. But it's a conversation not a lecture!

Talking Point: Many types of audience

Image 25: Jen in correct position, with back to exhibit and talking to guy in white shirt.

Image 26: Same shot but family approaches and Jen can now greet them through eye contact and smile while talking to guy in white shirt.

[Notes on being flexible for different styles of learning, kinesthetic, touching, other senses, problem-solving, emotion/opinion]

Talking Point: Interpreting is fun!

Image 27: Jen talking to an engaged crowd.

Explain that if interpreting correctly, Jen can reach many people all at the same time.

Attachment 4:

Trainee Exercise:

Draw An Interpreter Activity

First day of training

Draw a picture of a Zoo Volunteer Interpreter - could be a representation of a volunteer you've seen on the zoo grounds or a representation of how you imagine yourself as a volunteer. (4 minutes)

State name, show picture, and describe one aspect of the drawing that you think is an important part of being a volunteer.

Visibility (shirt, name tag)

Facial expression

Eye contact

Involving a group

Holding an artifact

Pointing out animal behavior

Other?

Conclude: You've already identified some of the key features of being an effective volunteer interpreter. Today we'll be covering these ideas and more in more detail.

On last day of training:

Hand out volunteer drawings and have them add one or two items showing how they NOW envision themselves volunteering.

Attachment 6:

Trainee Exercise:

Word Choices

Hand out cards that contain poorly worded phrases. In pairs, rephrase the statement to be less harsh or more accurate.

Card says: When you overhear visitors observing that the pandas are "fighting," you say "No, you're wrong!"

Possible alternative is: "A lot of people think that, but actually what is probably happening is..."

Example Cards:

That's the stupidest question I've been asked all day!

If I hear that question one more time, I'm going to spit.

Red pandas are fairly stupid compared to giant pandas. (use more instinct instead of cognitive thought)

Eew! Don't those snakes look creepy sliding around each other like that?

The interesting thing about reptiles is that they are poikilothermic and ectothermic and have internal fertilization with no larval stage.

Attachment 7

Trainee Exercise:

Interpret A Familiar Object

Activity:

Bring an object that you are familiar with (Knowledge of the Resource!) to the next training session. We will break into small groups where you will share and talk about the object. Examples of objects may be; an interesting knick-knack, an object that's related to an exciting trip, hobby, or work, or that lucky bowling ball with your highest score engraved on it. Basically, any object that you have a connection with is good.

Purpose:

As an interpreter, you will be conversing with many visitors and sharing all sorts of great information. One way to start and focus a conversation is through the use of objects. This activity is a practice session that incorporates the elements of both conversation and object use. And if your object can handle it, make sure to pass it around so that all can get a "hands-on" feel of what you're talking about. Remember, this is not Show and Tell this is interpretation so make this exercise as interactive as possible.

Hints:

Expect to interpret for a few minutes. Make an effort to integrate various interpretive approaches such as introducing yourself, asking questions to involve your audience, and using the object to create an interest and connection to your talk. But most of all, be relaxed and have fun!

Helpful manual section to review – "Elements of Interpretation," paying close attention to the portion on "Appropriate Techniques."

Attachment 8

Trainee Exercise:

Exhibit Interpretation

Name: _____

Activity:

For the next training session, prepare to interpret the topic listed below. We will break into small groups for this exercise. Your audience will be other members of the class and staff who will play the role of general Zoo visitors. You will be positioned in view of the animal/exhibit and can use relevant objects and artifacts. Expect to interpret for about five minutes.

Purpose:

Use your manual and training notes to prepare for the interpretive activity. You are expected to be a knowledgeable interpreter at the exhibit (but you don't have to know everything), able to share related information with visitors and carry on short two to three minute interactions. Remember, you don't have to share everything you know with visitors. In other words, be careful not to dump information on your audience.

Hint:

Make an effort to integrate various interpretive approaches such as introduction, asking questions of your audience and involving them, using objects to create interest and a connection to the topic, letting the topic "speak," using anecdotes, etc., while developing your personal interpretive style.

Assignment: _____