



Appendix
B

**Interpretation:
Sharing your venue's story**

Contents

1. What is interpretation?	35
Why should we think about using interpretation?	37
Developing an Interpretation Plan	38
2. Using interpretation to create the visitor experience	39
Involving people to create great interpretation	40
Methods of interpretation	41
Top Tips	49
Case study: Roald Dahl Museum	50
Stories and themes	55
Example mini-plan for theme interpretation	56
3. Interpretation for schools	57
Top Tips for school sessions	59
Useful links	60

1. What is interpretation?

What makes the difference between a pleasant day out and a rich, stimulating experience that stays with your visitors long after they've driven away?

That difference is interpretation.

Interpretation is the magic wand that heritage organisations use to turn an experience, story or place into something their visitors can understand, appreciate and get excited about.

Here are simple examples of how interpretation can work its magic, both outdoors and indoors:

EXAMPLE A – OUTDOOR INTERPRETATION

Scenario 1

When planning a visit to a historic landscape, you read in the advertising material that it was designed by Capability Brown. When you get to the site the member of staff on the welcome desk tells you that part of the landscape is by Capability Brown and part of it was designed by someone else but doesn't explain how you can tell the difference. You walk around the landscape but do not have any way to tell which areas are by Brown and which are not. You wonder why the site advertises the Brown connection, but does not help you identify which areas are by Brown, what he actually did there and what is so special about his work. You lose interest and go into the house where the historical information is better presented.

Scenario 2

When planning a visit to a historic landscape you read in the advertising material that it was designed by Capability Brown. The website has a brief but well-illustrated summary of what Capability Brown did at the site, and a link to a YouTube film about Brown. When you get to the site, the member of staff on the welcome desk tells you that part of the landscape is by Capability Brown. There is a short exhibition panel at the entrance which explains who Capability Brown was, and what he actually did at the site.

This is illustrated with photographs, so that you know what to look out for when exploring the grounds. The staff member says that they are happy to answer any questions and suggests that you also talk to colleagues in the grounds, who will be able to tell you more about specific areas in the site. They offer you a leaflet

with some illustrations of the Brownian elements of the landscapes and tell you that there is a 5-minute film and a family learning activity pack available if you would like to explore further with young children. As you walk around the landscape, you discover that the lake was dug on Capability Brown's instructions, and whilst it looks beautiful it also helps drain the land, improving the quality of the soil which in turn makes it more efficient for farming. You discover that the gentle hill you stroll up was also built by hand and that the trees framing the viewpoints were deliberately planted there. You return home with the knowledge that the landscape which looked so natural was actually man made, using just man and horse power.

EXAMPLE B – INDOOR INTERPRETATION

Scenario 1

During a visit to a heritage venue you see a display case. The only thing in the case is a lump of rusty iron about the size of your thumb. You can't make out any details. It's just a lump of rusty iron. You wonder why it's displayed. You lose interest and walk away.

Scenario 2

During a visit to a heritage venue you see a display case. In the case is a lump of rusty iron about the size of your thumb. You can't make out any details on the lump of iron. There is however a panel next to it with explanatory text and pictures:

"This is an iron buckle from the sword belt of a Roman soldier [there is a picture of what it looked like on the belt when it was new]. It was found in the remains of a Roman fort that stood on this spot 2000 years ago [there is an illustration of what the fort may have looked like, set in the landscape], before the current house and landscaped grounds on this site existed. The soldiers based here helped to control the rebellious local British tribes. When they retired, many soldiers were given local land and married local women, a clever way to help keep the peace. The soldier who lost this buckle might still have descendants living in this area."

That rusty lump has transformed in your mind into something fascinating and valuable. It looks totally different. Now as you look at it, you are imagining the soldier who wore it and what it was like for him as he tried to obey orders to control unruly British tribesmen. When you walk away you feel a little richer somehow and you want to share the story with your family and friends.

Interpretation is not just about facts and figures, it is the way in which the interest, value, significance and meaning of heritage is communicated to your visitors.

Interpretation communicates the stories and ideas behind the heritage of your site and provokes the audience to think for themselves, to come to their own understanding about what it means to them. To do that, interpretation at your site must:

- Catch your visitors' attention
- Have a clear theme or idea to communicate
- Provide a connection between the heritage of your site and people's own experiences
- Be pleasurable, interesting and meaningful
- Be well organised and easy to use and understand
- Meet the needs of a variety of audiences (including age, background, gender)

Interpretation is one tool in a toolbox of communication work that includes marketing, visitor information and orientation.

These other communication tools often use the same media as interpretation, such as panels and leaflets, but there are crucial differences between them:

- Marketing materials aim to sell a heritage product
- Visitor information tells people what there is to do and see
- Orientation helps people find their way around

Why should we think about using interpretation?

There are several very good reasons why you should interpret the heritage of your site:

- It enhances your visitors' enjoyment and the meaning of their visit, better connecting them with the natural and cultural qualities of your site
- It can support formal education
- Staff and volunteers will learn more about the heritage assets in their care
- It promotes a conservation ethos and encourages visitors to support your work and that of other conservation bodies
- It encourages visitors to behave in a more responsible way, for example by not dropping litter or not climbing on features in the grounds
- It provides the satisfying interpretive experience that visitors expect

- It can generate an income through related merchandising, marketing and events
- It encourages return visits and word-of-mouth promotion
- Your organisation will be actively supporting the UK's competitiveness in the international heritage tourism market

Developing an Interpretation Plan

The starting point for any interpretation project is to write an interpretation plan – a document that sets out in a clear and logical manner what you want to achieve and how you intend to do it.

An interpretation plan can be a long or short document depending on your needs and circumstances. Typically, it will include the following:

- Your aims – what you want your interpretation to achieve.
- Your audience – who is your target audience(s) and from consultation do you know what will meet their needs?
- Your themes and topics – the messages and subjects you wish to communicate.
- Your objectives – what you specifically want people to experience, learn, feel and do as a result of the interpretation.
- What you will implement – the media you propose to use, usually with a timetable and costs for their implementation. This part of a plan might also include concept designs to show how the interpretation will appear.
- A review of any management issues that will affect your interpretation – such as conservation policies, staffing levels and financial considerations.
- How you will evaluate the interpretation – what you will do to find out whether the interpretation is working.

Consider how other heritage organisations are sharing their stories with their visitors. Look at their websites and visit them in person (be the visitor) to stimulate ideas for your site. Talk to their interpretation and learning staff – don't be afraid to ask for advice, they were all beginners once!

2. Using interpretation to create the visitor experience

The steps outlined below use interpretation to create a great visitor experience that achieves the Aims and Objectives of an Audience Development Strategy (see **Appendix C – Audience Development**).

Good vs. Bad

EFFECTIVE INTERPRETATION SHOULD...

- Be based on a clear theme
- Be clear and simple
- Provide what visitors need to know to make their visit stimulating, enjoyable and memorable
- Be an involving and interactive experience
- Have strong human interest, whatever the subject
- Build on the audience's pre-existing knowledge and own experience
- Meet the particular needs and expectations of different audiences
- Use any method that will make the subject relevant and will engage people emotionally and physically

POOR INTERPRETATION...

- Forgets to use 'human' stories to engage audiences on personal, emotional levels
- Does not provide audiences with enough information to enable them to fully understand, value and enjoy what they're seeing or experiencing
- Uses text when the right picture would get the message across at least, if not more, effectively
- Isn't developed within a structure of clear themes throughout the site, instead it confuses the audience with disconnected information and loses their interest
- Uses architectural details or locations as its starting point, rather than starting with a theme or story and then selecting the things that will bring that story to life
- Uses text on labels and panels that is too long and detailed – known as "a book on the wall" method – rather than providing concise, memorable information that visitors can read and understand within a few seconds

- Spends money on 'high-tech' before properly researching whether this is the best way to tell the story (the best way might be as simple as providing visitors with paper and colouring pens)
- Does not use the style of language and vocabulary the target audience can relate to, which can leave them feeling that 'this is not for me'
- Does not explain facts, concepts, attitudes and events that may fall outside the audience's personal experience or knowledge
- Distracts the audience from actually engaging with the artefact, space or experience that the labels/panels relate to (e.g. too many text panels and labels or interactive technology)
- Fails to achieve the Aims and Objectives laid out in the organisation's Audience Development Strategy (see Audience Development in the Manual's Appendix)

Involving people to create great interpretation

The thinking behind interpretation across your site needs to be done by more than one person, or from one point of view. Involving a multidisciplinary team – interpreters, subject experts, conservators, educators, and operations, marketing and events staff, as well as the local community when appropriate – will produce a better result. It also means that all forms of information, whether historical facts, directions, warnings or instructions, will be considered holistically. By combining related information you can reduce signage to a minimum.

People involved in local tourism can act as ambassadors, passing on information on your behalf. These people, especially bed-and-breakfast owners and taxi drivers, often talk with great enthusiasm about the history of nearby attractions. Their recommendations and interaction with potential visitors encourage a shared sense of what makes your attraction special. They have a powerful influence over what visitors choose to do in an area and how they feel about it. It makes sense to harness this by keeping your 'local ambassadors' up to speed with your core messages and events programmes.

Last, but not least, great interpretation needs the input of your existing and potential audience. You can't create great exhibitions, trails, resources and activities without understanding what they actually want, need and expect from you. For guidance on how to consult your audiences, please read **Appendix C: Audience Development and Activity Ideas**.

Methods of interpretation

Interpretation isn't just about putting the right text in the right place. Good interpretation uses every method available to tell a story, explain a fact or concept, engage, inspire and entertain. Some interpretation will be developed for the long term, some will be temporary or even a 'one off' at a special event or for an anniversary. It's all about being as creative and adventurous as possible (while keeping to budget).

Common interpretation methods include:

- Exhibitions/displays
- Guidebooks
- Maps and leaflets
- Labels for plants trees and equipment in the landscape
- Films
- Events and activities (including guided tours)
- Costumed theatrical interpreters
- Guided tours

The list of methods outlined in this document is far from being comprehensive – new, creative ways to share stories with audiences are being thought up all the time and don't always involve technology – but it gives an overview of some of some tried and tested methods.

OUTDOOR INTERPRETATION

The UK might not be known for its reliable weather, but one of the nation's favourite pastimes is getting outdoors and enjoying nature first hand.

Outdoor interpretation is all about shedding light on, not overshadows, a site. Plaques that convey compelling information, trails backed up by a website to keep them dynamic, works of art that enhance the landscape, or a temporary intervention are the order of the day.

Options for outdoor interpretation include:

- Display panels
- Plaques
- Trail leaflets and maps
- Guided tours
- Craft demonstrations

- Audio- or multimedia guides
- Sound posts
- Costumed interpreters
- Artistic interventions (e.g. sculptures, audio installations)
- Events – large or small (e.g. drama, dance and music, flower shows, festivals and fairs, *son et lumiere* displays)

Within an extended site like a Capability Brown landscape, you may need a broad overall strategy, with individual plans for interpretation for different locations. This can be developed in stages depending on how much time and capacity your organisation has available.

The following principles apply to all outdoor sites:

- Think about your visitors and their reasons for being there
- Respect the setting's natural environment, history and meaning
- Remember that you can only convey a tightly focused set of ideas
- Create a feeling of anticipation on arrival. If there is no physical 'gateway' people enter the landscape through, find other ways of giving a sense of having arrived somewhere special
- Make use of the fact that interpretation can influence behaviour, especially in open spaces where people feel less constrained by rules
- Don't try to interpret everything – leave some places for people to discover on their own

Technology offers some exciting opportunities for outdoor interpretation. Podcasts can be downloaded onto mobile phones or tablets or onto CD, or information can be downloaded onto mobile phones or captured through GPS. Options for triggering phones and tablets using wireless technology are also being explored by heritage venues. However, the audience profile for many outdoor sites may not include a high proportion of technology-savvy visitors. Do some visitor research before developing anything technology based and bear in mind that it can get out of date quickly. Websites are currently thought to need an update every 18 months to keep up with technological advances. Test to see what phones and suppliers have the best coverage in your area and whether this seems a worthwhile exercise for you.

Person to person is still one of the most effective ways of conveying information in outdoor environments. Encounters with park rangers, the site's owners, tour guides or costumed interpreters are often remembered far more vividly than the content read on a display panel. Although this can be an expensive option, the

cost is made manageable by training a team of volunteers to interpret the landscape for visitors through tours and open-air craft sessions, like food foraging, charcoal-making and green woodworking.

Outdoor trails can attract new audiences, particularly adults and families, by enabling visitors to get outside and enjoy the landscape, wildlife and scenery as well as the collections inside. Trails can be provided via audio or multimedia guide or simply be provided in printed format. It's important that the trail supports interpretation inside any buildings open to visitors on the site, which helps to interpret the landscape by linking it to stories and objects indoors.

Artistic interventions within landscaping can provide visitors with surprising and memorable new insights and perspectives on the themes of the site. For example, local artists and craftspeople could be invited or commissioned to produce artworks to be placed along a trail route, perhaps resulting from work with local communities and schools. Changing the art works on display on a regular (advertised) basis can encourage repeat visits and offer an enriched experience to audiences.

A potential stumbling block encountered when trying to interpret landscape is that many visitors, particularly if they are unused to large outdoor spaces, don't take time to stop and really experience the views, sounds, smells and features of a Brown landscape. Try introducing something eye catching, yet appropriate, to the setting that encourages people to stop and take notice. In Holden Park in North Yorkshire, visitors are simply encouraged to lie back on benches to admire the tree canopy, making a connection with nature in a subtle way.

Outdoor sites are ideally placed to raise awareness of green issues with their interpretation. At some National Trust locations, display panels carry various messages ranging from the role trees play in ameliorating our carbon footprint to recommending the use of sustainable timber. Sharing 'green' themes with visitors might also help reduce vandalism – requests not to damage trees, light fires or drop litter are taken more seriously when the global consequences of doing so are explained.

Nature activities such as bird watching and mini-beast hunts are increasingly common at heritage venues as part of their advertised activity programme for families, adults and schools.

To encourage more wildlife to your site and to involve visitors in surveying and monitoring biodiversity, consider placing bird feeders and nest boxes, a log pile, mini-beast 'hotel' and nectar-rich planting into appropriate areas of your landscape.

Many venues around the country run 'BioBlitz' days – a 24-hour event in which teams of volunteer scientists, families, students, teachers, and other community members' work together to find and identify as many species of plants, animals, microbes, fungi, and other organisms as possible. To take part in the UK's BioBlitz programme, please see Useful links below.

Outdoor attractions often present problems of physical access for visitors with disabilities. It's important to take professional advice to make sure that interpretation is available to all visitors. In the UK, organisations such as the Centre for Accessible Environments, and the Fieldfare Trust can help venues to identify potential issues that might interfere with disabled visitors' access to interpretation during their visit and recommend specialist advisors (see **Useful links** below).

EXHIBITIONS AND DISPLAYS

If your site has both an interior exhibition space and outdoor areas forming part of the same story, you'll need joined-up interpretation. This means that visitors can follow broadly the same themes outdoors as they do indoors, even if different interpretation methods are used. It could be as simple as providing a view of the outdoor space in question from the indoor display interpreting.

Permanent exhibitions can be used to help visitors to make sense of the site, its history and use, its stories and the people connected with them. For guidance on creating exhibitions see **Useful links** below.

There are plenty of exhibition production companies to design and create the physical structures and any audio-visual elements for you (for a search link for suppliers to the heritage sector see **Useful Links** below). If you're on a shoestring budget, photographic and text panels can be produced by high street printers such as Prontaprint. There are people you can commission to write the panel and texts for you, or you can write it in-house (for text-writing guidance see **Useful links** below).

Temporary exhibitions can raise a venue's profile if marketed properly, and they drive new and repeat visits. They can also generate extra income. However, temporary exhibitions have to be planned with strategic precision. If not, they can prove to be extremely draining and costly enterprises.

It's also worth considering creating a small portable 'travelling' exhibition. This involves a set of vinyl panels on frames that be popped up and collapsed down, and transported easily in a wheeled container. A pop-up display of this type can be set up in community spaces, such as libraries and shopping centres, where

potential visitors' curiosity can be stimulated to find out about your venue, particularly if a pair of engaging volunteers are there to chat and hand out leaflets. There are plenty of production companies online who will design everything for you, so be sure to shop around.

GUIDED TOURS

Tours can be provided on a one-off, occasional or regular basis for very little or no cost. Nothing beats face-to-face, live engagement with visitors.

If you decide to offer a regular tour programme, follow the example of other heritage sites and recruit a team of volunteer tour guides (for advice on volunteers, please see **Appendix A – Volunteers: Recruiting & Managing**).

If you are the site's owner, you might give a talk about your family home, its history and your family's role in the local community. You could take them to see your favourite views or features in your grounds and tell them the story of how Capability Brown transformed it. This type of tour only needs a little thought and preparation.

PRINTED LEAFLETS

Leaflets can be a useful interpretation device at a site, particularly if you don't have interpretation boards or only open occasionally.

Most on site leaflets include a map highlighting the things you want visitors to see, how to reach them and some short and engaging information and images of these points. It is essential to show the site's facilities, especially toilets and parking. Too much text is not helpful as people will be reading the leaflet out of doors, possibly in interesting weather conditions and often standing up.

Content needs to be as simple and clear as possible. Fonts should be sans serif and be at least 12 point. Try not to impose text over busy photographs as this makes it difficult to read. Background colours of pastel tones help with reading difficulties, pale green is simplest. Always ensure that you include the copyright © of the photograph you use next to the image and that you have the permission of the copyright holder to use it. Try to design the leaflet so that the map can be read easily whilst held in one hand and that it does not fold on a crucial piece of information.

Maps can be expensive to commission and produce and are often covered by copyright rules. If you have access to an aerial photograph or drone footage you can use this as a base image on which to overlay information or graphic design. Many sites use an artistic interpretation as it can help with scale and you can

show exactly what you want to. It is recommended to include walking times between points rather than mileage or meterage as it is much easier to understand and helps people plan their visit.

When developing leaflets think about what you will do with them once you have them. How long will the leaflets be current? Do you need to include the year or season? How many do you need to print? Where will you store them safely? How many can you afford to print and distribute to visitors? How and where will you distribute them on site?

Leaflets tend to be popular with older generations and tourists who like to have a souvenir or keep sake from their visit or prefer physical access to information. In the growing age of technology many people own smart phones and prefer to access information at the click of a button.

In deciding whether to devote resources and money to creating physical leaflets it may be worth considering whether leaflets could be provided as downloadable documents available on your website for visitors to access in advance and during their visit. If your site does not have Wi-Fi or the signal is not strong then consider encouraging visitors to download or print your leaflets in advance of their visit.

If you are printing leaflets, put a system in place to encourage people to return them at the exit or place in recycling bins to avoid littering.

TRAILS

An effective trail often involves a sense of mystery and revelation, taking people on a journey to help them build a picture of an exhibition or site's significance. Often it will also incorporate elements of playfulness, competition or a challenge. Bringing in our human instinct to play is really powerful. A trail could have a quiz format, but it's not about seeing whether your visitors have been paying attention. It does not have to be fancy, but it must be fun and rewarding.

Trails tend to require small amounts of text telling a story that's compelling, but keep it simple. A trail is a gateway to helping visitors explore further. It's not there to give them everything.

Once you have the content you can produce it in different ways (e.g. a sheet or booklet, 'antique' scrolls or on a hand-held device as part of an audio or multimedia guide). The trail can be given to visitors in a form they can carry around or as fixed points dotted around the site that they have to hunt for.

Testing your trail out is absolutely vital – you'll need to find out if there are issues in terms of moving visitors physically and intellectually through a story and around

an area. Common mistakes are having too many stops and providing unclear directions.

You don't want lots of lost visitors. Invite a local group of non-experts to test a trail for you – reward them with tea and cakes and send a Christmas card later in the year. This will help spread word of mouth recommendations.

Many organisations create trails in-house, but with so many different things to think about it is also common to use external support to help devise the content, format or design of a trail.

AUDIO-VISUAL TECHNOLOGY

Images and sound can now be digitised very easily, making audio-visual displays a mainstream form of interpretation in public venues. Most households have at least one television these days, and probably a home computer, laptop or tablet, digital cameras and smart phones. Visitors of all ages are becoming tech-savvy in their everyday lives and now expect audio-visuals as part of their day out.

Audio-visual displays and interactives can help visitors to engage with stories and objects and bring a gallery or space alive, but they're complicated mediums to use, particularly if you are interpreting the outdoor landscape. They can involve features such as a presenter, voice-over, actors, music, graphics, archive film and sound footage and photographs, or animation.

There's no point in producing audio-visual displays for their own sake. The effective use of audio-visual interpretation depends on an understanding of what it offers in comparison with other forms of interpretation, such as a graphic panel, model or interaction with a live person such as a volunteer.

Some advantages of audio-visuals:

- A concise and direct form of communication
- It has aural impact (stimulating for most visitors, including children and those with visual impairments)
- Meets visitors' expectations of exciting forms of presentation
- Creates atmosphere and can be theatrical, emotive or aesthetic
- Provides access to material which could not otherwise be put on display; e.g. photographs, documents, sound recordings and film
- Covers aspects of themes/stories not adequately represented by objects
- Places objects in their working, natural or historical context; e.g. a film demonstrating the techniques Capability Brown used to move and plant some of the trees on the estate

Disadvantages of audio-visuals:

- Sound can bleed into nearby areas, as well as conflict with other soundtracks
- It needs specialist technical knowledge to produce the content and select the equipment
- It needs continual checking and maintenance to ensure good working order and to minimise breakdowns
- Tend to be limited to indoor areas rather than within the landscape.

AUDIO-VISUAL INTERPRETATION GENERALLY FALLS INTO THREE CATEGORIES

i. Introductory film and/or soundtrack

This puts the venue or exhibition in context for the visitors (e.g. its history, meaning, purpose). It can be an effective way of helping visitors orient themselves and engage with the overall subject of the site as a whole, or a particular space or exhibition. A film might be shown inside a building, introducing visitors to the landscape outside so that when they go out they already have a degree of understanding about what they'll experience.

ii. Integrated into displays or locations

For example, museums often show short programmes on small screens within a gallery, or longer programmes on large screens (often in a mini-cinema area with seating). Alternatively, fixed audio-visual interpretation dotted around a site (both indoors and outdoors) might take the form of individual screens or listening posts where they tell the story of that specific location or object.

iii. Portable devices

Visitors can carry small, independent devices around specific areas of a site, which help them to engage directly with stories, objects and locations at their own pace and in their own way (they can choose the content they are interested in).

Top Tips

- Don't use audio-visual interpretation just for the sake of it
- Look at the audio-visual exhibits at other venues and talk to the staff involved in their planning and maintenance
- Stick to tried and tested technology, rather than use experimental software and equipment
- Ask programme producers and equipment suppliers for advice at an early stage
- Be realistic about what you can achieve on your budget
- Think about the overspill of broadcast sound from one or more exhibits in the same space
- Don't pack too much into a single programme
- Don't be afraid to question programme producers about content, costs and progress
- Don't forget that audio-visual equipment will eventually fail
- Don't install audio-visual displays without a budget for ongoing repair and maintenance
- If you need to raise money or get a grant to do this work, bear in mind the time this might take and how the technology might already have evolved in 6-12 months.

For audio-visual displays accessible to disabled visitors consider:

- Subtitles or inset sign-language interpretation on films
- Large-print transcripts of spoken content, and descriptions of other audio content, such as music titles or sound effects – this can be created for existing programmes that have been made without subtitles
- Installing an induction loop in the gallery for hearing-aid users, although this may be impractical in a gallery containing several audio-visuals
- The height of display screens and monitors – these should suit wheelchair users, as should access for wheelchair users to mini-cinemas
- Somewhere to sit whilst watching. Chairs with arms are better for people who need a bit of help standing back up again.

Case study: Roald Dahl Museum

The Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre worked with a communications agency and a deaf charity to pilot an app that provides signed content to visitors visiting its indoor galleries. QR codes positioned around the museum trigger the app to display British sign language (BSL) interpretation for existing panel text and audio content. Visitors can download the app for free using the museum's Wi-Fi.

BSL interpretation is provided for several displays around the museum, including Roald Dahl's writing chair, a bag containing his school reports and a photograph of the author in his army uniform during the Second World War. Elsewhere, it provides practical visitor information and instructions on how to use interactive material.

The museum piloted the app with deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors and school. Feedback from the participants asked for shorter, snappier bits of information to be spread over more areas of the museum. The feedback resulted in adjustments being made to the original version of the app, which was launched in 2015 (see Useful links below for more information).

Costumed interpreters

One person in costume in the right position is worth a thousand words of text. They can create a unique sense of place and time through direct engagement with the visitors.

Evaluation has shown that this form of interpretation works best when people become involved in the dramatisation of an authentic event.

Costumed interpretation is flexible. Unlike a permanent display, if something is failing to work as planned, the script and scenarios can be adjusted and turned around quickly. The disadvantage is the cost.

Approaches to training costumed interpreters vary. Some heritage venues, such as Hampton Court Palace, require them to be qualified historians or archaeologists. Other organisations commission characters from experienced heritage drama interpretation companies, who employ teams of professional actors. It's also possible to use volunteers in this capacity, selecting them as interpreters on the basis of their acting and engagement skills and then teaching them the historical context.

CHILDREN'S GUIDEBOOK

Lively and colourful guidebooks for children, written in a humorous style and illustrated with amusing cartoons are a popular souvenir for families. Excellent examples of these are *Power Palace* and *Tower Power* (about Hampton Court Place and the Tower of London respectively), published by Historic Royal Palaces.

Don't be put off by the idea that writing, illustrating and printing a children's guidebook needs a big budget. You might have a budding David Walliams or Quentin Blake hiding their light under a bushel in your staff or volunteer team.

Remember that producing this sort of guidebook for children is not just about keeping kids entertained and out of the flower borders during their actual visit. Guidebooks of this type are souvenirs to keep long after the child's been strapped back into its car seat and driven home. If done well enough, the guidebook will remind them of the fun they had on their visit and will have them nagging mum and dad to come back again.

If you can allocate a reasonable budget, there are thousands of really talented young art students out there dreaming of a break just like this to get their careers in illustration started. Contact local colleges and universities and give illustration course leaders a call to find out how to find the right artist from their pool of talented students. You can also ask their advice on what would constitute a fair fee at that level of experience.

Research online for children's book illustrators and actually get a taste of their work on their website before you decide to contact them. If your budget is tight, look for young and up-and-coming artists as their fee is more likely to be affordable and there may also be room for negotiation. Don't forget that having their work for all the world to see on your guidebooks is fabulous advertising for them too.

Shop around for the best design and printing price, but don't sacrifice quality. Your guidebook, as with all printed matter seen by your visitors, sends out a strong message about your organisation. Ensure that the artist has signed the rights over to you for use of the artwork they produce for you. That way you'll be able to use it as you like on signs, exhibition panels, souvenir goods, website etc. without needing their permission.

ACTIVITY BACKPACKS

Activity backpacks filled with fun, child-friendly items and activity ideas have become hugely popular among visitors to heritage attractions, as they provide a more focused and rewarding visit for families. The contents of each backpack support a theme or story, and it's usual to have more than one type of backpack on offer. They are generally aimed at 3-12 year olds, some include items for babies and toddlers, so that the whole family can share the experience.

Contents typically include:

- Maps
- Magnifying glasses
- Costume items
- Quizzes and games
- Notebooks
- Jigsaws
- Objects for handling – to provide closer observation of specific artefacts or physical features around the site, as well as sensory experiences
- Fun facts
- Instructions for adults

Backpacks encourage families to spend longer looking at individual objects and make closer observation of detail, and introduce them to concepts, facts and stories through playful activities. They also encourage communication between adults and children.

Backpacks also provide a simple and inexpensive way of introducing interactivity into areas where there is little or no interpretation, or what there is isn't designed for family learning.

OBJECT HANDLING AND TRYING THINGS ON

Using a handling collection with visitors is a tried, tested and proven way of engaging with all age groups, both outdoors or indoors. Giving visitors opportunities to handle physical objects can encourage new ideas, feelings and thoughts. It encourages conversations between family members and strangers. It can overcome the barriers of glass cases and 'Don't Touch' notices and inspires curiosity, exploration and discovery.

If you can't use the real thing, then there are other options available. Replicas can be a great way of allowing visitors to get the idea of the weight, texture and feel of the real thing – especially if you are able to show them the actual objects at the

same time. Sometimes it may even be possible to mix actual objects with replicas. For example, perhaps you have a fragment of an 18th-century plant pot in your collection that could be safely handled and then compared to an entire one, visitors could try to guess which part of the pot they have handled, how it might have been made, etc.

Replica costumes for dressing-up are always popular with adults as well as children. Costumes help visitors to empathise with people from past eras and give them a feel for the types of clothing they might have worn (e.g. a tricorne hat of the type worn by men in Capability Brown's time). The costumes chosen must support the history of your site.

There are plenty of specialist costume companies on the internet, and you might also have volunteers who are handy with a sewing machine willing to help out. There are lots of pattern books available for different eras. Try contacting your local NADFAS for help and advice (see Useful links below).

A good guide to running handling sessions is *Learning from objects: A Teacher's Guide* (English Heritage), which is available to buy online from Amazon. See also Useful links below.

TOP TIPS – INTERPRETATION FOR FAMILIES

Families love having something extra to keep their children occupied on a visit, so anything you offer will be appreciated!

- Keep family activities fun and simple– they shouldn't be complicated to organise or need too many resources.
- Remember that families will consist of children of different ages, so don't make activities too complicated for the younger ones. The adults in the family group will be grateful for an answer sheet.
- Think about whether you want to offer families something they can do on their own or something which is led by someone from your site. Volunteers can be great at helping with led activities.
- Work out whether you can dedicate a room to arts and crafts activities – not only does it contain any mess, but it's a great help if the weather turns.
- Children love taking something they've made home with them.
- One simple way to add value for families is to give them a trail to follow, looking out for things on the way.
- Another fairly easy way to give families something extra is to create backpacks with an explorer hat, some child's binoculars, some suggested activities, pencils and paper.

- Stickers are a quick, easy and popular way to reward children for completing activities.
- Choose a character that fits with your site (perhaps based on a carving or statue) that you can use on your family sheets to give them a visual identity.

Also...

- Don't pre-judge what a family group consists of. It might not just be one or two parents with children – there may be grandparents, uncles, aunts, family friends or carers or guardians involved.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The range of events on offer at outdoor sites is growing all the time, including rock concerts, firework displays, culture festivals and shows. Many heritage organisations have come to depend on them for generating income to fund other services. The trick is to stop thinking of events as just icing on your interpretation cake – instead, see how an event programme can be fully integrated into your interpretation planning.

There is a judgement call to be made about how to offer visitors a rollicking good time while still providing them with historically accurate insights. However, far from seeing events in your Capability Brown landscape as being at odds with your organisation's *raison d'être*, consider the opportunities they offer to interpret your themes and stories in less conventional ways, while simultaneously attracting new audiences. Use events in every season to encourage the spread visitor numbers more evenly throughout the year (as well as more regular repeat visits).

Once kids associate your venue with fun, particularly if they're local, you'll have a small but vocal marketing agent embedded in that family. You'll also become a reliable 'get the kids out of the house during school holidays' outing of choice for fraught parents.

Sometimes, however, events are more about the process by which interpretive ends are reached, rather than the end result itself, particularly when working in partnership with community projects. For example, at the National Trust's High Peaks Estate, set in the Pennine moorlands of Derbyshire, an ambitious dance project brought together groups from the community and the Rambert Dance company. The groups were taken on a guided walk, focused on the Celts and Iron Age people who lived there, which was then translated into a dance performance.

Stories and themes

i. Uncover your stories

- Build up a list of stories relating to your site by:
- Researching in archives, museums and libraries (local as well as online)
- Collecting ideas for stories from staff and volunteers
- Talking to local experts, including your local historical societies and curators at local museums
- Include questions in your visitor surveys about the stories that most interest them about your site, as well as any stories they would like to find out more about
- Looking at events at your site within local, national and world historical contexts (e.g. – the Age of Enlightenment, the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions)

ii. Group your stories

Group the stories under the themes they have in common (some stories will fit under more than one theme).

iii. Identify the target audience/s

Which visitor types does your organisation want to engage/increase/attract?

iv. Select the theme/s and related stories

Plan to engage the target audience/s, based on what your audience development research shows about their particular needs, likes and wants

v. Choose your interpretation methods

Choose the best methods for telling those stories to your target audience/s (e.g. guided tours, audio-visual exhibitions, costumed interpreters, activity backpacks)

vi. Develop individual 'mini-plans'

For each activity, resource, display or event, detail the audience it is aimed at, who will deliver it and how (see the example below).

Note: Sometimes your organisation will know a theme it has to promote even before identifying which audience it wants to develop; for example, the anniversary of an event unique to your site. At other times, themes will be dictated by local or national events, anniversaries, festivals, etc., such as the 300th anniversary of the birth of Capability Brown. In either situation, follow the steps outlined above and simply select stories related to that theme in Step ii.

Having your site's main Themes established will provide you with a strong framework to work within when planning your interpretation (and audience development), which will also ensure the site's 'messages' are uniform and support one another. Not working within this theme framework risks giving visitors an uneven visit experience with a confusing jumble of disconnected information.

For more information about identifying and understanding the interests of your target audiences, please see **Appendix C – Audience Development & Activity Ideas**.

Example mini-plan for theme interpretation

Target audience/s:

Families, Adults, Schools

Theme:

The legacy of Capability Brown

Theme's stories:

- How Capability Brown physically created a river in your site's landscape
- The discussion about the design's proposal for a river, recorded in letters between Capability Brown and the estate's owner.

Methods of interpretation:

- Costumed actors dramatise the letters in a live performance within sight of the design feature under discussion.
- Actors' voices are recorded giving dramatised readings of the letters, which visitors listen to on an audio guide or as part of an exhibition.

3. Interpretation for Schools

Schools can be very loyal audiences. Once teachers have visited you with a class and had a good experience that supports National Curriculum teaching, they will come back year after year and recommend your venue to other teachers.

What your venue could provide for schools:

- Staff/volunteer-led sessions and activities
- Resources for teacher-led visits
- Resources for classroom work before and after a visit

Resources for teachers typically include:

- Activity sheets for use on site
- Activity ideas for the classroom (pre- and post-visit)
- Trails
- Fact sheets (facts, potted history of the venue and stories)
- Guidance notes for teacher-led visits
- Detailed information about the venue's School Programme

Teachers are keen, but time poor. Providing resources for them in simple formats to download at school from your website will save your printing costs and help you reach more teachers (potentially one of your target audiences).

The beauty of online resource provision is that you can update and add to it easily and quickly. It also makes it simpler to share archive material with teachers, such as photographs and documents, as well as film and audio clips. Resources can be provided in basic PDF, Word and .jpeg formats. If your venue has films made that could be shared online, you could join an increasing number of heritage organisations and post it on your own YouTube channel for teachers and other potential visitors to watch. This can also be a good marketing technique.

To develop curriculum-based sessions and resources for schools, do one or all of the following:

- Work closely to the subject content plans for each Key Stage (age group) using Government's official guidelines (see Useful Links below).
- Set up a focus group of teachers from local schools to develop specific sessions and resources (after school hours – you might need to pay travel costs)

- Provide trainee teachers from your local teacher training institution with work placements (all trainees do this as part of their course for a week or two) and set them the task of developing your school resources and sessions.

Recruit a dedicated team of volunteers to deliver your schools programme following appropriate training, or to support your staff during school visits. For guidance on recruiting, training and managing volunteers, please see **Appendix A – Volunteers: Recruiting and Managing**.

The Capability Brown Festival has devised an Education Pack based around the 2016 Key Stage 2 curriculum, which is aimed at 7-11 year old pupils. It is available to download from the Festival website www.capabilitybrown.org/resources-sites.

The Historic Houses Association (HHA) provides a free specialist education advisory service for members (see **Useful links** below).

Top Tips for school sessions

You don't have to get everything right the first (or second) time. Children and teachers will be quite forgiving once out of school and enjoying a different learning environment.

- Working with schoolchildren is not about you talking and telling facts, it's about how you engage the children. You also don't have to know all the facts – asking children their ideas or challenging them to find out back to school works well.
- Keep things simple. If you can take the children on a walk which includes looking for things in the landscape, enjoying Brown's views and eye catchers and some short, simple activities, that can be enough in the beginning. It's very easy to focus on just looking (after all, we have some amazing Brown landscape to look at), but don't forget to give children the chance to use hearing, touch and smell.
- Try to use lots of open questions, which encourage a longer, more detailed answer e.g. How does this view make you feel? Why was the lake put here?
- Avoid asking 'read my mind' questions, where you are expecting a particular answer – there are almost always other valid answers.
- Expect the unexpected – if you get an answer you don't expect, don't shut them down with a 'no', ask the pupil how they came up with that answer. Children often have a delightfully different way of looking at the world to adults!

Also...

- Be flexible – schools will often arrive late or have to leave early. It is fine if you can't do everything you planned.
- Can you arrange volunteers to support school visits? An extra pair of hands always helps.
- It's really important to remember to allow time for things like:
 - Hanging up coats and bags at the start and collecting them at the end
 - Allowing time for the toilet
 - Giving children some time for unstructured running around and exploration
- If you organise a full day visit, allow an hour for lunch break. You will need time for toilet trips and walking the group between different rooms/areas on the site

Useful links

Creating display

Creating an Exhibition (CoTA – Collaborations: Teachers and Artists)
<http://cotaprogram.org/how-tos/how-to-curate-a-museum-exhibition/>

Writing label text

Museum Practice – Writing museum text
<http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/guides/16112015-writing-museum-text>

V&A Museum – Gallery Text: A Ten-Point Guide
http://media.vam.ac.uk/media/documents/legacy_documents/file_upload/10808_file.pdf

Powerhouse Museum
<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/ecologic/files/2012/08/How-to-write-and-produce-your-exhibition-labels.pdf>

V&A Museum
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/creating-new-europe-1600-1800-galleries/labels-gallery-text>

Developing activities and resources

Inspiring Learning for All – resources for developing quality activities and resources (available from Summer 2016)
<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/ilfa/resources>

The National Curriculum for schools in England
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum>

Historic Houses Association – Capability Brown trail
<http://www.hha.org.uk/DB/news/hha-launches-capability-brown-trail.html>

Heritage Open Days

<http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/get-involved/register-with-us>

Natural England – *Nature Based Trial Activities* (PDF for downloading)

http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiy377i_bDLAhVDSRoKHdlgAhQQFggMAM&url=http%3A%2F%2Fpublications.naturalengland.org.uk%2Ffile%2F6611256916049920&usg=AFQjCNG21mfAu1_4YJ0kxMk7ierv64ZRRRA

Natural England – *Access to Nature: inspiring people to engage with their natural environment* (PDF for downloading)

http://www.google.co.uk/http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiy377i_bDLAhVDSRoKHdlgAhQQFghAMAY&url=http%3A%2F%2Fpublications.naturalengland.org.uk%2Ffile%2F5557933643399168&usg=AFQjCNGS02xDBuRoKOQImxuAWxnfuENW2Q

National BioBlitz Programme

<http://www.bnhc.org.uk/bioblitz>

Roald Dahl Museum – BSL app

<http://www.roalddahl.com/blog/2015/december/the-story-of-signly>

NADFAS (The National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Societies)

<http://www.nadfas.org.uk>

The Capability Brown Festival events page

<http://www.capabilitybrown.org/events>

Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

<http://www.lotc.org.uk>

Free specialist school education advisory service for members (Historic Houses Association)

<http://www.hha.org.uk/learning-and-outreach-2/learning-advisory-service.html>

Inspiring Learning for All – guidelines for developing impactful activities and resources (available from Summer 2016)

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/ilfa/resources>

Search for suppliers of interpretation resources and services
(Museums Association)

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/find-a-supplier>

Handling objects

Source of reasonably priced replica artefacts and costumes for classroom teaching
(TTS)

<http://www.tts-group.co.uk/primary/history>

Hands On (Museums Galleries Scotland) –

a free guide for primary and pre-school staff on using museum objects

<http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/about-us/news/news-article/306/hands-on-training-pack-for-teachers-available>

Every Object Tells a Story (V & A Museum publication) –

looks at telling stories from objects

http://media.vam.ac.uk/media/documents/legacy_documents/file_upload/17288_file.pdf

Accessible interpretation

Centre for Accessible Environments

<http://www.cae.org.uk>

FieldFare Trust

<http://www.fieldfare.org.uk>

Capability Brown biography

Capability Brown Festival

<http://www.capabilitybrown.org>

<http://www.parksandgardens.org/projects/capability-brown/762-capability-brown-selected-resources>

<http://www.comptonverney.org.uk/park/capability-brown>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/capability-brown/>

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Lancelot-Brown>

Britain in the 18th century

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/overview_empire_seapower_01.shtml

<http://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles>

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/0-9/18th-century>

Gardening history

<http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org>

<http://www.linnean.org/Library-and-Archives>

<http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk/page/collection>

Botanical and horticultural

<https://www.rhs.org.uk>

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/departments-and-staff/library-and-archives.html>

<http://www.rbge.org.uk/science/library-and-archives>

<http://www.kew.org/learn/library-art-archives>

UK-wide archives online:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

<https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive>

<http://archiveshub.ac.uk>

Local archives

<https://www.gov.uk/search-local-archives>

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

Image archives online

<https://images.nationalarchives.gov.uk/assetbank-nationalarchives/action/viewHome>

<https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/archive-collections>

Bibliography

- Brimacombe, P. *Capability Brown: the master gardener* (Stroud: Pitkin Guides, 2001)
- Brown, Jane *The Omnipotent Magician: Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, 1716-1783* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011)
- Clifford, Joan *Capability Brown: an illustrated life of Lancelot Brown 1716-1783* (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1975)
- Colvin, Howard, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects: 1600-1840*, 3rd edition (London and New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 165-167.
- Fryer, H. (Ed.) *Lancelot (Capability) Brown: Warwickshire commissions* (Warwickshire Gardens Trust, 1994)
- Gibson, Michael *'Capability' Brown in Staffordshire* (Stafford: Staffordshire County Library, 1981)
- Hadfield, Miles et. al., *British Gardeners: A Biographical Dictionary* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1980), pp. 47-51.
- Hinde, Thomas *Capability Brown: the story of a master gardener* (London: Hutchinson, 1986)
- Hyams, E. *Capability Brown and Humphry Repton* (London: JM Dent, 1971)
- Mayer, Laura *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden* (London: Shire Publications, 2011)
- Phibbs, J A list of landscapes that have been attributed to Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (*Garden History* 41: 2, 2013) pages 244-277
- Ransomes Film Unit *Capability Brown* (film from 1964)
- Stroud, Dorothy *Capability Brown* (Country Life, 1950)
- Rutherford, Sarah *Capability Brown: And His Landscape Gardens* (National Trust, 2016)
- Turner, Roger *Capability Brown and the Eighteenth-century English Landscape* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1999)
- Tyne and Wear County Council Museums and Landscape Institute *Capability Brown and the Northern Landscape* (Newcastle: The County Council Museums, 1983)
- Willis, Peter *'Capability Brown's Account with Drummonds Bank, 1753-1783'* (*Architectural History: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* 27, 1984), 382-91
- Woodhouse, A. *Capability Brown of Kirkharle* (2000)