

TECHNIQUES OF INTERPRETATION

Joan Brigham, Fenner Nature Center, Lansing Michigan

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION? To many of us the natural world is a mysterious and foreign place. Unraveling these mysteries for children and adults is similar to interpreting a foreign language. Our job as field trip leaders is to help them understand, appreciate and become aware of their wild surroundings.

HOW TO ACHIEVE A QUALITY PROGRAM

THE THREE "RS" OF INTERPRETATION

REVEAL – give them information, but do not lecture.

RELATE – make information interesting and relevant to their experience.

RESPOND – listen and answer questions.

INVOLVE PARTICIPANTS

Ask lots of questions. Encourage them to do the same. Make them want to know more. If you don't have ready answers, let them try to find the answer within the group and encourage them to look it up in the library when they return to school as you will.

BE POSITIVE

Negative statements make poor teaching tools. Rephrase your question or statement. Try not to say 'no' to an incorrect or imperfect reply. Rephrase their answer to encourage a correct response. Saying 'no' discourages involvement and learning.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO REASON

Don't answer all their questions with direct answers. Ask leading questions and let them figure it out if possible. Be sure it is finally resolved.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC

Your participants will respond well. It's catching.

EXCITE THEIR INTEREST

Tell anecdotes which pertain to the subject. "How do we know the fox is here? Use your nose to smell for its presence. Watch for its tracks. Learn about its world."

UTILIZE ALL THEIR SENSES

Remind them that this is a place where we have an opportunity to learn in many ways. We start by sharpening all the senses. Listening requires silence. As Rachel Carson says, "Take time to listen and talk about the voices of the earth and what they mean. One hears the very throb of life itself."

As you become a more experienced leader, there will be many more techniques which you will find to be useful tools. This is only a partial list to help you along the way.

Joan Brigham, 1972