

## MODULE 8: ECOTOURISM

### Practicum 1: Fundamentals of Nature Interpretation

#### EXERCISE: CREATING THEMES

##### GOAL

To train students in the recognition and development of nature interpretation themes.

##### EQUIPMENT

Writing instruments, paper.

##### PROCEDURE

Ask students to work in teams of three. Ask each student to write a word identifying a favorite plant or animal from local nature (e.g., African walnut, *Coula edulis*). Now ask students to pass their papers to the right, and then to construct a phrase incorporating this item suggested by their teammate, e.g., *African walnut products*. Instruct students to pass their papers to the right again, and now ask them to construct a single simple sentence from their teammate's phrase, e.g., "*The African walnut provides many useful products.*" This simple sentence represents a potential theme for an interpretive program.

### Practicum 2: Dealing with difficult cross-cultural situations

Below are some cross-cultural situations that Ecotourism Guides could encounter on their tours. Discuss each situation in groups and identify:

- a. the problem
  - b. a possible plan of action and
  - c. what could be done next time to avoid the problem
- A tourist couple is bathing in the river. While they are swimming, they start kissing each other.
  - It is evening in the village and the village chief is pouring glasses of local whiskey for your guests. One of your guests refuses the alcohol, but the villager insists that she/he drinks the whiskey, thinking that the guest is only being shy.
  - One of your guests likes local whiskey very much. He/she had had a lot to drink. He/she is very drunk and is talking very loudly. The villagers are no longer enjoying the party because your guest is too loud and drunk.
  - While on a short break, one of your guests sees some people in the fields planting rice and rushes to take pictures. Without asking, he/she starts taking pictures.
  - The group is having a discussion with the villagers. One of your guests asks you to translate why the men in the village are so lazy and why the women do all the work.

### Practicum3: EcoLodge Planning

You will work in small groups to prepare an **Ecolodge Plan**. Assume you have adequate (though not limitless) funding to build an ecolodge in a part of Liberia of your choosing.

Prepare a development plan that includes the following:

1) A description of the specific place you will build your ecolodge using the site evaluation and planning (e.g., access, local communities, local building materials, landscape, zoning) and site design guidelines (e.g., building placement, roads, plant disturbance, drainage) from class and your readings. In addition, you should discuss architecture and principles of biophilic design.

2) A specific description of the business practices and design features you plan to use. You can also include artwork of your plan. Provide a comprehensive description that demonstrates your understanding of material input systems and closed-loop management systems.

a) Specifically, you should describe in detail material use and flow - aesthetics, energy use, water management, waste management, and building technologies – and the ways these are integrated into a green design system.

b) Then you should describe in detail business operation practices – e.g., buying, hiring, investment of profits, employee training, community involvement, customer service, etc.

3) An assessment of your ecolodge's contributions to the surrounding community, economic profitability and impact, and environmental stewardship. Demonstrate that your EcoLodge would be doing more good than harm.

## **GUIDED NATURE WALK**

### GOAL

To train students in the fundamental processes of nature interpretation.

### EQUIPMENT

Access to a natural area outdoors. Watch, paper, writing instruments and assorted props as designated by participants' programs.

### TIME

Variable depending on syllabus, but usually several class periods according to size of class.

### PROCEDURE

Divide the class into equal teams consisting of a captain or co-captains and pairs of supporting team members. Three students per team is an ideal number for this activity but it can be modified for more if necessary.

Assign a different topic to each team. Topics may be related, or unique, but all must be relevant to the natural area used. For example, topics can reflect a typical collection of floral and faunal elements, i.e., reptiles, amphibians, mammals, birds, higher plants, etc. but could also include land and cultural history, and other topics such as medicinal, anecdotal, and culinary plant uses.

Each team will plan, practice, and implement a short, guided nature walk. Students begin by conducting surveys of the natural area after they have received full instruction on the assignment. During their surveys, each team should make notes on an agreed upon "trail." Each group will select trail features to serve as the focal point of a stop that illustrates their theme. It is likely that several trips into the field may be necessary to complete planning. Each team will present its own guided walk.

Each pair of students will present an original "primary nature walk" of 4 parts. Part one of the interpretive walk will be an introduction. The next 3 parts will consist of one "stop" each. Group members can take turns giving walk segments or collaborate.

Each group's entire walk should be 20 minutes including the time spent traveling among trail stops. Adhering to this time is important. The 3 main stops, known as the "body of the interpretive walk," should each begin with a different focusing element from one of the following:

- (1) **command or exclamation**, e.g., "Look at this bark!"
- (2) **question**, e.g., "Do you know how many endemic species Liberia has?" and
- (3) **story**, e.g., "Long ago, I remember an encounter with a forest elephant, and...."

The purpose of the focusing element is to interest and connect the audience with a trail feature that is then given meaning and unified with the theme. It will help newcomers to

this process to restrict presentations at each stop to two or three main ideas and to concentrate on linking the discussion to the theme. These ideas, then, should connect the audience, traiside feature and theme. The main task is to provide explanations that identify the feature, explain its meaning relevant to the theme and relevant to the audience.

To attract and maintain interest at each stop, each group should use (1) **directed dialogue** with the audience, their classmates, during the walk by engaging them in discussions that draw out and reveal meanings, (2) **audience activation techniques**, e.g., giving audience members tasks to perform such as touching, smelling, looking, answering questions, counting properties.

Each group should prepare and give the instructor a **walk blueprint** for approval before the presentation. This blueprint will list the walk theme, contents of each stop including the focusing element and three main ideas for each stop. Presenters should be encouraged to consider the use of field guides, sketches, etc, appropriate for their walk theme.