

Pre-Camp Training for Living History Staff Members

Chapter 5

Uniqueness and Relationships of Camps

As you build the reality of your camp's time, characters, activities, appearance, and such, keep in mind the goal of making each experience new and exciting for the campers. Look for the ways in which your camp is unique.

Imagine that a crew is hiking in to your camp. What sights, smells, sounds can you create immediately that will distinguish your site from any other at Philmont? How can you make them think, "Wow, where are we now? This is completely different from the last intercamp." The smell of green chile stew simmering on the stove at Abreu, or the biscuits at Hunting Lodge. The sound of bark being stripped for a railroad tie at Pueblano or Crater Lake. A mountain man repairing his traps on the porch at Miranda. As you get to know the characters and activities of your camps, you will come up with many more, specific images to offer. Do be specific. And, of course, be historically accurate.

Campfires, evening programs, and company meetings, as mentioned in Chapter 4, are definitely ways to present the unique history, background, and ambiance of your camps and its characters. You are presenting **living** history --- giving the campers an immense amount of information in a very accessible way just by being an authentic, historically correct character. One who sings the songs of his or her background, tells the stories, shows the campers who s/he is and where s/he came from. Make sure everything in your presentations mirrors the place, people and themes of your camp and **no other**. (Note: The only exception here is Pueblano and Crater Lake that have overlapping material; also to some extent Miranda and Clear Creek and Cypher's and French.) Please reread the campfire section of Chapter 4 to refresh yourself on the importance of this point.

Here it is for your convenience:

If your camp has a campfire, evening program or company meeting be sure that it is period correct. Sing songs that were popular for the day and play authentic music -- authentic to the type of camp as well as the time period. Mining camps had a completely different repertoire from homesteaders, mountain men, loggers or Phillips employees and guests. Research the music and stories now. Tell captivating tales "in character". This is one of your very best opportunities to really showcase your characters and time period. Every campfire or evening program at Philmont should be completely unique and specific to that place, its history and characters. This could mean that you will put aside some of your own personal preferences and standard "schtick" to expand your repertoire.

During training week we will be bringing in a guest instructor that will assist all of our campfire programs in developing a meaningful, relevant, and accurate campfire experience. You will even have an opportunity to play in front of a live audience two times prior to scatter. Once at the end of the Living History Skills day at the “Town Hall Meeting”, but also during a brand new event that will take place for the first time in 2016. It will be called the “Backcountry Music Festival and Open Mic Night”. At this event, EVERY campfire camp will have a chance to present one or two songs for the entire staff to enjoy. Then, it will open up for open mic, where musicians can form their own group and play, or even have a solo act. We are excited to highlight our wonderful backcountry talent in this way and hope that you will be excited to be a part of it!

Home and Cabin Visits

Be sure to give the home and cabin visits in character as if this is your home, workplace or temporary outpost. Invite campers into your home or cabin in the true spirit of Western hospitality. *Do not think of it as and do not call it a “tour”* and yourself as a tour guide, but as a visit and yourself as a warm and generous host. How much more interesting it can be to have Gertie Abreu show her wedding picture than to hear in passing that it was someone else's from a hundred years ago! In general, live in those spaces as your characters would have. They are not museums. They are homes. Let your characters occupy them completely and realistically for their time. Do be aware of items that would be considered anachronisms, however. Your nalgene bottle sitting on top of the organ at Abreu would certainly be considered out of place and would disrupt the interpretive nature of the home visit for the participants.

During your home visits, look for opportunities for hands on experiences for them! Let them throw some kindling into the wood burning stove at Crooked Creek. (They may have chopped it, after all!) Have them inspect the replica rifle at Hunting Lodge, and use it as an opportunity to stress firearm safety, reminding them of the three primary rules! Let a Scout that knows how to play piano sit down at Rich Cabins and play a tune for everyone. These types of interactions engage the participants and helps them really connect with what you are portraying at your camp. And let's face it, who wants to go on a “tour” where you can't touch anything? How much fun is that?

Who Knew Who, What are the Similarities, Common Interests

Attached with this chapter is a list of all the interpretative camps with their themes and dates. Look it over now. Look for the uniquenesses AND for the ways in which some relate to one another. These can be in time, location, characters or in their themes and activities.

The commonalties can also be in the elongated time lines of history which are more subtle and will take more study to present.

For example, the Caseys at Crooked Creek would have known the Abreus since the latter were earlier and prominent landowners in the area. However, they would have known a generation older than the family members at Abreu in 1912 -- the year that Philmont depicts them. The Caseys would have known the Abreu family as it was at the Rayado Ranch in Santa Fe Trail times thirty plus years before our depiction at Abreu camp. Making reference to the Abreu family for campers whose treks pass through both camps and Rayado will give the crews a sense of how the history developed over time.

Become familiar with the treks and when the campers will encounter other interp camps and characters. Start making connections wherever logical and useful. Keep in your time frame as first person characters, but, when out of character, explain how conditions changed over time. Always offer postscripts to the history that you have just presented to give the campers a sense of continuity. Would Pueblano have been deserted by 1922 -- the time we are presenting at French Henry? The characters at French Henry would probably know something of Pueblano's history. Wherever you can start connecting the historical dots for yourselves, the richer your portrayals will become. Give it some thought now.

Different camps and characters within the camps will have different attitudes and opinions about current and past events. The character menus are designed to provide a variety of viewpoints. Consider who would be enthusiastic about New Mexico's becoming a state and who might prefer that it remain a U. S. territory or even a territory of Mexico. What are the advantages or disadvantages that each character would take into account? What changes to people's lives did the coming of the railroads or new management of a mine or the sale of Rayado Ranch make? Then, how would your character interject that opinion naturally into his/her words and actions with campers?

What about the loggers at Crater Lake or Pueblano and miners at Cypher's? They would certainly know about each other and probably know each other personally to some extent. Would they have a friendly competition about who is the strongest, toughest, smartest, or best looking? They certainly could. Where do they see each other? What practical jokes might they play on each other? What messages might they send back and forth via the crews? Fill out some of those details and put them into your dialogues with the campers.

Speaking of Dialogues.

Here's a bit of a sidelight, but let us remind all of you to speak to each of the crews as if it is a whole, new, fascinatingly individual group -- like it is the first one to be welcomed to your camp. This is in contrast to what we sometimes see as a kind of carnival midway, "barker" style that does not really acknowledge the group as unique, but as just other bunch of campers to which a staff person has to give the same, ol' information for the ten zillioneth time. This gets hard about July 25th, we know. BUT, to the crew that arrives on August 1st it is very important.

Here are some suggestions to keep your dialogues fresh. Think of them as real **dialogues** – two way conversations. Not a lecture. Not just instructions or information. Take your cue from the principles of good interpretation. For example, you might ask yourself: How can I make this homestead from 1900 relevant to a urban kid from 21st century Baltimore? Find the connections between your camp and the crews who come through. If you practice this all summer, your dialogues will stay ever new and creative for you and the crews.

Look the campers in the eye and see them as individuals. Single out one or two and speak to them directly. For instance, "Now this young man looks like he's done some pole climbing before. Look at those leg muscles. What's your name, son?" Interact **with** the campers. Avoid acting or speaking at them. Believe me, it will be more fun and fulfilling for you and for them when you can do this **genuinely**. It takes practice and the confidence that you and your character can go with the flow of the conversation and direct it constructively and respectfully.

For an excellent example of the kind of first person interpretation that we are aiming for, listen to this short feature program titled "Interpreting History" from the radio series *Living on Earth*.

<http://www.loe.org/shows/shows.htm?programID=07-P13-00048>

Click on this blue web link and you'll get a group of programs aired November 30, 2007, to NPR affiliates. Scroll down to **Interpreting History /Jim Williams**. You can read a synopsis and/or click on the "Real Player" to the upper right corner of the title. A box is likely to appear that asks what you want to do the download. You want to send it to your computer's Windows Real Player. Click that and it should send the audio of the program to your computer. A screen comes up that has swirling images with a brief request for donations to "Living on Earth". After that it should just play. Be sure that the volume is up.

Here's another example of a first person interpreter from the Tenement Museum in NYC. I saw this young woman portraying the Turkish immigrant Victoria Confino. As Victoria she welcomed us into her family's tenement apartment and did an excellent job. To see her go to www.tenement.org Click on bottom right corner -- Become an Immigrant Immigrate in 1916. Ellis Island to 97 Orchard -- Game leads you through steps of becoming an immigrant and Victoria tells her story and gives advice in the Set Sail, Ellis Island, and 97 Orchard sections.

Assignments.

- Research and list at least two pieces of material that would be appropriate for you to contribute at a campfire, evening program or to the unique atmosphere of your camp -- songs, stories, dances, poems, music, feats of skill or daring, superstitions, whatever.
- Write a portion of a dialogue for a mine, home, lodge or cabin visit at your camp. Do this in first person. Include a reference to another camp if logical, your attitude about a current or past event, and an indication of something that demonstrates your camp's unique nature.

If you haven't emailed your size survey, do it now. We need it!

Again, best wishes. It is always a pleasure to hear from you. We have had some terrific communications from staff people about costumes that they are bringing, resources that were discovered complete with mining songs, loggers' and miners' superstitions and lingo, etc. There is some great material for campfires there which can be passed along at your request. So, email when inspired, puzzled or pleased.

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