

Our TwHP lesson plan is another avenue available to help teachers link students to their historical community. Educators in Stafford County have particularly appreciated this concise and well-designed lesson, which augments the Civil War curriculum with people, places, and events that happened right in the backyards of many area students. County schools regularly schedule field trips to Chatham as part of an awareness of local history and Chatham's role in the bigger view of the war.

I have found that many teachers are not familiar with TwHP, so I provide workshop participants with a listing of all the lesson plans available from the National Register of Historic Places. Should teachers desire short lessons and information to support other historical and cultural units of study, they will have a handy educational resource for assistance. I even find numerous occasions in the park's visitor centers to offer this and other educational material to visiting teachers.

The staff at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania has made a striking success in the community by employing cultural resources as points of departure for curriculum-based education programs. None of the park's attempts to secure funding for such programs has met with any success, so all of our endeavors have been wedged into other operations as an intermittent collateral duty. Funding limitations may soon cause our educational programs to evaporate. Those programs, such as the Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans, have proved the rich benefits that can accrue from using historic places as the grist for teaching.

A Stafford County teacher summed up her overall experience in a workshop held in Fredericksburg, August 19, 1999: "Wonderful lesson ideas and plans. Thanks for the information about this untapped source."

Janice Frye, Education Coordinator, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Virginia

Patti Reilly

Curriculum Connections

Making the Most of National Park Experiences

What's the first thing you would do at the start of summer break after teaching a full year in the classroom? Most of us would select an activity that was relaxing and probably not related to school. Not so for a dedicated group of educators who participated in the Historic House Explorers Institute this past June. Teachers, museum educators, and content specialists from Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, and Washington, DC, signed up for a one-week working institute to develop a framework, methodology, and action plan for developing curriculum-based programs that teach seventh- and eighth-grade students to "read" historic homes. Sponsored by the National Park Service (NPS), Society for the Preservation

of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), the Institute focused on the use of primary sources and issues related to learning styles, standards, content and skill acquisition, and authentic assessment.

This type of collaboration is essential for the development of effective NPS education programs. Although NPS sites have great potential to teach students about concepts, people, places, and events, if programs are not based on the school curriculum, teachers will choose other options to support their course of study. Today's educators are faced with required learning standards, lack of transportation funds, and a host of issues vying for their limited time; they cannot experiment with programs not designed to meet

their needs. Educators at the Explorers Institute recommended that curriculum-based programs should:

- be relevant to what schools teach
- be curriculum-based, to justify the trip
- correlate with standards with a matrix
- include pre- and post-materials for preparation and reinforcement
- be facilitated by trained personnel knowledgeable about learning styles, standards, and developmental stages
- offer a tiered program and provide options
- be accessible to meet a diverse range of physical abilities and learning styles
- incorporate hands-on learning
- utilize a collaborative approach

Both schools and the NPS benefit from this approach. As Kelly Fellner, supervisory park ranger at Longfellow National Historic Site, and a participant at the Institute, stated, “Curriculum-based education programs allow teachers and park educators to speak a common language which results in more enriching experiences for schools and the site.”¹

The Explorers Institute is one example of park efforts to develop more effective education programs. Parks as Classrooms and Teaching with Historic Places offer teachers an array of materials and programs targeted at specific grades and subjects areas. From Acadia National Park’s “Carriage Road Explorers,” to Boston National Historical Park’s People and Places Program, to the Eisenhower Academy: An Institute for Middle and Secondary Teachers, to “Weir Farm: Home of an American Impressionist,” we can find inter-

disciplinary features and a mix of services for teachers and students.

Understanding what the phrase curriculum-based education programs means is an important first step in the development processes.

According to the NPS Servicewide Interpretive Development Program, developed to foster professionalism in interpretation, curriculum-based programs:

- are based on park resources and relevant to park interpretive themes
- link park themes with national and state standards
- involve educators/group leaders in planning and development
- include pre-visit materials that prepare learners for the program
- include post-visit materials that extend learning beyond the program
- address different learning styles
- include an evaluation mechanism
- link learning experiences directly to clear objectives

The NPS Northeast Region’s *Road Ahead: A Strategy to Achieve Excellence in Interpretation and Education*, unveiled in 1997, promotes the concept of life-long learning and the development of curriculum-based education programs. Setting a goal for every park in the Region to have a curriculum-based program will result in both stronger partnerships between schools and NPS sites and also more connections among the sites. Stretching from Maine to Virginia and including 22% of the national public school enrollment—approximately 11 million students—the Region has a significant opportunity to reach out and establish ties with diverse communities.

The *Strategy* calls for parks to develop Comprehensive Interpretive Plans (CIP) to guide each park’s interpretation and education program. Involving the education community in this process is critical. Understanding the unique aspects and strengths of each site will help avoid competition with other organizations and also suggest possible partnerships. Uncovering untold stories and exploring multiple points of view make the sites more relevant to students. The new (1996) NPS thematic framework <<http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/thematic.htm>> is an excellent tool available to help educators/park staff develop stories about people, place, and time.

Margaret Piatt leads a discussion at the June 2000 Historic House Institute to identify elements for a meaningful historic house experience for visitors. Courtesy National Park Service.





Students participate in “Workers on the Line” at the Tsongas Industrial History Center, Lowell, Massachusetts. Courtesy National Park Service.

Education Centers are an important component of the *Road Ahead* strategy. Centers have special resources that expand a park’s capabilities in offering a broader menu of education programs and services. The Tsongas Industrial History Center is a collaborative project of the University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Education and the National Park Service at Lowell National Historical Park. The Center encourages the teaching of industrial history in a hands-on way through on- and off-site education programs for over 50,000 students annually. Dr. Peter O’Connell, director of the Tsongas Industrial History Center, summed up the benefits of curriculum-based programs in the following words:

If national parks and museums are to be essential educational partners with schools, our educational programs, curriculum materials, and workshops must help teachers do better what teachers have to do—help students attain the curriculum standards mandated by the state as part of education reform. Our education programs also have to satisfy kids’ standards as well—they must be engaging, meaningful, involve the use of great objects and historical structures, and be different than what can happen in the classroom. If we are truly curriculum-based and teacher- and student-centered, teachers will want to bring classes every year and students will want to visit national parks with their parents to participate in other experiences not possible on a single school visit.²

Building on the Tsongas model, the Northeast Region is planning a new NPS Education Center at Fort Wadsworth, part of Gateway National Recreation Area and a project of the National Parks of New York Harbor. This

Center, the largest of its kind in the region, will be a gateway into the national park system for diverse urban audiences.

Taking advantage of new and emerging technologies is a big challenge for schools and parks. Distance learning is an exciting new venue for interactive programs and for reaching students who may not have an opportunity to visit the site. Over 300,000 students tuned into a live satellite broadcast from Gettysburg National Military Park that allowed students to travel back in time to July 2, 1863, the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg. The program also included web-based activities leading up to the live event. In another example, with the support of Virginia’s First Lady Roxane Gilmore, George Washington Birthplace National Monument posted the lesson plans for “How Math and Science Changed George Washington’s Life” on the state’s education web site. Working with state public and private agencies parks can expand the reach of programs, secure additional support to sustain the program, and explore options for future collaborations.

Getting the word out to educators about these and other curriculum-based programs is no easy feat. *Exploring the Real Thing*, a guide to the national park sites in Massachusetts, provides teachers with a description of park education programs, a list of teacher-recommended resources, and descriptions that tie sites to the curriculum, target audience, class size, costs, availability, accessibility, and logistical information. An electronic version of the guide will be posted this year on the NPS web site.

Developing curriculum-based programs is the cornerstone for a solid foundation for park education programs. Providing relevant resource-based experiences for people of all ages will ensure a continuum of opportunities for citizens to support their own learning objectives through the national parks and to find meaning in their national treasures. Offering curriculum-based programs, especially for school age children will help foster stewardship during the formative stages of adulthood and also enhance the quality of public education.

Notes

- ¹ Personal communication
- ² Personal communication

Patti Reilly is the program manager for Interpretation and Education, Boston Support Office, National Park Service.