



Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation

Stacy F. Roth

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First-person interpretation--the portrayal of historical characters through interactive dramatization or roleplaying--is an effective, albeit controversial, method used to bring history to life at museums, historic sites, and other public venues.

Stacy Roth examines the techniques of first-person interpretation to identify those that have been most effective with audiences while allowing interpreters to maintain historical fidelity.

Past into Present focuses on first-person interpretation's most challenging form: the unscripted, spontaneous, conversational approach employed in "living history" environments such as Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts, Conner Prairie in Indiana, and Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. While acknowledging that a wide range of methods can touch audiences effectively, Roth identifies a core set of practices that combine positive communication techniques, classic interpretive philosophy, and time-tested learning theories to promote audience enjoyment, provoke thought and inquiry, convey important messages and themes, and relate to individual visitor interests. She offers numerous examples of conversation and demonstration strategies, visitor behavior profiles, and suggestions for depicting conflict and controversy, and she provides useful character development guidelines, interpretive training advice, and recommendations for adapting first-person interpretation for diverse audiences.

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