

Storytelling on Tours: Debriefing

What did you enjoy about adding storytelling to your presentation?

Comments from the class:

- “Gave the artwork more context.”
- “Found interesting narrative in all the objects.”
- “Gave me a reason to explore further, digging deeper to find the right story.”
- “Fun to hear a story.”
- “Spices up the tour; brings people in and makes them excited.”
- “Story can be a sidebar or bonus for the visitors.”

What was challenging about adding storytelling?

Comments from the class:

- “Figuring out which story to tell?”
- “How do you identify the best story to tell?”
- “How do you tell a story and still allow for interaction with the group?”
- “How do you integrate the story and conversation?”
- “What do you cut/prune to weave in a story?”
- “Theme is needed to focus stories. Struggled with how much story should echo the theme.”
- “Some objects are difficult to explain symbolism and story in one tour stop.”

Think about a memorable story. What made it memorable? What did the storyteller do to make the story memorable?

Comments from the class:

- “Connected emotionally with the story.”
 - “Put myself in the story.”
 - “Great stories have mystery and surprise.”
 - “Nice when a story feeds into VTS.”
 - “Paradox, when a story goes against our expectations.”
 - “Bring ourselves into the story; something from personal experience connects.”
 - “I like concrete stories”
 - “I like abstract stories.”
 - “I like human interest stories.”
 - “I like stories of how things are made.”
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- Decide where the story fits best in the discussion: beginning, middle, or end
 - Relate your story directly to the work of art: tell the story in the work of art (religious or otherwise)
 - Limit your story to 2-3 minutes – don’t have it overtake the presentation
 - Tell one main story (and there may also be shorter secondary stories)

- Use “facts” about artists sparingly. If something in the artist’s life relates directly to what you are showing, that’s a good story to tell. (Eg: Van Gogh’s time at St. Remy to restore his mental health and painting of the olive groves he saw there as a therapeutic act.)
- Use stories for meaning making: to help people make sense of an object

Storytelling Guidelines

- Use active voice (“Then Shiva ripped off the boy’s head!” instead of “Then the boy’s head was ripped off.”)
- Have the characters speak – in their own voices (Parvati: “Shiva, look what you’ve done to our son!”)
- Build in suspense/surprise: what happened next? (Shiva: “I’ll restore his head using the next living creature that comes along.” And who/what comes along?)
- Engage the emotions – when your listeners feel something, they care more and are more likely to remember
- Look for meaning or connection to your theme (eg: How to know a god when you see one) – so visitors can answer: “What was that story about?” (How Ganesha got his elephant’s head.)

“Stories inspire wonder and awe; they allow a listener to imagine another time and place, to find the universal in the particular, and to feel empathy for others. They preserve individual and collective memory and speak to both the adult and the child.” --Leslie Bedford