Module 9

KIDS

Knowledge without love will not stick. But if love comes first, knowledge is sure to follow.

John Burroughs

For ourselves, and for our planet, we must be both strong and strongly connected — with each other, with the earth. As children, we need time to wander, to be outside, to nibble on icicles, watch ants, to build with dirt and sticks in the hollow of the earth, to lie back and contemplate clouds....

Gary Paul Nabhan & Stephen Trimble

Module 9

KIDS

What is it?

Interpretation designed to address specific needs of children (kids).

Why do we do it?

Children are our future park stewards and their programs require a special approach.

How do we do it?

Implement skills, techniques, and strategies specifically designed for kids' programs.

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Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program.

Freeman Tilden

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INTRODUCTION

Conducting interpretation for kids is one of the most rewarding aspects of interpretation. It offers endless possibilities for using your creativity with an audience that is typically very receptive. Interpretive experiences may create powerful memories for children, shaping their feelings towards parks and wilderness for the rest of their lives. As a children's interpreter, you have the opportunity to develop the future stewards of our wild and historic places, as well as developing the future stewards of our planet.

Children need programs that are designed especially for them. In this module we will review the types of kids' programs and explore strategies and techniques to help you develop a program that will engage this audience—whether they are alone or in a mixed-age group.

9.1 PURPOSE AND VALUES

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Reducing that deficit—healing the broken bond between our young and nature is in our self-interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demands it, but also because our mental, spiritual and physical health depends upon it. The health of the earth is at stake as well.

Richard Louv

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Because children's interpretation offers us the opportunity to reach not only the child but the important adults in his or her life, children are one of our most important audiences. **It is through the eyes of children that adults often see the clearest vision of their own world.** In this age of video games, computers, and virtual reality, it is especially important to help kids connect to the natural and cultural world. Today's children are less in touch with nature than any previous generation on earth. Although they are "plugged in," and have access to information and videos twenty four hours a day, many are not able to name the native trees in their neighborhoods. For a variety of reasons, kids are spending less time and especially less **unstructured** time out of doors.

Alienation from nature and the human costs associated with it are called "nature-deficit disorder." This term was made popular in 2005 by Richard Louv, whose book *Last Child in the Woods* was a wake up call for parents, educators, and environmentalists. Among the costs of alienation from nature Louv identifies are diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of mental and physical illness (Louv, 2005). In addition, this lack of connection to nature among a whole generation may lead to serious consequences for our planet and our future as a species.

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As we began our school group tour to find animal homes in a Pacific Northwest forest, I would ask the five and six-year-olds, "What animals do you think we might see today? The first reply was almost always, "Monkeys!"

Joanie Cahill,
Regional Interpretive
Specialist, CSP

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When children do not connect with nature, it can become a fearful concept (Beck and Cable, 2002; Brown, 1989). Spiders, snakes, and bees frighten not only kids, but adults as well. Children, however, because their exposure to nature has come through television and computer games, also fear animals that are not even in their local parks, such as elephants and tigers. Remembering Maslow's hierarchy of needs *(Module 3—Communication)*, if a child is afraid, then learning, discovery, or enjoyment is difficult

at best. Interpretation, appropriately conducted, should always address the basic needs first, thus alleviating fears.

Introducing nature and history to kids through our interpretive efforts may be their first authentic exposure and, as such, can have a life-altering effect on them. Many of us as children were so moved by natural and/or cultural experiences that we chose interpretation as our careers. Our childhood experiences affect us forever. **That is why, as an interpreter, you should always proceed as if each program you create and deliver may change lives.** You may never know the impact you and your program have on a child. Therefore, it is with respect that we provide programs specifically for children.

Our childhood experiences affect us forever.

9.2 TYPES OF PROGRAMS

There are many types of programs that can be conducted with children. You can conduct talks, walks, campfires, and other types of programs with any specific audience in mind, including kids. But there are also specific programs designed to be particularly effective with children. The following sections describe typical situations you will encounter. The most common children's programs are presented in the park or in the classroom.

MIXED AUDIENCE WITH CHILDREN

One of the most common settings in which children connect with park resources is traditional park programs like nature walks, historic tours, and campfire programs. Families attend interpretive programs together, yet a child's needs in this setting are sometimes overlooked. As Freeman Tilden reminds us, programs for children should follow a "fundamentally different approach" than programs for adults. This leads some interpreters to address either the adults' or the children's need—not both.

In fact, the best programs engage all ages and abilities. As with any interpretive opportunity, the key is to incorporate as many different types of learning (visual, tactile, auditory, movement, etc.) as possible. While some enjoy stories and pictures, others may want facts and information. English language learners may appreciate more direct interaction with the resource or props. Facts, stories, hands-on opportunities, sensory involvement, analogies, metaphors, pictures, and direct experiences with natural and cultural resources are all components of a successful program designed to meet the needs of a mixed audience *(Module 3—Communication)*. Using a variety of interactive methods will also help you connect to audience members with special needs, such as those with language or physical challenges.

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I really enjoyed you showing us the wonders of Anza-Borrego. It seems like one of—if not, the coolest parks in California. You've really taught me a lot about the wildlife they have there. I would like to go there sometime soon because of all the cool sights there. I will try to convince my parents on taking me there this year.

School Group Visitor (PORTS), Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

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In addition, all adults, not just the parents or guardians, typically appreciate what you do for children. Kids in an audience often create opportunities for adults to be children again. Society usually tempers this desire with regimented restrictions, but **interpretive programs can offer an "approved" setting where adults can play.** When conducting programs for a mixed-age audience, provide opportunities to touch, explore, interact, and imagine, without minimizing the informational components. Let the guidelines outlined in this module assist you in planning appropriate activities for children in a mixed-age audience.

A well-planned interpretive program will engage all ages and abilities.

STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

California State Parks currently offers the following children's programs on a statewide basis. These programs reach thousands annually, and it is up to the interpreter to make these programs successful. Here is a brief description of each.

Junior Rangers

The Junior Ranger program began in California State Parks in the early 1970s; it has become one of the most important and successful elements of our statewide interpretive programming. Children aged 7 to 12 participate in interpreter-led programs or self-guided activities, earning a variety of awards that signify completion of different topics and levels. Children are the target audience and drive the selection of materials, activities, and topics. California State Parks developed a *Junior Ranger Handbook* to direct the preparation and delivery of Junior Ranger programs. The handbook contains guidelines for working with kids, sample programs, activities, subject information, resources, and self-guided activities.

> *The goals of the Junior Ranger Program are to offer programming specifically designed for children that develop(s) in children an appreciation for their cultural and natural resources heritage, an awareness of interrelationship among those resources, and a desire to help protect them.*
>
> Department of Parks and Recreation, 1998

Junior Ranger Adventure Guide

The Junior Ranger Adventure Guide is a self-guided program consisting of a workbook that can easily be adapted to any California state park. It is easy to implement, even in the off-season. Children obtain the Adventure Guide at the park or download it ahead of time from the Internet. Once at the site, they are invited to explore the park, participate in park activities and complete puzzles and games related to what they've experienced. After completing the activities, participants show their work to park staff and receive an award. The activities are designed to be especially useful in state recreation areas and state historic parks; the award can be easily adapted for different locations.

Junior Lifeguards

Junior Lifeguard programs are presented to children approximately 9 to 15 years of age. They focus specifically on water safety and aquatic natural history. Aquatic recreation, exercise, competition, lifeguard skills and basic First Aid and CPR are introduced. Junior Lifeguard programs involve more contact time with children than do Junior Ranger programs. Junior Lifeguard programs are generally four-week summer programs and average 100 hours of contact time per child. This extended relationship allows interpreters to build on previous lessons and ideas, so a more in-depth examination of topics takes place. Programs culminate in a formal graduation ceremony to celebrate the child's achievements. The Aquatic Operations Handbook provides an overview of the Junior Lifeguard Program.

Environmental Living and Environmental Studies Programs

Environmental Living Programs (ELPs) provide children overnight park experiences that explore the interaction between people and their environments. Immersed for a brief time in the past, students learn from their own experiences about earlier cultures and lifestyles.

Environmental Studies Programs (ESPs) have similar goals to ELPs but are organized without the overnight stay. Both are structured to provide the most informative experience in the allotted time, focusing on the unit's interpretive themes. Both programs are coordinated with concepts taught in the classroom. They differ from standard tours and programs in their in-depth nature, their length, and their immersion of the children in the subject matter being discussed. Programs incorporate demonstrations, hands-on activities, and follow-up student assignments.

PORTS

Park Online Resources for Teachers and Students take classes from all over California on virtual field trips to California State Parks. Teachers and students are provided with complete units of study aligned with state curriculum standards and then participate in live videoconferences. Included in the PORTS program are lessons to prepare the students for the videoconference, supporting materials, and links to further resources. A class could explore paleontology at Anza-Borrego Desert, tide pools at Crystal Cove, the gold rush at Columbia, or the elephant seals at Año Nuevo. Many other topics and parks are also explored through PORTS.

Litter-Getters

The statewide Litter-Getter Program is open to all but is especially popular with children aged three to six. Children pick up a "Litter-Getter bag" from park staff and fill it with trash from the campgrounds and trails. Once the bag is full, it is redeemed for a sticker book and the opportunity to fill another trash bag and earn another sticker. Litter bags and awards are available to support this program.

Additional Programs

Some parks provide other opportunities, such as Young Naturalists or Cubs, specifically for children under the age of seven. Teen programs, high school helpers, Jr. Ranger summer camps and after-school Junior Ranger clubs are also offered at some parks. These programs are developed and provided based on an individual park's needs, goals, and expertise. Although encouraged, they are not a formal statewide program, and offerings vary considerably from park to park.

For more information on any of these statewide programs, contact your supervisor or your District Interpretive Specialist.

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We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

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CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR BILL OF RIGHTS

Every child should have the opportunity to:

- Play in a Safe Place
- Explore Nature
- Learn to Swim
- Go Fishing
- Camp Under the Stars
- Ride a Bike
- Go Boating
- Connect with the Past
- Plant a Seed

California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks and Tourism

SCHOOL GROUPS

You can expect to take part in school group programs for the hundreds of thousands of students who come from the over 15,000 schools that visit our parks. "As field trip destinations, California's state parks are invaluable to schools interested in getting students out of the classroom and into the world beyond the school boundaries" (State Park System Plan, California State Parks, 2002, p. 3).

Programs conducted with school groups follow a somewhat different approach than those conducted with children who are not part of school groups. One of the primary differences between school group programs and other children's programs is that program content should not only be driven by the park's significance and messages but also **by mandated curriculum standards.**

Over half a million school students attend California State Park programs each year.

—California State Parks Quick Facts.

There are other differences as well; for example, in the school-group setting, teachers will often handle behavioral problems that the interpreter may need to address in non-school group situations. If school group programs are conducted in the classroom, the lack of distractions from a park setting can be beneficial. Of course, there is no substitute for a real park visit.

School Groups	Not With School Groups
• More organized	• Less organized
• More group experience	• No familiar leader
• Familiarity with teacher	• May not know each other
• May have studied topic as group	• Not accustomed to group action
• Typically same age	• Often wide range of ages
• Teacher or chaperones may help manage group	• Interpreter manages group

Academic Content Standards

All programs conducted for school groups within California State Parks must be aligned with academic content standards. These content standards direct what each student must learn in each grade within California schools. Since a school's accountability is based on the academic content standards, creating interpretive opportunities that incorporate these content standards increases the overall benefit for the students, schools, teachers, and the park. **Programs should get students into natural and cultural settings, provide opportunities for them to learn about and experience science and history firsthand, expose them to California State Parks, and help teachers meet content standards.** By meeting teachers' needs, we are assured continued support from schools as we reach out to this important audience.

School group programs require careful planning.

Although standards help us identify and support appropriate concepts, themes should not be based solely on content standards. Choose your theme the same way all themes are selected—park significance, management goals and objectives, interests of the audience, etc. You may find a training CD helpful: *California State Parks, Integrating Academic Content Standards into School Group Interpretive Programs.* Descriptions of

standards are available on the internet. Your District Interpretive Coordinator can help you locate standards or the training CD. There is a lot to consider when planning a school group program.

WHEN PLANNING A SCHOOL GROUP PROGRAM, CONSIDER

- Park resources and identified interpretive themes
- Needs of park management
- Needs and interests of the students
- Needs and requests of the teacher
- State academic content standards
- Time available
- Location of program
- Number of students and adults
- Your own skills, knowledge and abilities

Example #1: Ms. Jackson's Fourth Grade Class

Ms. Jackson's fourth grade class will be coming to your forest park. She wants you to take them on a nature walk. There will be 26 students and 6 adults. A quick peek online at the content standards reminds you that fourth graders are learning that *all organisms need energy and matter to live and grow.* As a basis for understanding this concept, they need to know about:

- plants being the primary source of matter and energy for food chains
- producers and consumers as they relate in food chains and food webs
- decomposers, including fungi, insects, etc.

They are also learning that *living organisms depend on one another and on their environment for survival.*

Knowing that they are mostly 9-year-olds with one hour for your walk, you select a one-mile trail with many natural examples demonstrating varieties of plants, food chains and webs, and rotting logs full of decomposers. You develop a theme based on these learning objectives as they relate to:

- **your trail's strengths:** There are lots of fallen trees and rotting logs
- **your management needs:** There are problems with people harvesting firewood, so you'll want to work in the importance of leaving downed wood in place.
- **your interpretive skills:** You love to play games but couldn't sing with a group if your life depended on it!. Plus, you are a birder and know the locations of several nests.

You decide on the theme: "We need each other to survive." Recognizing that you will have one adult for every five or six children, you plan ahead and direct the adults to take responsibility for keeping their groups together and on task. You remember a game about food chains that you played once, and think about how that will work with your space, time and group size. At this point, you apply everything you've learned from *Module 6—Talks* and *Module 7—Walks*, to develop, present, and evaluate your program.

Example #2: Mr. Salvador's Kindergarten Class

Mr. Salvador is bringing his kindergarten class to your oak woodland park on a morning in October. They will have an hour and fifteen minutes. He would like a nature walk but reminds you that his children tend to have short attention spans. He will be able to bring about seven parent helpers along. After checking the content standards for kindergarten, you know that the students are learning that *different types of plants and animals inhabit the earth.* As a basis for understanding this, they need to know about:

- observing and describing similarities and differences in appearance and behavior of plants and animals
- how stories sometimes give plants and animals attributes they do not really have.
- the names of major structures of animals and plants, such as roots, stems, arms, wings, etc.

You take a quick peek at the Social Studies content standards online too, and see that the kids are learning to:

- recognize national and state symbols and icons
- match simple descriptions of work that people do and the names of jobs in the local community.

You decide that the best approach for this group of 5-year-olds will be to do several short activities that are linked together by the theme, "Oak woodlands create a special California home for plants, animals, and people."

You begin your program by having the children help you unfold and raise the American and California flags, and talk about how this is our home and why there is a bear on the flag. Next you'll tell them about the important job that rangers do to keep the wild land healthy, protect the animals, and help people who are lost. You'll briefly show them some of your equipment (binoculars, gun, handcuffs,

sunscreen, etc.) You let one girl come up and try on your Stetson to see if she'd like to be a ranger someday.

Next you plan to walk a short ways to an oak grove. You explain to the kids that there are many animals and plants in the woodland and that there are only a couple that could hurt them Tell them what to do if they see a snake (if that is likely) or encounter poison oak. Explain that oak woodlands are a great home for many animals and along the walk you'll be looking for clues that animals live there. You might ask for some ideas ahead of time about what they think might live there, or have some pictures to show of common birds, bugs, and mammals. You plan to encourage them to point out holes in the ground, nibble marks on leaves, nests, feathers, scat, etc.

You might have one stop on your walk where you ask the kids to identify all the parts of a tree that they can name and give them time to touch and smell the bark and feel the leaves. If you follow this with a stop at a second tree, they can tell you how the two trees are alike or different. You might stop at a tree with woodpecker holes in it and show them a picture of a woodpecker. Who can name its body parts? Do all birds have beaks that look the same as this? Why not?

At the grove, you'll have the parents help as the children choose a partner for the activity "Meet A Tree" found in Joseph Cornell's book *Sharing Nature with Children.*

After that, you'll have the kids pretend to be squirrels and collect as many acorns as possible in two minutes. Then look at them and discuss what acorns are for, and what their role in nature might be. Some one will probably ask about galls, another unique oak habitat! Have the children return the acorns so they can be food for wildlife or plant themselves for the future. If the idea seems workable, you'll have them all lie on their backs looking up through the trees quietly for ten seconds and listening to the sounds of nature in the grove. If there is time, you'll read a short Native American myth about *Coyote and the Acorns,* before returning to the parking lot.

Along the way back, you plan to stop at one more tree and evaluate what the kids have learned by asking what tree parts they can name, what similarities and differences they can identify, and whether or not they recognize the tree as a home for wildlife. You hope you'll have time at the end of the trail to have them pretend they are tiny acorns, growing tall with bark and branches and leaves etc. If not, you'll finish up at the parking lot with a reminder about how lucky we were to visit the oak woodland that is such a special California home for plants, animals, and people too.

Making park resource-based education an integral part of the formal educational system is a worthy goal. Through school group programs we can reach populations that otherwise may not visit California State Parks. Planting the seeds of pride and stewardship in a variety of population groups may help reduce some of the problems parks will face in the future. In addition, reaching children through school-based programs helps integrate the park and its resources into the whole community. In fact, the basic theories and approaches of interpretation make learning exciting, interesting, and fun—thus helping to create lifelong learners and park stewards.

Interest makes play of the hardest work.

Enos Mills

Now that you understand the general types of kids' programs we offer, let's review the basic characteristics of children relevant to conducting successful interpretive programs.

When California State Parks become partners with schools, everybody wins.

9.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN

Although each child is unique and individual, some characteristics are commonly recognized. Children of all ages are naturally curious, sensory driven and full of energy. Plan to embrace these characteristics in your programs.

CURIOSITY

What's that? Where does it come from? Why is the sky blue? Anyone who has ever been around children for any length of time can attest to the fact that they are naturally curious. In fact, "the earliest school years find children learning the names of things at a phenomenal rate, never again matched" (Tilden, 1977, p. 49). Adults are curious too, but are often trained by the conventions of society not to ask too many questions. By asking lots of questions, children will help you create experiences for them that are meaningful and relevant.

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It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.

Albert Einstein

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When conducting a program for kids, constant questions and interruptions may plague your program. This can be very frustrating…**OR**…you can take advantage of this natural curiosity, energy, and excitement, and channel it! Convey facts, names, dates, and details to children. Let them convey facts, names, dates and details to you! Stories, analogies, metaphors, etc., are important, but kids also want to know the specifics. Do not stray too far from the planned path, but answer their questions. Better yet, facilitate their own abilities to find answers.

Interpreters have the opportunity to channel natural curiosity.

CHANNEL CURIOSITY

- **Entertain questions and comments in a controlled, timely fashion.** For example, at the start of the program establish the times and places for stories, comments, and questions. Save comments and stories for the end, but take questions throughout the talk. You may need to explain the difference between comments and questions.
- **Listen!** Children respond well if they know you are listening.
- **Capitalize on kids' natural desire to learn.** Ask guiding questions to engage them in the resource.
- **Follow their eyes.** Find out what interests them.
- **Embrace the teachable moment.** If a snake slithers by, stop, watch and discuss, then link it to your theme if possible.

SENSE-SATIONAL!

The natural curiosity of children allows you to get them to do, feel, smell, and otherwise experience nature in ways that adults might not. Adults become cautious about touching things, especially if they do not know what it is. Kids, on the other hand, often do the opposite. In fact, touch helps them determine what something is. Engage senses frequently to help maximize the natural tendencies of kids to explore. As always, take care to ensure the safety of both the children and the environment when engaging them directly with the resources.

Offer opportunities for children to learn by using their senses.

Another characteristic very pronounced in younger children, partly because of their lack of inhibitions,…is the love of personal examination through (the) senses other than sight and hearing.

Freeman Tilden

MAKING SENSE OF SENSES

- **Engage at least one sense with every main point.**
- **Promote positive engagements with the resource.** Always explain WHY it is okay to touch, taste, smell, etc. Kids remember, so be sure you are giving the right lesson.
- **Focus on one sense at a time.** For example, blindfold kids and hand them something. Ask them to identify it, what produced it, or who uses the object. Or, place scents or scented items in a bag and have the kids identify the scent.
- **Change their perspective on a sense.** For example, have them lie on their backs and look at a tree. Have them count the shades of green they can find in the forest, in a square foot of ground, etc.
- **Enjoy yourself.** Many times kids just do not know how to experience the environment. They will learn much from simply watching you.
- **Point things out as you notice them,** especially the small, often overlooked things, or better yet, challenge the kids to notice what is special or unique.

ENERGIZED

Kids are just naturally energetic. They love to play and run, and have few inhibitions. Especially when outside the formal, regimented classroom, kids are likely to want to express themselves through physical activities. An interpreter who constantly reminds children to sit down, listen, stop talking, etc., is missing learning opportunities. Joseph Cornell's (1998) **flow learning** method provides a structured approach to working with kids and channeling their natural energy. Later in the module, we will review this theory and other techniques for focusing a child's natural excitement and energy.

Children's programs encourage exploration and direct interaction with nature.

AGES AND STAGES

Of course every child is unique, but the generalized descriptions below will serve as guidelines for planning children's programs.

Ages 2-6

At this age, children learn through their play.

Children at this age tend to experience the world through their senses. To them, everything they discover is "alive" and experiences the world the same way they do. For example, a young child might think a tree has feelings and parents, just as he/she does. Independent play, make believe and exploration are the primary ways they discover the world. Language skills also begin to emerge.

An interpreter helps tiny people enjoy activities on the big stage.

Kids in this stage of development do not typically have the ability to perform logical

operations in their minds. The world is what they see, feel, smell, taste, and hear. Socially, two- to six-year-old kids are self-centered. They see the world through their own eyes and have a difficult time grasping any other perspective. Kids at this age also tend to exhibit the preconventional level of moral reasoning. This means they primarily reason the appropriateness of an action based on their perceptions of associated rewards or fears of punishment that directly result from the behavior. This is why stickers, stars, and other methods of rewarding positive behavior work so well at this level of development.

PROGRAM TIPS FOR 2- TO 6-YEAR-OLDS

- Make children feel safe with you.
- Focus on make believe, play, and guided discovery.
- Establish behavioral expectations early.
- Engage children with stories, puppets, thematic songs, games, and sensory explorations.
- Keep groups small, or allow kids to participate in activities as individuals.
- Conduct short hikes, as younger kids tire easily. Be sensitive to their needs and abilities.
- If helpful, give human characteristics to things to illuminate difficult concepts.
- Shift activities, physical location, focuses, etc., frequently.
- Get down on one knee or find other ways to be at their level, eye to eye.
- Ask easy questions shortly after giving the answers.
- Make time to listen to them.
- Use repetition to get your theme and facts to stick.

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For the child…it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow… It is more important to pave the way for a child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts that he is not ready to assimilate.

Rachel Carson

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Ages 7-11

Curiosity and making connections drives learning.

7- to 11-year-olds have lots of questions.

Children at this level work well in groups or alone. They can classify objects, understand basic relationships, and grasp specific behavioral requests. Although kids at this level are very much wedded to the physical world, they can begin to perform logical operations in their minds. Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy are replaced with endless questions and inquiries about the nature, classification, or relationship of things.

Social and moral stages at this level of development result in children beginning to see the world from a perspective other than their own. Social development grows from the subjective perspective (ages five to nine) where children begin to understand that others have different perspectives, to the self-reflective thinking (age seven to twelve) category, where they begin to evaluate their own behavior. The world begins to open up to the concept of "others." Judgments about rightness of an action are now not based solely on the self, but also on the significant others and society as a whole.

PROGRAM TIPS FOR 7- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS

- Activities should involve direct experience with the resources.
- Facilitate whole group, partner, and individual exploration.
- Questions and inquiries are effective at helping guide discoveries.
- Use metaphors, analogies, and other cognitive descriptors to help kids understand difficult concepts.
- Behavioral requests and rules can be understandably discussed.
- Hikes can be longer (approximately 1/2-1 mile).
- Help them name and categorize items and relationships.
- Children are exuberant at this level of development; tap into their energy with thematic games, songs, and actions to perform.
- Kids like to "help" and will even compete for your attention. Assign roles to your "helpers" to keep them engaged.

Ages 12-14

Guiding the discovery on their own, with your help.

By age 12, children typically do not like to be called children. Kids in early adolescence can mentally manipulate hypothetical situations and time relationships, and can conduct inductive and deductive logic. They are aware of social norms and expectations and are painfully aware of their own physical appearance.

In this stage of cognitive development, children can think systematically about logical relationships that are not necessarily physically present. In addition, young teens can now understand something from a neutral third-person perspective or from the perspective of society as a whole. Discussions of global concepts and ideas now hold meaning.

When working with this age group, realize that for many of them their primary concern is their physical development. In this stage, they are acutely aware of themselves and everyone else in terms of physical appearance. It is important for them to feel safe and accepted by their peers. Provide challenges and opportunities to excel without putting anyone on the spot. Working in teams or groups or partnerships may create a more comfortable atmosphere. While some might be willing to stand up in front of others and perform on their own, let them volunteer for this, since most would prefer you didn't single them out. There is safety in numbers.

PROGRAM TIPS FOR 12- TO 14-YEAR-OLDS

- Discuss, debate, and allow them to express their own opinions.
- Let them take on adult roles.
- Engage their minds in "what if" scenarios. Their ability to reason, apply logic, and judge situations should be encouraged.
- Provide opportunities for them to guide the discovery, conversation, or direction of the program.
- Give them the tools to discover the answers (demonstrate how to use field guides, research techniques, keys, etc.).
- Encourage questions and discuss ways they can continue their involvement (participation in clubs is high at this level of development).
- Model desired behavior without telling them to do it. For example, students are more likely to pick up litter if they see you do it than if you ask/tell them to do it.

Teens and Young Adults

Forming values systems that last a lifetime.

By the middle and late teen years, growth is still occurring rapidly, acne may be a problem, and children are trying to reconcile who they are on the inside with who they appear to be on the outside. Some teens experience emotional ups and downs while others struggle with awkward physicality, both side effects of a quick-growing body.

Teens and 'tweens need adults who are positive role models.

This is when values are formed and may remain for a lifetime. Teens are examining good and evil and need to have positive relationships with adults during this time who can be friends and mentors. At this stage, children fully believe they are adults and interpreters should treat them as such while remembering that they are still youth with more development ahead.

Kids in their middle teen years are open to trying different hobbies and start to be interested in many things. This is a great opportunity for the interpreter, as teens may find that they can discover more about themselves through nature or learning about historic cultures. They may seem unstable at times, as they are exploring different points of view and trying on different identities. This is just part of searching for who they are in this world.

One technique that works well with this group is to give them your respect and trust from the start of the program while carefully setting the boundaries and expectations. You will find most groups meet or exceed your expectations. Though some teens may appear sullen or withdrawn, they are very

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When most people think of teenagers, they think "rebellion," "stress," and "turbulence." The truth is, however, that teenagers are often delightful people. They're idealistic. They're exuberant. They're creative. They have a lot of energy and drive. They see the world in a different way than adults do, and many have insightful perspectives. They are exploding into possibility—like a new star being born.

Peter L. Benson

▪ ▪ ▪

aware of your every action. Modeling behaviors such as picking up litter or the right way to hold an artifact will leave a lasting impression on them. They want to be shown the right way to do things.

Remember how you felt awkward at this age and wanted to look cool, like you knew it all, even though you were unsure of yourself. Be gentle and kind about incorrect answers by carefully thanking them for their input, highlighting any grains of truth and redirecting the question. Using humor and poking fun at yourself is a fun way to disarm teenagers. Giving time for independent activities for reflection and capturing their impressions in a logbook or on a specially designed journal can be highly effective with this group.

Another way to put them at ease and increase the likelihood of their full participation is to have specific programs for them without the direct involvement of their parents or teachers. If you give programs for teens and they do not appear to be enjoying themselves or will not actively participate, remember that teens can have tough outer shells and may still be getting the message. Before you drastically change your program, ask the participants after the program, away from their peers, what they enjoyed the most and to name one thing they learned from the program. You may be pleasantly surprised by what they are actually taking away from your program.

If your program is all day or continues over subsequent days, you might want to use an approach called "experiential learning" with this age group. Think about your park resources, themes, content standards, etc. and then ask yourself, "What experience could teens have in my park that would help them understand these concepts?" Try to create a program that contains the following elements:

1. Reflection, critical analysis and synthesis
2. Opportunities for students to take the initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results
3. Opportunities for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially, or physically
4. A designed learning experience that includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes

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Think of your content as gum and your students processing, practicing, and reflecting as the chewing. You want less gum and more chewing.

Jay Roberts

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Here are some additional thoughts on communicating with this age group.

PROGRAM TIPS FOR TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

- Treat them like adults, but also carefully set behavior expectations and boundary/time limits for exploration.
- Respect their fear of being put on the spot.
- Give them respect and responsibility.
- Provide open-ended discussion and problem-solving tasks.
- Role-playing debates are a fun way to engage their intellect and dramatic abilities.
- Make time to listen to them intently.
- Avoid lecturing.
- Avoid intensely direct eye contact.
- Give them a chance to share their ideas and discoveries with small groups of their peers.
- Take time to ask their feelings, opinions and thoughts.
- Involve them with thematic hands-on resource projects, such as planting, removing invasive species, etc.
- Invite them to volunteer in the park.
- Ask them about their hopes and aspirations for the future.
- Ask them about their special talents.
- Model the behaviors you want them to use.
- Use norms (*Module 3—Communication*) to assure their compliance with park rules.
- Be yourself and let your life show through your teaching.

Special Needs

Some of the children attending your program may have visual, mental, mobility, learning, or hearing impairments. As with all visitors with disabilities, these kids have the right to be able to attend, with minimal alteration, any programs being offered. The guide *All Visitors Welcome* recommends that we "focus on what these children can do rather than what they cannot, and how you can adapt your program to meet their special needs" (p. 31). *All Visitors Welcome* and the *Junior Ranger Program Handbook* both include many helpful pointers for working with visitors with various disabilities. Do not assume you know how to accommodate special-needs children. Ask the teacher ahead of time, or ask older children directly what they want to do and how you can help them do it. Let them guide you. As always, include several different kinds of stimuli (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) to increase your success.

Non-English speaking children also introduce some interesting challenges. Many of the techniques listed below will assist in working with this special needs group as well. In addition, refer to *Module 6—Talks* for more tips on working with non-English speaking visitors. Engaging visitors in the resource, using props like photos, pelts and historical items, and guiding exploration are all useful techniques.

PROGRAM TIPS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

- Find out about special needs from the teacher in advance.
- Allow the child with a disability to provide input on what is necessary to accommodate him or her.
- Engage as many senses as possible.
- Describe objects, and if possible, provide opportunities to touch them.
- Face the audience and speak clearly.
- Offer assistance, but do not automatically give it.
- Be aware of any special facilities or assistance (listening devices, language interpreters, etc.) available in your park.
- Be respectful, friendly, and open.
- Do not give too much special attention to any single child.
- Be flexible and adaptable to needs.

Adapted from the Junior Ranger Handbook, CSP

Working with children reminds us that interpretation is about connecting to beauty, mystery, and wonder.

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If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder…he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.

Rachel Carson

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9.5 MECHANICS

SAFETY FIRST

As the interpreter, you will be responsible for the safety of your group. This may mean anything from counting your group and not losing anyone, to calling 911, or providing first response if that is part of your training and job classification.

Tips for Safe Programs

- Keep group size small (no more than 15). This helps you maintain control and protect the children from the actions of themselves or others. If you must work with a larger group, have the teacher take half on a self-guided activity (then switch) or enlist docents to assist you.
- Establish rules and expectations for behavior with the parents and with the kids.
- Talk to children about dangers you may encounter (poison oak, etc.) at the beginning of the program and reduce fears.
- Know where the parents will be during the program and what the protocol is for dealing with an injury.
- Be sure you always have a means of contacting other staff to help in the event of an emergency.
- Check in with the kids; ask them how they are doing. Many children may never have been in a natural or cultural resource park before, and basic fears can be strong.

HAVE FUN!

Remember what it was like to play, get dirty, and touch the ground? Children will learn more, accept more, and remember more if you play, laugh, and enjoy the experience **with** them. Kids who have never interacted with natural and cultural resources before will look to you for cues on how to respond. Dive into it! The best technique is to have fun. What **you** love, enjoy, and get excited by, kids will too. When your program is fun, the kids will be fully engaged and behavioral problems will be at a minimum.

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"…enthusiasm is contagious, and that…is perhaps your greatest asset as an interpreter."

Joseph Cornell

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MANAGE BEHAVIOR

There is a fine line between allowing children to explore and discover something for themselves and letting them run wild and out of control. The trick is to find that line and walk it like a tightrope. Establish parameters for behavior early, and allow children to expend some of their energy at the start of a program. Specific techniques for controlling behavior vary depending on the developmental level, the group's structure, the environment, distractions, and the presence or absence of other adults.

One technique that teachers (and interpreters) use to manage behavior is to put it "on cue." A behavior cue is when you do or say something and the children have a verbal or physical response that they must give. Those of you who were scouts will still remember the cue for silence (two fingers in the air.) For young children, you might teach the group to respond when you make your hands into rabbit ears and say "rabbit ears!" The children must respond by putting their hands on their heads, making rabbit ears, and showing that they are ready to listen. (Nose wiggling is optional.)

Be sure that you make all the children comply with the behavioral cue before you move on to the next topic, activity, etc. You are the leader, but they will exert considerable social pressure on each other to comply. Select or develop specific behavior cues depending on the subject matter, group structure, etc. Here is a list of attention getters that have worked for elementary school students. How could you adapt them for your park setting? You can also ask teachers, seasoned interpreters, colleagues and peers what they use. Experiment!

Let the kids know how you expect them to behave at the beginning of your program.

MORE BEHAVIOR CUES AND ATTENTION GETTERS

LEADER	STUDENTS
"All Set"	"You Bet"
Say, "Clap Once" pause, "Clap Twice" pause, "Clap three times" etc.	Students respond with claps.
"One two three, eyes on me"	"One two, eyes on you"
Use a bell, duck call, drum, rain stick, etc.	When students hear your sound, they stop, look and listen.
"Give me five" (Hold hand in the air)	Students hold hand in the air. Five fingers represent "Stop And Look At Me"
"If you can hear my voice, pat your head…if you can hear my voice, flap your wings…" etc.	Students will notice others responding with actions and will want to "play" too.
Secret Clap: leader claps a special pattern	Class repeats special pattern when they hear it.
"Shark Bait"	Students hold out arms like a giant jaw and clap together
"Who lives in a pineapple under the sea"	"Sponge Bob Square Pants!"
"Looking for gold…"	"Eureka!"

Tips for managing behavior

- Outline expectations and consequences at the start of the program.
- Put behavior "on cue" early in the program. Do not let behavior stray too far from expectations or it will be hard to regain control.
- Be consistent in behavioral requests and enforcements.
- Do not yell. This signifies that you have lost control.
- Use proximity. Put a problem child next to you.
- Disapproving "looks" are powerful tools, but only if you follow through.
- Delegate responsibility. Disruptive children make good "helpers."
- Enlist others (parents, teachers, volunteers, etc.) to assist.
- If the problem persists, discuss it privately with the child. As with any visitor, identify the problem behavior, the negative impacts to the resource, to others, and to themselves from the behavior, and address how the situation can be fixed.
- Give the child time to comply. Do not expect immediate results.
- Praise and ignore. Often when you praise the child who is following your directions, the others will try to win your approval as well. Ignore behavior that is not ideal but is not threatening safety or the ability of the group to learn.

Keep it Short

As we learned in *Module 3—Communication,* adults have short attention spans. However, they are capable of making themselves focus for longer periods of time. Children, on the other hand, are more natural in their responses to things. If they are bored, they will let you know! Fidgeting, talking, moving around, and generally not paying attention are all classic signals indicating you have lost their interest. Attention spans are very short for kids and "most of them have not learned to be politely quiet when the span is exceeded" (Lewis, 1980, p. 126).

Children are naturally drawn to learning if you can keep the spirit of the occasion happy and enthusiastic.

Joseph Cornell

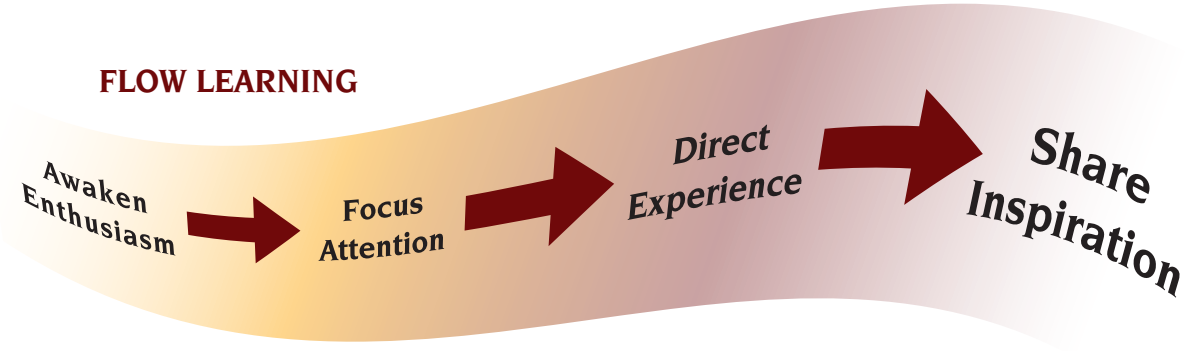
Depending on the developmental level, attention spans may range from a few seconds to about 10 minutes. Programs can and should be conducted for longer periods of time than this, but to be successful the interpreter needs to shift focus, location, subject matter, and activity often. For example,

one great technique to use when working with kids is to move their physical location frequently. Having them stand up, sit down, face the other way, etc., is effective in regaining interest and focus. They need to move; use it to your advantage.

The most successful programs keep children physically **and** mentally engaged. Keep information in "sound bites." Children cannot listen for extended periods of time. Weave information with activities and games to gain a child's interest. Don't be boring!

Flow Learning

Another successful approach for conducting programs with children developed by Joseph Cornell is called "flow learning." Cornell created flow learning from four distinct stages that mirror the natural process of learning and outlines the approach in detail in his book, *Sharing the Joy of Nature.* Stage 1 is awaken enthusiasm; Stage 2 is called focus attention; Stage 3 is direct experience; and Stage 4 is share inspiration. Each of the four stages has accompanying activities that help maximize that particular stage of learning. Cornell has published several outstanding books that provide activities you can use to enrich your nature programs with all audiences.



OTHER RESOURCES

There are lots of resources available to help you design your children's program. *Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, Project Wild Aquatic,* and *Project Wet* provide guidelines, curriculum, activities, and learning opportunities designed to encourage children to think and learn about the natural world. You can access these resources through workshops offered throughout the state that are available to everyone. In addition, books, websites, and other curriculum guides are readily available to help you develop your interpretive programs. Some may have been developed specifically for your park.

One of the best ways to make your programs relevant to kids is to know what is popular in their culture. See current kid's movies, learn the latest "texting" vocabulary, know their expressions and read their books. For example, if you know a current kid's movie

addresses the topic of climate change and species survival, you can use that to relate it to your program. Leading a nature walk for young children? Turn it into an adventure like Dora the Explorer, with your map and backpack as props.

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Every child should have mud pies, grasshoppers, water bugs, tadpoles, frogs, mud turtles, elderberries, wild strawberries, acorns, chestnuts, trees to climb. Brooks to wade, water lilies, woodchucks, bats, bees, butterflies, various animals to pet, hay fields, pine cones, rocks to roll, sand, snakes, huckleberries and hornets. And any child who has been deprived of these has been deprived of the best part of education.

Luther Burbank

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There is no formula or guide for working with children that can replace your own natural enthusiasm, creativity, and passion. There is no substitute for you. Your love of the subject and of your audience is the greatest asset you have. Working with children presents wonderful opportunities to share your inspiration, knowledge, and understanding of natural and cultural resources. By engaging them and their families, you are developing park stewards who will share your desire to preserve and protect our heritage.

Help all children understand, appreciate, and enjoy their state parks.

WHAT'S AHEAD?

Now that we have reviewed many of the basic types of formal interpretive programs, let us turn to the most common type of informal interpretation in the parks—roving interpretation. It involves taking our techniques, skills, and interpretive messages to the visitors—on the trails, in the visitor centers, in the campgrounds, or wherever they might be. The next module will provide guidelines for conducting successful roving interpretation.

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Module 9

KIDS

SELF ASSESSMENT

Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in *Module 9—Kids* The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read *Module 9—Kids* Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

1) What was your earliest park use memory? Do you think today's children are getting similar experiences?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2) Can you name three things you learned directly from nature as a child?

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

3. _____
_____

3) What would be a direct benefit of today's children getting to experience more natural or historic site settings?

_____
_____
_____
_____

3) How is planning a children's program similar to planning an interpretive talk or walk? How is it different?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4) Name three special children's programs conducted statewide in California State Parks.

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

3. _____
_____

5) What do you think might be your biggest personal challenge when designing or presenting a children's program?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6) Programs conducted with formal school groups should be based on (Circle all that apply.)

a) School curriculum

b) Content standards

c) Park themes

d) Interpreter interest

7) List three things you should do when leading a walk with young children aged two to six.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

8) Programs conducted with children 7 to 11 years old should (Circle all that apply.)

a) Involve questions and inquiries

b) Be detailed and thorough

c) Include written exercises

d) Practice guided discovery

9) Programs for children 12 to 14 years old should (Circle all that apply.)

a) Involve debates and discussions

b) Allow them to guide the discovery

c) Promote individual performances in front of the group

d) Encourage self-directed exploration

10) Name three techniques for including a child with mobility impairments in your program.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

11) You should not get down on the physical level of the kids during a talk. (Explain your answer.)

a) True

b) False

_____
_____
_____

12) What does it mean to "put behavior on cue?"

_____
_____
_____

13) When leading kids on a hike, list three ways to ensure the safety of your group.

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

3. _____
_____

14) Which is more important: (choose one and explain your answer)

☐ 1. That children learn science or history on your walk.

☐ 2. That children have an enjoyable experience in a park setting.

_____
_____
_____

15) Why are teenagers an important audience for state park interpretive programs?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

16) Describe two ways to manage disruptive behavior during a children's program.

1. _____
_____

2. _____
_____

Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in *Module 9—Kids* to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.

WORKBOOK LEARNING ACTIVITIES

To help you review and apply the material covered in *Module 9—Kids*, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

1) Interpreting to a group of 7-year-old children, how would you:

Explain tides using something familiar to inner city kids.

_____
_____
_____

Teach about the water cycle using kinesthetic learning?

_____
_____
_____

Explain why the tribe is NOT extinct, even though the members no longer live in their former dwellings.

_____
_____
_____

Use something familiar to them to explain why the statue represents history.

_____
_____
_____

Explain why they should not pick the endangered flowers.

_____
_____
_____

Use something familiar to them to explain that time is relative.

Use two or more senses to explain the seasons.

2) Develop an activity for 12-year-olds to educate them about:

Choose one:

The importance of cultural diversity

or

The importance of habitat restoration

3) You are conducting a program with a group of 14-year-old children with their teacher present. One of them has been continuously disrupting the program. You have tried making him your helper, keeping him next to you, and asking him to stop. You are still ½ mile from the end of your nature walk. What are three things you could do to manage the situation?

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

Take it to YOUR Park

Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use the answers as a guide for beginning your career in California State Parks.

KIDS

Park name: _____

1) What types of children's programs are conducted in your park? For what ages?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2) If Junior Ranger, Junior Lifeguard, and/or Litter Getter programs are not offered, why not? If yes, how successful are they?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3) What schools near your park visit the park routinely? Which schools do not visit? Why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4) Has there been an outreach effort by your park staff to provide programs in the classroom? To what extent and how successful was it?

5) Design a children's program to be conducted with children ages 11 to 14 in your park. Brainstorm, create the theme, outline the program, create activities, etc. What is the objective of the program? How does it support park management or interpretive goals? What visual aids, props, audiovisual equipment, and supplies will you need?