

The Time Travelling Trunks: Portable, Educational, and Creative Encounters with History



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Background

The Southwest Seattle Historical Society (SWSHS) is home to a number of educational trunks that include access to primary sources and teaching collection objects. Unfortunately, there is scant interpretation present, and many of the materials have become culturally insensitive or have fallen into disrepair. Though in need of a makeover, these trunks present an opportunity for SWSHS to introduce multiple modes of engagement with schoolchildren, including interactive lesson plans and original theatrical interpretation.

At the moment, museum theatre is still a developing field, and many small nonprofit organizations and k-12 schools have not yet incorporated this into their exhibitions and educational materials. The need for museum theatre and creative, targeted learning at small institutions is made evident by the fact that nearly all current museum theatre is taking place at large, well-funded organizations. Small institutions frequently lack the funding, time, and staff to incorporate educational museum theatre into their programming.

Purpose

The creation of relevant lesson plans and the integration of original theatrical opportunities were the focus of this project, aiming to update and diversify SWSHS's educational offerings in order to create a multimodal experience that can be incorporated into the curriculum of schools in SWSHS's service area.



History is Interactive!

> Studies have shown that theatre can offer significant educational enhancement to elementary-aged children (Jackson and Leahy, 2006).

> Learning history in a hands-on way allows students to experience the past in a diverse and intimate way (Clements, 2017).

> SWSHS's trunks will have the ability to reach nearly 5,000 students in the West Seattle Area!

Goals

This project served to address two major goals:

1. SWSHS will have a piece of repeatable, relevant, and immersive educational programming that will not require staff or volunteers, but will be integrated into the local school system.
2. SWSHS will expand its demographic to include students in its service area.

Deliverables

In order to meet these goals, the deliverable consisted of three components:

1. A series of short lesson plans relating to the trunks that correspond to each grade level.
 1. One of these lessons will incorporate theatrical elements in order to encourage students to write their own historical play.
2. Collection care and integrated pest management plan for future use.
3. Proposal of items to be deaccessioned from current trunk collections for ethical or safety reasons.

Process

Work was conducted in four phases:

1. Research and Relationship Development

This phase consisted of gaining familiarity with object-based curriculum, effective lesson plans, and the process of writing theatrical work for museums. It also included consultations with SWSHS, the Duwamish tribe, and other professionals in the field that were knowledgeable on intended focus, incorporating multiple perspectives, and programming.

2. Educational and Theatrical Writing

The writing phase entailed the creation of 13 short lesson plans, the compilation of the collection care and integrated pest management plan, and forming a compelling theatrical experience. This stage allowed me to tap into my creativity to integrate fun ideas into the programming for the trunks.

3. Implementation

This phase allowed me to further collaborate with SWSHS staff before the trunks were deemed ready for the schools in the service area, make revisions using feedback from my committee members, and begin to schedule in person instruction with local schools to test the effectiveness of the trunks in a classroom setting.

4. Evaluation and Reflection

Finally, the last phase in this process integrated an evaluative component, requiring exit interviews from SWSHS staff, community collaborators, and committee members.

What's in the Trunks?

Three trunks were completed, each of them containing identical materials. These materials included:

- > 13 lesson plans per trunk (one each, grades K-12). These lessons are as follows:
 - > GK: Storytelling
 - > G1: Comparing Cultural Games
 - > G2: The Changing Duwamish
 - > G3: Creating a Newspaper Ad
 - > G4: Fashion Timeline
 - > G5: Comparing Writings about "Settling" Seattle
 - > G6: Historic Letter Writing
 - > G7: Innovation at Luna Park
 - > G8: The Spirit Returns
 - > G9: Isaac Stevens: Hero or Villain?
 - > G10: Playwriting
 - > G11: Women Win the Vote
 - > G12: Oral Histories

> Supplemental literature for each lesson

> Supplemental historic photographs from SWSHS collection

> Objects from SWSHS teaching collection that help fulfill specific learning objectives.

> A simple and brief collections care plan that is accessible to both staff members and instructors.

Next Steps

Schools on the Duwamish Peninsula will have the opportunity to rent these trunks and lesson plans for use in their respective classrooms.

Trunks or individual lesson plans will be given to schools for a period of two weeks, with the instructors picking up and dropping off the materials.

When rented, lessons will be self contained, and will not require purchase of additional materials or staff support from SWSHS.

While the lesson plans do place an emphasis on critical thinking in relation to current events, trunks will not be reliant on trends or changing social situations. Material covered is largely evergreen.



Reflections and Acknowledgements

This project was not without its roadblocks. While I began this process with the intention of focusing solely on curriculum and theatrical creativity, ultimately I was able to learn firsthand of the importance of a strong collections management plan as well as the necessity of correct storage and choice of materials when compiling an educational trunk.

When the trunks were initially opened for this process, it was discovered that the overwhelming majority of collections items had been infested with insects. Furthermore, the degradation that had begun on some of the items used as food for the various insects had contributed to a massive amount of debris that had in turn affected the other items negatively. Because of this, most of the objects in the trunks had to be disposed of.

Additionally, the trunks contained material that is now viewed as culturally offensive, which necessitated deaccessioning of particularly problematic items from the educational collections.

In essence, these trunks were built from scratch. While beginning anew has its own challenges, it was helpful to have a clean slate which contributed to greater creativity and allowed for a fresh, new interpretation of West Seattle's history.

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