Telling stories with pictures
– Painting pictures with words

Presented by Barbara Wilson
Volunteer Steward – Lake in the Hills Fen

You can use displays, leaflets and guided walk commentary to get your message across by capturing attention in various ways. Different mentalities gravitate to text or pictures so use both.

Remember to:

- Design for your customer’s age, attention span, interests, etc.
- Adapt for children’s eyes that see from a different perspective and height.
- Lead the eye to the salient points of your statement.
- Use rhymes, alliteration, stories and humor: they are great memory aids.
- Repeat. Repetition is the core of learning. Tell people what they are going to be seeing; tell them what they are seeing; tell them what they have seen.

DISPLAYS AND LEAFLETS

1. Captions or text
   a) Make sure the vocabulary and content is age appropriate for your customer. This can require two different versions, one for adults and one for children.
   b) Place your words directly beside, below or in a box with your illustration. All the words for several pictures placed below lead the eye to the wrong picture.
   c) A summary of several captions can be used at the top, side or bottom of each page or display board if each picture is then identified individually.
   d) Check and check again your facts, spelling, etc.

2. Pictures or Illustrations
   a) Think carefully about what you want to say with each picture. If you want to talk about the seeds of a plant don’t use a picture of the flowers. Wait until you have a picture of the seeds to use with your information.
   b) When choosing whether to use a photograph or an outline drawing consider which better describes the point you want to make. Sometime a photograph can’t show a detail as clearly as a drawing or vice versa.
WALK COMMENTARY

1. General
   a) Do a pre-walk of the route to plan your main points of interest.
   b) Research everything you see. Look up information such as Native American uses and legends, land use history, both recent and prehistoric, so that you can use words to enhance and elaborate on what people are seeing.
   c) Be prepared to throw the whole plan out the window when you find your walkers have other interests. Talk to your group before you set out to establish their interests and level of knowledge.
   d) Don’t lose the tiger by concentrating on its stripes. By just concentrating on individual plants or insects you can loose the big picture. Keep relating the individual to the whole to communicate the entire picture.
   e) Don’t look at the thing you are showing people: you know what it looks like! Show it to them! This is tougher than it sounds! This is not a natural instinct. Think about the person advertising a box of detergent.

2. For Children
   a) A group of children will see things you didn’t. Firstly they are shorter and secondly they are often seeing things for the first time without any preconceptions.
   b) Find ways to explain to children with similes alluding to things they are familiar with, e.g.:
      - Carnivorous Dragonflies are the “Eagles” of the insect world.
      - The parasitic Dodder vine is the “Vampire” of the plant world.
      - Different species of the same genus are like dogs: all poodles are dogs but all dogs aren’t poodles, some are terriers, spaniels, etc.
   c) Be careful to make the experience exciting and not scary. Most children have never been surrounded vegetation that is taller than they are so prepare them for it (tell them what they are going to see). The classic was a three year old who announced “We’re never going to find our way out of here!” It’s better not to tell them that some pioneers’ children wandered off in the tall grass and were never found again!
d) Woodlands are often portrayed as scary places so, before entering the tree line, try to give a word picture of a cool, green, safe home for animals; a green cathedral; shelter from the summer sun.

e) Simple rhymes like “Sedges have edges” are great if the sedge is in flower or seed but useless if they can’t feel the “edges”. Hopefully you won’t meet up with a coral snake, at least around here, but “White next to Red and you’ll be dead” will be useful if you do.

f) Some plants have amusing uses or alternate names that will stick in the mind of children better than the more commonly used name: Prairie toilet tissue (Mullein), rip gut (Cord Grass), scouring rush (Horse Tail).

g) So many children spend a sedentary, indoor life that can lead to mental problems in later years. You may be giving them their first interaction with Nature. Some of them may be reluctant to participate because it is all strange to them. Using a variety of words and pictures you have the best chance of capturing the most members of a group. A classic fourth grade reaction was most polite: “This is all very interesting but are we nearly done? I’m really more into computer games.” Hopefully he will remember some of the interesting things and maybe look them up on the internet and one day return to Nature some time to find out more.

By watching people’s reactions you can see if you have achieved the desired affect.

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Rabbit Tracks
The rabbit is a **hopper**. The hind foot overtakes the front foot. This rabbit is running from left to right.

Coyote Tracks
The coyote is a **walker**. It moves the front foot on one side of its body then the hind foot on the other.
CHICORY
By the white cart-road,
Dusty and dry,
Look! there is Chicory,
Blue as the sky!
Or, where the footpath
Goes through the corn,
See her bright flowers,
Each one new-born!
Though they fade quickly,
O, have no sorrow!
There will be others
New-born to-morrow!

FUMITORY
Given me hundreds of years ago,
My name has a meaning you shall know;
It means, in the speech of the bygone folk,
"Smoke of the Earth"—a soft green smoke!

A wonderful plant to them I seemed;
Strange indeed were the dreams they dreamed,
Partly fancy and partly true,
About "Fumitory" and the way it grew.

Where men have ploughed or have dug the ground,
Still, with my rosy flowers, I'm found;
Known and prized by the bygone folk
As "Smoke of the Earth"—a soft green smoke!

GOOSE-GRASS
Who cares about Goose-Grass? The geese
do, for sure!
To most other people, I'm common and poor.
By hedges and ditches and dustiest ways
I straggle and climb through my vagabond days.
My white little flowers, so few and so wee,
Are almost too few and too tiny to see;
But the children have fun when they find how I stick,
And I'm ready to help them play many a trick—
So I'm also called "Cleavers"; how firmly I cleave,
Wherever I touch you, you'd hardly believe!
Announcing, maybe,
But clever of me—
Yes, clever,
Oh, clever,
Most clever of me!
A Chipmunk

The quick and industrious chipmunk hides under the log from such predators as hawks, owls, and foxes. Chipmunks eat seeds, nuts, fruit, and flower bulbs. They store food for the winter in underground tunnels, where they also hibernate. A chipmunk is eight to ten inches long from nose to tip of tail.

A Daddy Longlegs

Daddy longlegs are also known as Harvestmen. These spiders do not weave webs but travel by foot in search of small insects and plant juices. When nights are cool, groups of the usually solitary daddy longlegs may be found gathered under logs with their legs entwined. Their legs may be as long as two inches.

A Ground Beetle

The shiny, hard-shelled ground beetle lives under moist leaves and old logs. The ground beetle is a predator that hunts at night for caterpillars and soft-bodied insects. Although it generally travels by foot, the ground beetle has wings under the shiny shell on its back, which it can use to fly short distances. Ground beetles are about a half inch long.

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Early Buttercup

Prairie Buttercup