Our Hidden Hills

- a toolkit for Local Heritage Animation

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An introduction to heritage animation

Our Hidden Hills

Our Hidden Hills is a community project for bringing local history alive by working with community members to interpret and develop stories for animation, presentation, and celebration of local heritage through the arts.

Having run three successful heritage animation projects over the past ten years, Theatre Wakefield offers this toolkit as a guide to the creative process.[1] The kit is designed to help groups develop animation projects within their own communities.

A model that works

Theatre Wakefield has developed a model for engaging English-speaking community (ESC) seniors and youth living in the Quebec's Outaouais region in heritage animation. These intergenerational projects help preserve and showcase the region's history through a variety of artistic activities, as well as increase the visible presence of the ESC arts and culture in the wider community.

There are four main steps in the heritage animation process:

1. Collecting a list of Local History Stories
2. Assembling Materials and Documenting the Stories
3. Preparing for and Conducting the Animation Workshops
4. Developing the Workshop Stories into a Show for Public Presentation

Activities within these steps include:

- training in story creation for small groups of local seniors (generally, 8 to 10 seniors[2] between 55 to 75 years of age, and the writing workshop mentors can also be seniors);
- sharing the resulting stories with regional youth who animate them in different formats (e.g. dramatizations, songs, narrated tales, and recorded interviews);
- scripting the stories into a variety show in which local artists (actors, musicians, and storytellers, et al) re-enact these tales;

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[2] It's wise to allow for some absences or dropouts due to health challenges or family issues.

- holding follow-up workshops with interested audience members to generate wider community participation and support;
- and, recording key parts of these activities electronically for further sharing.

The resulting variety show presentations will attract audiences comprised of tourists and visitors, families and school groups, and seniors clubs as well as local heritage associations.

Community Identity and Vitality

A good heritage animation project can span up to a year's worth of fairly intense activity. All told, dozens of community members may be involved in researching and writing stories, creating the recorded historical vignettes, developing and coordinating the production of the variety show, or scripting, rehearsing, and presenting of the resulting play.[3] Seniors, youth, amateurs, professionals, community members, visitors, and casual volunteers can all form a vital cross-section of participation in the phenomenon known as "community-based arts" for heritage animation.

Regional Partners and Funding

Partners throughout your region will naturally vary. The partner group may be a cultural association, a municipal office, a heritage centre, a recreational club, a tourism venue, or a combination of those functions and more.

Making contact with those who are "in-the-know" locally is crucial. For example, a municipal office in a given community may have a recreation and culture representative, but grass-roots community groups are much more likely to be motivated and equipped to reach potential audiences in the manner that they're used to, whether it be by email newsgroups, online or newspaper postings, or good old-fashioned phone calls.

Associations such as the Lions Club, Golden-Agers, and others have strong and active local networks for promoting community events and wherever possible these types of grass-roots groups should be encouraged to sponsor and take charge of local publicity and other logistics. They can host the heritage animation variety show as a fundraiser for their organization (or other worthy local cause) and benefit from the increased community presence and visibility that such an event provides them.

While regional schools may not often the budget for hosting productions of this nature within their system, back-to-school presentations will almost certainly be

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[3] Wakefield dramaturge and filmmaker Robert Rooney describes this inclusive creation process in this video clip.

appreciated by local educators and their students. Of course, identifying which among these potential partners are more capable and willing becomes easier the more your group conducts outreach across your region.

Where partnerships are likely to be particularly productive, the partners should be enlisted as local champions early on within the production process for their input, support, and promotion. This helps establish a strong sense of involvement and ownership within the project.

Regional partners don't have to be those strictly interested in history. For example, a strong case can be made for the community health benefits for the types of activities described in this kit. The involvement of a community-based partner from the health and social services sector can help strengthen your quest for funding by articulating the intended benefits for the targeted population groups in your project.

Funding for a heritage animation project can come from obvious sources: the Department of Canadian Heritage offers many project funding programs that target the Official Language Minority Communities (anglophones in Quebec and francophones outside of it). But be sure to consider other sources. If your project involves seniors or youth (or both) then other departments may be interested. For example, Employment and Skills Development Canada has a program called *New Horizons for Seniors* that helps to keep Canada's aging population active and involved. If your project has a bilingual component, regional funding bodies will find it easier to support heritage activities that you mount in both English and French, for example, by subsidizing costs of translation, or by supporting the mounting of the same production in French.

Getting Ready

Before project activities begin, there are things to consider and preparations to be made. At the onset you'll want to determine a budget for administration and operations which will include human resources, material supplies, rehearsal and performance locations, communications, and possibly travel and hospitality.

Project Staff

The project staff should consist of three roles: a Project Coordinator, a Workshop Facilitator, and a Content and Materials Coordinator

Job descriptions for each of these positions are provided in the Appendices.

However, it's recommended that you enlist many more volunteers to help with various tasks such as community outreach, volunteer coordination, and publicity.

Artistic team and workshop participants

Your project team will probably include local writers, historians, actors, musicians, a videographer, a graphic artist, and a workshop facilitator. Team members ideally have some prior experience at turning historical tales into living art. They definitely need to be good listeners, have strong interpretive skills, have the capacity to engage with elderly people, and have respect for all participants' contributions.

Participants in workshops will include those senior community members who can identify and express key aspects of local history. Seniors can be recruited from the volunteers and members of your local heritage association (see QAHN's membership list), from Golden-Agers or similar clubs, and from members of a local theatre group, if one exists in your community. Youth may be similarly contacted through activity groups, especially any groups that engage young people in performing arts or recording activities (acting, singing, dancing, storytelling, video and/or sound recording, etc.).

It's a good idea to create a database of contacts that will outlast a given project and be available for the next one. It's been our experience that many seniors and youth will return to become involved again.

Other considerations

You'll need a suitable workspace to meet to discuss the project, carry out interviews, and hold workshops.

You'll also want access to and familiarity with some audio/visual equipment for recording your workshops and subsequent presentations.

A sample Project Schedule is provided in the Appendices to aid you in the overall tasks to be carried out for the project.

Starting Up

1. Pre-qualify the community you intend to work with. Is there interest? Are there sufficient volunteers? What facilities and equipment are available?

2. Help the community volunteers conduct a local talent search for both researchers and animators (starting with the local heritage association, perhaps, and branching into other community groups, schools, etc.).

   Get them started on the story collection process (what to look for, how to tease out the story from the plain facts, etc.)

   Stories are either event-driven or character-driven around some challenge, problem, or conflict that provides an identifying community marker to explain who we are and how we got to where we are today (literally or figuratively).

3. Events and characters can be represented over time (e.g. inter-generational or ancestor-descendant relationships), however the research component needs to be monitored for streamlining so the scope of the story stays manageable.

4. Come back in about a month and ask them "Whaddya got?"

5. Engage in collective decision-making on which stories to choose.

The Workshops

The first workshop can focus on what makes an interesting heritage tale and how to research it, with presentations where possible by members of your local heritage association.

The second workshop should be for interpreting the gathered historical material and drafting the story with presentation (live or recorded) in mind. Mentors need to be available between workshops for one-on-one sessions with participating seniors. Between them, mentors should have at least some experience with the following:

- understanding what tools are available – both online and within the community – for researching local history;
- using different approaches for transposing stories created from an idea, article, song, court record, municipal archive into a narrative tale for audio or video recording;
- using writing techniques to create drama within a story, and knowing what material to keep and what to cut.

The third workshop continues with coaching and/or short presentation to the group. Each workshop participant should read their draft story aloud so that all can discuss how it might be developed and further improved.

This process continues through **the fourth and final workshop**, with mentors working alongside individual writers to turn stories, poems, journal or diary entries, and other forms of expression into scripted skits for performance.

On-the-Spot Story Animation Techniques

- Story circle – tell the story – sentence by sentence – going around the circle forwards, then backwards

- Identify the climax of the story, then figure out where the story should really begin – these two decisions create the arc of the story

- Establish a visible "tableau" of the key turning point in the story, then use similar tableaus to build a frame-by-frame sequence leading up to and following the key moment.

- Repeat and embellish the tableaus until they become scenes that blend into a narrative.

The Show

For the variety show, the heritage animation pieces need to be woven into a rehearsal script. Songs may be written for inclusion in the production. A director, a stage manager, and young actors and musicians need to be recruited, and the performance venues (e.g. heritage centres, tourist attractions, schools, community centres) need to be booked.

The next section provides a breakdown of activities for each of the four steps in the heritage animation process.

Activity Plan

Activity 1: Collect Possible Story Ideas

Talk to individuals
- Pre-screen potential interviewees
- Conduct and record interviews

Hold sharing workshops
- Facilitated informal group session

Ask for stories and photos
- Email lists
- Website / Facebook
- Posters, newspaper notices

> **Tips**
> Identify key people in your community who have historical knowledge.
>
> Consult people involved with historical societies, museums, libraries, newspapers in your area.
>
> Keep the workshop sizes manageable - no more than 12 participants.
>
> Give demonstrations (either live or pre-recorded) of ways history can be brought to life – songs, poems, readings, plays etc.
>
> Publicize your project – get people talking about it!

Activity 2: Document Histories

Record interviews & workshops
- Audio/video recordings
- Transcripts and notes

Archive and index stories & photos
- Scan originals
- Catalogue files for future reference

Post the story selections on a website
- Simple but effective websites can be created using free or cheaply available web-page services such as WIX or Weebly.

> **Tips**
> Get permission to record and publish material by signed waiver form.
>
> Digitize your material and save it electronically. Categorizing makes retrieval easier and faster.
>
> A private page on your website can be used to submit stories as well as share those already collected.
>
> The website is a perpetual means of contributing and

Activity 3: Prepare Workshops

Select the best stories
- Your selections will be based on the relevance of collected material and participants' interest in working with it.
- Aside from general popularity, criteria for selection might include the interconnectedness of story themes or the historical sequence of the events described.

Select your workshop format
- The format will be based partly on the kinds of stories you choose and the resource people who are available.
- The format will also depend on the particular skills of the artists involved and which method of interpretation (dramatization, songs, narration and slides, etc.) best suits the selected stories.

Set up workshops
- Book dates and venue
- Confirm workshop leaders
- Facilitators, artists, historians, storytellers, musicians, actors
- Arrange materials (a/v equipment, flipcharts etc.)

Prepare the workshop package
- Stories and story ideas handouts
- Audio/visual clips of interviews, workshops
- Photos
- Other resource material

Publicize the workshops
- Email lists, Facebook events, newspaper announcements, your website, and, of course, word-of-mouth through your volunteers.

> **Tips**
> Select a maximum of ten stories that are well-documented, relevant to the community and, of course, interesting.
>
> Match the format of the workshop to the stories and resource people. Examples of format include scriptwriting, dance movement, songwriting. Workshop could be a combination of formats.
>
> Workshop package should include all collected material for the selected stories.
>
> Distribute the package to workshop leaders and participants prior to the workshop so that they can familiarize themselves with the ideas, concepts and even do their own additional research if they wish.
>
> Make sure you get RSVPs from all invitees, i.e. leaders.
>
> Ask people to register so you know how many people are attending.

Activity 4: Hold the Animation Workshops

Welcome & Introduction

- Self-introductions
- Give a brief overview of the project activities and objectives
- Explain the community value of heritage animation

Small group brainstorming
- Break into small groups with one leader each
- Select stories to focus on
- Choose formats for presentation, e.g. song, skit, radio play, dance, etc.

Mini presentations
- Small groups present their ideas to all

Collective brainstorming
- Large group discussion
- Feedback on individual ideas and identification of connecting themes
- Facilitator compiles and blends the stories and ideas and helps the group develop them into a coherent presentation of the material

Going "live"
- Group presents a run-through of the fully-scripted story.

Note: A Sample Workshop Agenda is provided in the Appendices.

Tips

Briefly outline the purpose and progress of the project, outcomes and agenda for the day.

Go around the room to let people introduce themselves.

Get contact information and signed waiver forms.

Groups of 8-10 participants with two or three mentors are a good size.

Each group should assign its own note taker. Flipcharts are useful for this.

Provide participants with story documentation.

Make more detailed material available (audio/visual clips, photos, artefacts, etc) for participants to refer to during the workshop as they wish. Don't bombard with too much information.

Mentors should circulate to assist as needed.

Take notes of mini presentations and collective brainstorming session on flipcharts so all can see.

Discuss next steps with group with suggestions for building on their work.

Wrapping Up

There is follow-up to do after the final workshop and the presentation of the variety show. The results of the project need to be shared with all of the participants. Project documentation needs to be sorted and made accessible to participants on your website.

 Follow up with the individual participants with a survey asking for their feedback on the process, results, and future ideas to pursue. Offer advice on ways they can further explore and create heritage animation within their community.

Encourage people to continue adding and sharing stories and information to the history collection on an ongoing basis via email or website.

Appendices

Job Descriptions

Project Start-up Activities

Sample Workshop Agenda

Waiver Form

Job Descriptions

Project Coordinator

Duties:

- Manages overall project to fulfill project goals
- Works with target communities to determine key resource people
- Coordinates development, distribution and analysis of project material
- Coordinates logistics for workshops

Qualifications:

- experience with project management
- good knowledge of target communities
- good understanding of logistics
- good writing ability

Workshop Facilitator

Duties:

- Responsible for design and delivery of workshops
- Works with project coordinator to analyze project material
- Designs and leads workshops

Qualifications:

- workshop design
- workshop facilitation
- good knowledge of community history

Content and Materials Coordinator

Duties:

- Responsible for documentation of the workshops
- Takes notes
- Arranges recording (video/audio) of appropriate parts of the workshops

Qualifications:

- good knowledge of information technology and multimedia

Project Start-up Activities

Activity	Timeframe	To-do list	Status	Responsible	Notes
Information Gathering					
Publicize project		Write text for website, press releases, etc. Translate text Launch website Contact media Post posters			
Collect and archive stories		Develop list of eligible candidates for interviews, e.g. historians, authors, seniors Conduct interviews in person or by phone Receive stories by email Digitize and store material			
Workshop Preparation					
Schedule workshops		Confirm venues, dates, costs			
Publicize workshops		Write text for posters, website, etc. Translate text Contact media Follow up with key individuals Post posters			
Organize workshops		Develop agenda and workshop methodology Develop budget Prepare participant info packages Purchase supplies (flipchart, paper, markers) Confirm attendance Order food, refreshments Multimedia requirements			

Sample Workshop Agenda

Item	Activities	Time	Responsible	Outcomes
Background and introductions	Introductions Purpose of project Outcomes/agenda Permission to film	10 min	Facilitator Documenter/recorder	Clear understanding of why we are here
What makes a good story?	Presentations Discussion on "what makes a good story" from which criteria is pulled	40 min	Facilitator Documenter/recorder	Generation of ideas/excitement Selection criteria on flipchart A story Novelty Interesting characters Modern day relevance
Brainstorming of "nuggets" (ideas)	Facilitated discussion	90 min	Facilitator Documenter/recorder	A list of nuggets
Fleshing out of concepts	Create links Match to criteria Prioritize if necessary	40 min	Facilitator Documenter/recorder	A final list of nuggets
Next steps	Group discussion – may need to be split into "nugget" groups	30 min	Facilitator Documenter/recorder	To do list: Who will work on it How they will proceed next What supports they require

Waiver Form

WAIVER AGREEMENT

I, (PRINT NAME) _____, the undersigned consent to participate, without charge or payment, in the production being recorded by _____.

(Name of Organization)

I further agree to the use of my voice, likeness, personal stories, memories and artefacts in this project and that the above organization or their nominee have the right to film, videotape, photograph, record and otherwise use the material I provide in any video, TV, radio, recording, motion picture, broadcast or other reproductive print or electronic media, and to fully use the said performance and material in any way.

I hereby declare that I am not under the age of eighteen (18) years.*

SIGNED by the undersigned at _____ on _____, 20__.

_____   _____

(Signature)   (Witness)

tel:_____

OR

*I (PRINT NAME) _____ hereby warrant that I am the legal guardian of the above-named person and that I give my permission for his/her participation.

_____   _____

(Signature)   (Witness)