# Creating an Interpretive Sign

Christi Carlson, Heather Walker & Lori Wright  
Northern Arizona History Academy: Teaching American History Grant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>9-12th Grade Social Studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>This activity can be used for a wide range of historical topics covered in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>1-2 Days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enduring Understanding</td>
<td>History is interpretive and perspectives can change over time.</td>
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<td>Objective</td>
<td>Students will create an interpretive sign for a historical landmark by choosing specific details and images from a variety of primary and secondary sources.</td>
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<td>Common Core Standards</td>
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  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.  
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources. |
| Materials   | The interpretive sign can be constructed using paper materials or using a digital medium, such as Microsoft Publisher. |
| Overview    | Interpretive signs have the ability to illuminate the power of place. Clear educational messages and content inform the public of each site's historic significance. It is important to remember that interpretive signage is self-sufficient. It can enhance a visitor’s perceptions of a site, city, or region. Interpretive signs differ from historical markers. Historical markers are more informative rather than interpretive. |
It is important for students to know history is interpretive and a historian’s perspective can change over time. Conversations about various facts emphasized or conclusions reached allow the teacher a chance to visit the concept of historiography. Same facts; different accounts. Students tend to read secondary accounts as authoritative and do not question them. This activity helps students see that historical narratives are claims and arguments that may be disputed or modified.

**Implementation**

1. **Show students pictures of interpretive signs found on the Internet.** Use the images to help students see the different ways in which the signs can be constructed. Ask if students have ever seen an interpretive sign. If so, where? What is the purpose of an interpretive sign? Does your town or community have any?

2. **Tell students to imagine that they have been hired to create an interpretive sign for a historical landmark.** Choose the landmark based on what you are teaching. Students may choose their own landmark or you may assign the class the same landmark. In addition, think about who wants the sign and their purpose. Is it the National Park Service or is it a non-profit organization? Be clear with the students.

3. **Using the content you want covered in class, provide students a variety of primary and secondary sources from which to draw upon.** Make sure there are copies of images, maps, artifacts, etc. Each group should receive the same sources so they can see how interpretation is truly left up to the historian.

4. **Provide a specific number of words and images that can be used.** This forces students to justify their choices. Example: Provide 10 photographs and tell them to choose only three.

5. **Before researching, drafting the text, or designing a sign, the need for the interpretive sign must be determined.** Have students answer the following questions:
   - What needs explaining?
   - Will something be missed without interpretation?
   - Who is the target audience of the sign?
   - What do you want the audience to know and learn?
   - How do you want the audience to feel?

6. **As students design the interpretive sign, give them specific visual criteria to follow:**
   - Do the titles, subtitles, and artwork support the main points of the text?
   - Is the text arranged in small sections of words?
   - Is there good contrast between the text and the background?
   - Is there a natural movement from the main title and art to the main text?
   - Is the layout clean and simple? Simplicity is usually better for interpretive signs.
   - Does the sign achieve its intended interpretive objective for the intended audience?

7. **Students present their interpretive signs to the class and justify why they choose the information and images that they did.**

8. **Assess based on required criteria.**

**Resources:**
