

Using an Interpretive Framework for Garden Tours: “Design-Features-Marjorie Post” 2024 Garden Docent Training Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

What is an “interpretative framework”?

Interpretation = an educational activity that aims to *reveal meanings and relationships* rather than simply to communicate factual information. (Tilden, 1977)

Framework = a network or outline that can be used to organize information, perceptions and experiences.

Why do we use a framework?

Cognition, or the mental activities of thinking, understanding, learning and remembering, is a process of forming logical structures for comprehending and analyzing experiences. (Piaget)

Information that fits into a system of organization is better understood, learned and retained. (Ausubel, 1968; Anserdon and Bower, 1983; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977)

The talks by staff about Hillwood’s garden collections and founder are resources, not models for tours. Using an interpretative framework gives you a structure for organizing and remembering information from these talks, and their attendant readings. In turn, interpretive frameworks are the structures of your object and room lessons and your tour, so that visitors have a way to organize the experience.

THE “DESIGN-FEATURES-MARJORIE POST” FRAMEWORK

Design-Features-Marjorie Post

This framework is designed to organize “big picture” information for entire garden rooms. In general, this framework provides an introduction (design), body (features), and conclusion (Marjorie Post). This framework of intro-body-conclusion is one most of us instilled from our formal education.

Design

Marjorie Post and others who created country estates with formal gardens wanted their outdoor spaces to be used for entertaining, relaxation, and exercise. These estates functioned to present their owner in a certain light, and to support the lifestyle of the owner.

- Introduce visitors to the garden room through its design (its plan that shows its look and function).
- Integrate information about this garden’s role in the design of the entire estate.
- Think of the design section as: giving visitors time to transition from one garden room to the next; and as an introduction to the new room. In other words: time to settle-in and then focus.

Features

Select three or so features (i.e. elements, both natural and manmade, used in the garden’s design), including plants, that best illustrate the garden room’s most important messages.

- Integrate information about the feature’s role in the design of the garden, its cultural context, and its horticultural information.
- Typical features include: plants, stones, water, statuary, hardscaping (built environmental features like sidewalks, walls, and terraces), garden furniture, and vistas (a distant view).
- Here is where you employ your skills at conducting object lessons, as practiced during your Five Minute Object Lesson.

Marjorie Post

Integrate information about Post as it relates to this garden room, especially her role in and use of this space and the features in it—especially those you just discussed. If you introduced some of this information in your design or features section, continue the story here. Information about Post could include narratives about her as an estate manager, hostess, business executive, philanthropist, or collector.

- This section serves as a nice transition from room to room.
- This section can also be a place to connect current museum activities to Post.