

TimeSlips:
The Encouragement to Imagine

Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

The foundation of this activity is the *TimeSlips* creative storytelling technique that was developed by Anne Davis Basting and perfected by the Center on Age and Community at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. *TimeSlips* has a website and offers online training, which is strongly encouraged. Their website sums up the *TimeSlips* activity as “a method that opens storytelling to everyone by replacing the pressure to remember with the encouragement to imagine” (<http://www.timeslips.org>).

TimeSlips was developed to help people with dementia, but can be used by any age or group and also would work well for inter-generational situations. The process assumes that all people are capable of relationships, growth, purpose, and creativity at all stages of life no matter their mental capability. Creative activities provide a different way for individuals to connect. This process, called creative engagement, is central to *TimeSlips*. Expressing oneself with others through words, sounds, music, and the visual arts can help open relationships and create a deeper understanding between the elders and those interacting with them.

The technique uses compelling photographs to initiate a group process whereby facilitators ask participants open-ended and sensory questions about the viewed images. Each participant’s responses are recorded and echoed throughout the session, culminating in a final

retelling of the story. This activity plan uses photographs from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers* to facilitate that process. (All images in the *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains* book are copyrighted. Any photocopy of them MUST include credit and attribution to the book and cannot be distributed, reproduced further, or utilized outside of this plan).

TIME:

Thirty to sixty minutes for each session. (Ongoing sessions over time using different images are recommended.)

MATERIALS:

- Large, self-stick, easel-pad paper (25" x 30" is standard) for the note taker to record the developing story
- Marker pen for the note taker
- Magnifying glass for participants who may be visually impaired
- Computer and printer to reproduce and enlarge additional copies of activity images (so each participant can hold one up close)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

The *TimeSlips* creative storytelling technique addresses the “Three Plagues” when participants gather in a group setting and everyone contributes to the final story; when facilitators ask open-ended questions that invite the unique, individual expression of every participant; when facilitators echo every response that is given to them, affirming the unique and individual expression of every participant; when facilitators share the stories generated in ways that reflect the dignity of the storytellers (newsletters, bulletin boards, readings, exhibits, collaborations); and when personal relationships are fostered through collaboratively creating and sharing stories.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

There have been several studies on the *TimeSlips* method and the underlying mechanisms of Creative Engagement with people suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or dementia. A study by Thomas Fritsch et al. found that residents in nursing or long-term care facilities with an extended *TimeSlips* program were more engaged and alert, that social interactions were more frequent, and that staff developed a more positive view of people with dementia.

--Fritsch, T., J. Kwak, S. Grant, J. Lang, R.R. Montgomery, and A.D. Basting. “Impact of TimeSlips, a Creative Expression Intervention Program, on Nursing Home Residents with Dementia and Their Caregivers.” The Gerontologist 49, no. 1 (February 2009): 117-127.

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (30 TO 60 MINUTES):

1. People with dementia often suffer from short-term memory loss. Those things that happened last week, yesterday, earlier that day, or an hour before are more difficult to recall. However, long-term memory, memories of years ago in childhood or early adulthood, tend to remain longer. People also respond to what is familiar or to that with which they had an ongoing association. We all grow up with folklore. It is tightly woven into our lives from the day we are born. It is shared broadly, especially between people in the same geographic area and within the same ethnic or religious group. Because many people in our region (North and South Dakota, western Minnesota, eastern Montana, and the Canadian Prairie Provinces) grew up with and can relate to the traditions featured in the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, it is recommended that images from this book be utilized in the activity plan.

This activity is ideal for a small group, but also can be used successfully one-on-one. An ideal session requires a facilitator to pose questions about the photograph to a small gathering of five to ten participants. A second person should take notes, recording all the participants' responses. Assistants, volunteers, or family members should be utilized to repeat questions for individuals who may be hearing impaired or to interpret answers for individuals who may have speech problems. The activity should be treated as a special event and ideally should occur in a location where the storytelling

process can proceed with minimal interruption.

2. To prepare for the storytelling session, look through the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Select interesting and compelling images to initiate story responses associated with one or more of the five senses. Images chosen could include triggers for the participants, such as music, weather events, traditions, family gatherings, pets, livestock, play, and sport. Make a large photocopy of those images, or multiple enlarged copies that can be seen or distributed to people attending the activity.

3. Locate a quiet space large enough to accommodate five to ten people. Arrange chairs in a semicircle.

4. Let people know a special storytelling activity is about to take place, and that they will be a part of it. Invite the participants' interaction by making them feel like they are part of an event.

5. The person directing the activity plan should welcome the storytellers and introduce themselves.

6. Show the elders a picture upon which a finished narrative has been developed and recount that narrative to get them excited about creating one of their own. (Samples of stories created by elders at Maryhill Manor in Enderlin, ND, are provided for this purpose.)

7. Select a new image. Have two to three options ready, with multiple copies to distribute to all the participants.

8. Begin the activity by showing an image and giving participants a few moments to look closely at the details.

9. Ask the participants open-ended questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” response. The person directing the plan may want to compose, in advance of the storytelling session, a series of questions pertaining to the images chosen.

- Ask the 4-Ws. (Who? What? Where? When?)
- Use sensory questions. (What do you hear? What do you smell? How does she, he, or it feel? What does it taste like?)
- Ask questions that focus on what we can’t see in the image. (What occurred prior to this event? What might be happening next?)
- Use intriguing statements and questions like, “They have a secret. What do you think it is?” Or, “What are they dreaming about?” “What are their dreams?”
- Phrasing is important. Create ownership by asking, “What do YOU want to call him? What do YOU want to call this story?”

10. Each time a question is asked, echo all the responses to both the teller and group (e.g., “Betty said . . .”).

11. The note taker records all the responses.

12. Periodically retell the story to keep it fresh in the participant’s minds.

13. Build to a final retelling.

14. Ask participants to give their group story a title.

15. Thank everyone for participating and enjoy a snack and beverage together.

16. Make plans to share the stories created (in bulletins, exhibits, readings, and so on).

Note: Consider using exhibits and art objects in this creative process. Sally Jeppson, exhibit designer and creator of this plan, has found that using images and art objects from an exhibit works well.

AUTHOR • SALLY JEPSON:

Sally is the gallery manager at the Jamestown Fine Arts Association (JFAA). In addition to her curatorial activities, she coordinates JFAA's *Art for Life Program*. Jamestown was one of the pilot sites in the North Dakota Council on the Arts' (NDCA) *Art for Life Program*, which places artists in elder care facilities. Sally worked with the NDCA to create a touring exhibition based on the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. The exhibit, which she coordinates, travels to libraries, cultural centers, and art galleries. In addition to this plan that utilizes illustrations from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* in conjunction with the creative storytelling method called *TimeSlips*, Sally developed another *Art for Life* activity plan that guides staff and seniors in developing exhibits showcasing the creative results generated from various *Art for Life Program* activities.

Sally holds a BA in Art History and Anthropology and a MA in Art History from the University of California at Davis. She worked for the Plains Art Museum, in Fargo, North Dakota, for eleven years, ultimately becoming curator. In 2000, she relocated to Gackle, North Dakota, and began her current work in Jamestown. Sally has served on various boards, numerous grant panels, and has juried a variety of regional art exhibitions and projects. She and her husband, artist Deane Fay, operate an exhibition design and art consulting business, Starview Enterprises, Inc. Together, they create exhibits for museums, cultural centers, city and state institutions, and private businesses.

Story Examples

The following stories were created by elders, with Sally Jeppson as the session facilitator, at Maryhill Manor, Enderlin, ND, on April 11, 2014. They were inspired by photographs from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. The narratives illuminate the creativity,

humor, values, and life experiences of the participants. They can be read and used as examples to acquaint participants with a completed story and to get them excited about creating one of their own.

Fair Rodeo

North Dakota State Fair Rodeo or maybe Minot – Why not Minot? Could be Lisbon, ND or Fort Ransom on the 4th of July. It's steer roping or calf roping—Poor Calf!

Don't ask about the smell, it's dusty.

It's brothers Sam and Bob, one is good, one is evil – see the black hat and white hat.

People are cheering them on, kids crying, announcer, cows mooing, hooves pounding and horses whinnying. It's hot and windy and dusty.

They are going to the Beer garden to have a "cold one" and talking about what they did wrong, complaining about heat and the next rodeo they're going to—they're traveling cowboys.



Who gets to take the trophy home? He's younger and will do anything at all costs to win. The other just wants to have fun.

Once, he tied his brother's spurs together so he tripped coming into the arena.

Maryhill Manor, Enderlin, North Dakota

TimeSlips Stories
Created April 11, 2014

**The Priest with a Mission
A Christmas Story
or
A Pot Roast**



The Priest Father John is cooking turkey or pot roast. He's headed to a church dinner with a pot roast or maybe visiting a family that doesn't have food for Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is Elmer's birthday month, his birthday is on the 22nd and next year it's on the 28th. Father John is from a rural area and family, he's either from the Abby at Richardton or maybe St. Mary's. He's in a kitchen, where there is a roaster oven, a refrigerator back there and also some salt and pepper.

At Thanksgiving and Christmas time they serve families that don't have much money to buy meals or those that will be alone.

Father John just came in from the cold, delivering meals to people in their homes. He smells of gravy with potatoes and carrots. He's happy to serve the people. He might even have a pumpkin pie or a large hot dish in the roaster. We kept pie in the roaster on top of the roast – a rack held it above the meat.

Father John likes to go hunting, fishing and to call bingo and do puzzles.

It's a "Big Roast", there's a photographer in the room to put a picture in the newspaper because it shows Father John likes to help the needy and lonely all year long.

He's going to visit a family with a lot of children.
The people who are going to eat are feeling humbled by the donations.

Maryhill Manor, Enderlin, North Dakota

TimeSlips Stories
Created April 11, 2014

Fishing For Water Witching for Water

This looks like the Sandhills and BueLingo Cattle. Maybe its Russell Bueling but he's too short, maybe he's someone else, it can't be Russell Danielson either because he's not tall enough. He used to work on a farm in Fargo or Grand Forks or Wahpeton or Sheldon!



Looks like there is a turtle or maybe a rock in the grass.

He wears a brown shoe and a black shoe on the left and his pants are falling down.

There's a cow patty in the grass, cow pies—good manure for grass growing—used for baseball bases.

Its clear to partly cloudy.

A photographer taking his picture since he can't be in the picture without a self-timer.

He's witching for water or maybe it's a fishing pole.

Cows don't know what to make of it—cows might take a bite out of him. No bulls—oh, wait they are ALL bulls. There is a bull named Murdock, he's a little ornery and overbearing.

Farmer has a tape measure on his belt; maybe he is renting the land or going to measure fish in the lake down yonder or maybe planting crops.

It could be spring or summer, temperature is 73 or 80 degrees since he's not wearing a jacket and he is wearing a hat because of the sunlight.

His wife is at home barefoot and pregnant, baking biscuits and gravy. Her name is either Cloe, Hazel, Matilda, or Carlene. He may be Mormon from the FLDS.

There's only one brown cow, she jumped the fence and her name is Elsie.

Weather looks stormy and dark in the sky. Good! Water is needed for the cattle or fish for the fishing pole.

Mayhill Manor, Enderlin, North Dakota

Time Sips Stories
Created April 11, 2014