

# **OPENING BORDERS AT HISTORIC SITES THROUGH VISITOR INCLUSION**

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# A COMPELLING ISSUE

Visitors at historic sites react to their experiences.

Inclusion and exclusion appear to occur naturally.

What does it take to make people feel included?

# DEFINING INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

- Inclusion is often defined as feeling appropriately represented in a narrative, agreeing with a narrative as it is presented, or experiencing comfort and acceptance in an environment (Heimlich & Koch, 2008).
  - Those who do not fit these criteria because of various reasons (age, gender, race, socio-economic status, learning ability, or sexual orientation) may feel excluded.
  - These definitions privilege the group with decision-making or physical control over a site, because they reflect the dominant group's power to define what it means to be included (Derrida, 1982).
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# CHALLENGING DEFINITIONS

Inclusion does not have to mean acceptance of or inclusion in a particular narrative or even feelings of comfort or welcome.



Inclusion has many potential meanings.



The power of identity should lie with individuals, including how they define inclusion.

# NEW DEFINITIONS OF INCLUSION

Beliefs about  
inclusion

No automatic  
shift to “insider”

Opportunities  
for inclusion

# A DEFINITION OF INCLUSION

One possible definition for inclusion may involve the right and expectation for people to engage critically with historic site narratives.

- *Narratives* are stories that people use to order and transmit information about the “unique sequence of events, mental states, [and] happenings involving human beings as characters or actors” (Bruner, 1990, p. 43).
- *Critical engagement* (Monroe, 2003) is a combination of engagement (personal interest, preparation, and time investment) and critical thinking.



# CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH NARRATIVES

1. Critical evaluation of narratives by people
  2. Connections to people's existing knowledge
  3. Communication of people's ideas about narratives
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# CRITICAL EVALUATION OF NARRATIVES

- Skills and techniques for examining narratives
- Verbal or textual narratives
- Behavioral narratives
- Place narratives



# CONNECTIONS TO PEOPLE'S EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

- Help people to make their own connections
  - Recognize that making connections is not always easy
  - Encourage people to evaluate their existing knowledge
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# COMMUNICATING IDEAS ABOUT NARRATIVES

- Refine ideas
- Look for ways to communicate
- People may want to construct their own ways of sharing ideas

*Sharing one's views about historic site narratives is essential to critical engagement.*

# WHY DOES REDEFINING INCLUSION MATTER?

- Concepts of inclusion are emotionally and intellectually charged
- The desire to be inclusive
- “Balance of power”
- Inclusion may increase possibilities for learning, engagement, and outreach
- Establishing new discourses

# POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

- What value do you see in stretching definitions of inclusion?
  - How might you accomplish this in your institution?
  - How might people in your community react to these ideas?
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