



Grappling with Difficult and Undertold Stories in Exhibits

Presenter: Erin McClelland June 15, 2017

Plan for the Hour

- Define “difficult” and “undertold” stories.
- Explore what makes these stories so difficult.
- Look at case studies of how others have presented difficult stories in exhibits.

! Definitions

Difficult stories:

- are "...histories of oppression, violence, and trauma"
- "...describe memories of pain, suffering, oppression, and grief..."

and they are undertold because they :

- they evoke strong emotions
- incite "anxiety, resistance, and stress for their audiences"

Adapted from Julie Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)

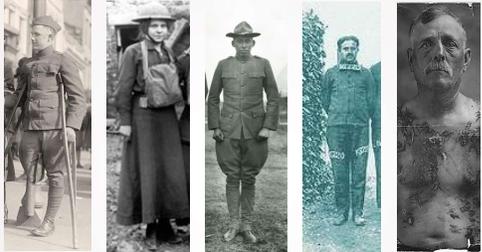
! Examples of Difficult and Undertold Stories

- Enslavement of African Americans
- Treatment of the mentally ill
- Internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II
- Treatment of those with Hansen's disease (leprosy)
- Discrimination against members of LGBTQ community



Photograph of Tom Kabayashi at Manzanar Relocation Center, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppprs-00245

! Examples of Difficult & Undertold Stories



Veterans who don't fit the model of the "hero" who returned "whole"

Women on the front lines

People of color

Conscientious objectors who were marginalized

German Americans who faced discrimination

! Why Are These Stories So Difficult?

These stories are difficult – evoking strong emotions and creating anxiety, stress, and resistance – because they challenge our core beliefs about the world, society, history, and, by extension, ourselves.

That creates a crisis moment where the audience has to decide between two options:

1. Accept the information and be forced to adapt, question everything

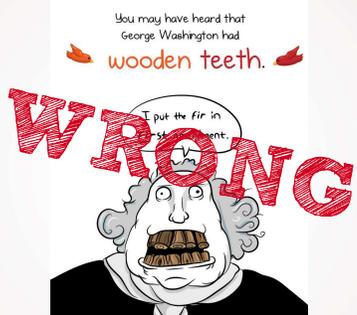
OR

2. Reject the information and maintain the status quo

Adapted from Julie Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)

! Difficult Stories in Action

You may have heard that George Washington had wooden teeth.



WRONG

Adapted from The Oatmeal, "You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you," http://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean

! Difficult Stories in Action

gold, lead, hippopotamus ivory, horse, and donkey teeth.



Adapted from The Oatmeal, "You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you," http://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean

! Difficult Stories in Action

What

if I told you George Washington had another set of false teeth?

What if I told you this other set wasn't made from wood, ivory, or any of the aforementioned materials?

Adapted from The Oatmeal, "You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you," http://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean

! Difficult Stories in Action

What if I told you it was made from the teeth of slaves?

Adapted from The Oatmeal, "You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you," http://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean

! Why Are These Stories So Difficult?

These stories are difficult – evoking strong emotions and creating anxiety, stress, and resistance – because they challenge our core beliefs about the world, society, history, and, by extension, ourselves.

That creates a **crisis moment** where the audience has to decide between two options:

1. Accept the information and be forced to adapt, question everything

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! Examples of Difficult & Undertold Stories



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! Navigating the Crisis Moment

1. Accept the information and be forced to adapt, question everything

OR

2. Reject the information and maintain the status quo

Adapted from The Oatmeal, "You're not going to believe what I'm about to tell you," http://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean

! Put a Face (and a Name) On It

HOME STORES 1-50 15:20 21:30 31-40 41-50 ABOUT FURTHER READING CONTACT Q

One Hundred Stories

The One Hundred Stories are a silent presentation. They remember not just the men and women who lost their lives, but also those who returned to Australia, the passed, the crippled, the insane, all those irreparably damaged by war. The Great War shaped the world as well as the nation. Its memory belongs to us all.



With due care At breaking point A guardian angel of the Anzacs

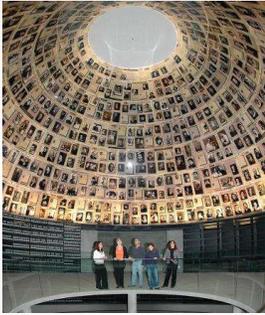
One Hundred Stories, Monash University, <http://future.arts.monash.edu/onehundredstories/>

! Put a Face (and a Name) On It



One Hundred Stories, Monash University, <http://future.arts.monash.edu/onehundredstories/>.

! Put a Face (and a Name) On It



Yav Hashem, The Holocaust History Museum, Hall of Names (Israel)

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Yav Hashem, The Holocaust History Museum, Hall of Names (Israel)

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Yav Hashem, The Holocaust History Museum, Hall of Names (Israel)

! Signals to Visitors – Transition Spaces



National World War I Museum & Memorial; Photo: Ralph Applebaum Associates

! Signals to Visitors – Transition Spaces



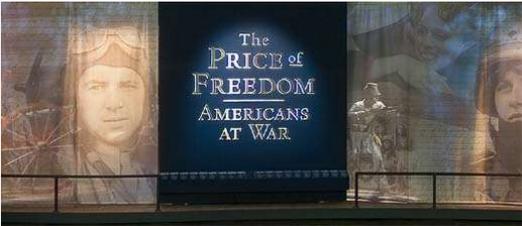
National World War I Museum & Memorial; Photo: Ralph Applebaum Associates

! Signals to Visitors – Warning Signs



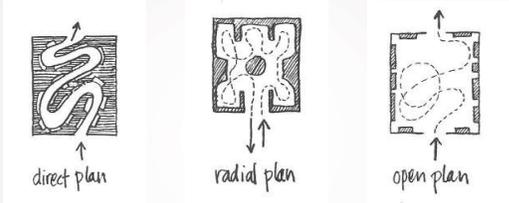
National Museum of African American History and Culture; Photo from What to See in Washington DC, <http://whattoseeinwashingtondc.com/index.php/2016/09/26/visiting-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/>

! Signals to Visitors – Warning Signs



"Price of Freedom: Americans at War," The National Museum of American History, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/price-of-freedom>

! Open Floorplan



Images from Kathleen McLean, *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions* (Washington, D.C. 1993), 125.

! Reflection Spaces



Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Santiago, Chile; Photo by Nico Saieh

! Reflection Spaces



Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos, Santiago, Chile; Photo by David Von Blohn

! Reflection Spaces



National Museum of African American History and Culture; Photo by Brad Feinknopf

! Reflection Spaces



"On the Texas Homefront," Bullock Texas State History Museum

! Reflection Spaces



"On the Texas Homefront," Bullock Texas State History Museum

! Reflection Spaces



"The Enclave," Portland Art Museum

Reflection Spaces



REFLECTING ON THE ENCLAVE
 November 8, 2014 - February 10, 2015
 I saw the bombs fall in Ireland, over land rather than the people. We still fight to be free, and one day... everyone will be. I heard... I felt...

"The Enclave," Portland Art Museum

Contact Information

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