

LIVING HISTORY

As you learned in *Ghost Walls: The Story of a 17th-Century Colonial Homestead*, the site of St. John's house has been a museum since 2008. Imagine that you work at this museum. You're in charge of creating a living history program. In this program, costumed performers portraying historical characters will use historical objects and activities to teach visitors about some important pieces of St. John's story. Your first mission as program director is to design a five- to ten-minute interactive exhibit that meets the following guidelines:

- It will take place in a specific spot (or several spots) on St. John's premises.
- It will involve one, two, or three performers who will portray actual people who lived, worked at, or visited St. John's.
- It will involve at least one historical artifact found on St. John's premises.

How do you create this performance? Here are some tips:

- Choose a time period and a part of the house in which your exhibit will be set. Perhaps you want to educate visitors about how the kitchen was used. Your exhibit will take place in the kitchen, and the historical setting can be a time during which the kitchen was known to be in use. Or you might first choose a historical setting, such as the 1640s, when St. John's house was the seat of Maryland's provincial court. In that case, you might choose to stage the exhibit in the parlor, where the court was held.
- Pick at least one person who was involved with the house during your chosen time period or who spent a lot of time in your chosen part of the house. This person (or people) will be your character(s), portrayed by a performer (or performers).
- Finally, start drafting a script for your performer(s). What will he/she/they say to museum visitors? What information and opinions will he/she/they share? How will he/she/they use historical artifacts in the exhibit? What will the performance reveal about the time and place in which it is set? As you incorporate historical information into the script, cite the pages of *Ghost Walls* where you found that information.

When your script is finished, give a performance for the class. You won't use costumes, and of course you can't use real artifacts or go to the real St. John's parlor—but you may use props or photographs to help your fellow students imagine the scene.

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This activity meets the following Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5-8.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5-8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5-8.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4

Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-8.4

Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5-8.6

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.