

Central Park Zoo Poetry: The Language of Conservation Case Overview



The Central Park Zoo, located in the heart of Manhattan, wanted a way to communicate to the public their message of conservation in an innovative, creative manner. The interpretive signs the zoo formally used for this purpose presented complex information about animal species, habitats, and histories while simultaneously describing the survival struggles of endangered species. While informative, this method did not appeal to a wide population base and had no emotional impact. The Central Park Zoo is known as an innovator in interpretive concepts for zoos, and they wanted to bring this same inspired thinking to their new project.

The Wildlife Conservation Society, which runs the Central Park Zoo, partnered with the Poets House, a national literary center, to establish a poet residency at the zoo. Drawing on the 45,000-volume poetry collection held by the Poets House, the project resulted in the placement of 41 poems and excerpts in a variety of places alongside the animal exhibits. The poems were inscribed on park benches, open air rafters, stone steps and banners displayed artistically around the zoo.

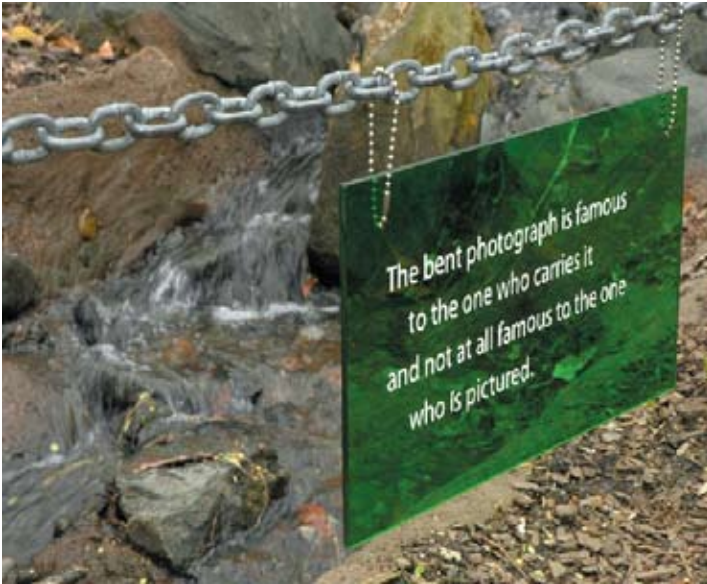
Poetry draws attention to how beautiful and fragile the natural world is, encouraging people to think about what a loss the earth's ever diminishing biodiversity is. This complements the message the Central Park Zoo already works hard to disseminate. The zoo felt that "poetry could be the gateway for voices from both near and far that have valued wildlife and conservation during the course of human history." The poems used at the Central Park Zoo represent different centuries, different parts of the world, and different rhythms, so as to appeal to a wide audience base. Some poems focus on specific animals, while others embody a more general idea of conservation. Lovely poems that were biologically incorrect were eliminated, as the project wanted to educate as well as inspire. The placement, the fonts, and the medium for the poems were planned by the zoo's exhibits and graphic artists, for maximum effect.



By courtesy of the Wildlife Conservation Society, the evaluation report of the project is available here http://www.shapingoutcomes.org/course/cases/CZP_evaluation_report on our website or at

<http://www.ims.gov/profiles/Apr06.shtm>

The Central Park Zoo has existed in its current incarnation since 1988, but its history goes back much farther. Starting as a collection of donated animals in the 1860's, its evolution marked the modern trend of abandoning cages for more natural habitat exhibits. In 1980 the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) agreed to renovate and operate the zoo for the Department of Parks and Recreation. The WCS believes in saving wildlife and wild lands by careful science, international conservation, education, and the management of the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks. Such work, according to the WCS, is "essential to the integrity of life on Earth." For more information visit them on the web at www.nyzoosandaquarium.com.



Founded in 1986, Poets House is a literary center and poetry archive that invites the public to "step into the living tradition of poetry." By participating in The Language of Conservation, Poets House is able to create a visible presence for poetry that will show the relevance and beauty of the art to over one million zoo visitors

each year. For more information visit them on the web at www.poetshouse.org.

Profiles of Stakeholders

These are fictional statements typifying attitudes and illustrating needs, not actual direct quotations.

Zoo Director

“With our important message of conservation, we’re under a lot more pressure than other organizations to find better, more inventive ways to communicate to the public. How can you communicate something as complex as conservation quickly and effectively? Poetry conveys our message in an expedient, fun way.”

Ten-Year-Old Zoo Patron

“I like going to the Zoo. You can see the way the animals live. But the signs are usually too high to read and full of big words.”



Poetry House Member

“It’s exciting to have such an interesting and visible place for poetry to be displayed. When you go to the zoo, one of the last things you expect to see is poetry on the benches and integrated into the displays. It really gets people thinking about the part poetry plays in the world. It can be used to foster a love of the natural world.”



Wildlife Conservation Society Board Member

“We want people to ponder conservation ideas during their zoo visits, thinking of themselves as part of ecosystems. These are ideas we want people to take home with them and incorporate into their everyday lives.”

IMLS

“The Central Park Zoo has shown through planning and research that their project has the potential to be a success. They conducted almost 200 zoo patron interviews to insure that the poetry was making the intended impact. This is an ambitious project, but the measurable results show that it’s a good investment.”

Logic Model Worksheet

I. Situation: program partners and stakeholders	
What is the program's name ?	The Language of Conservation
What partners are involved?	Poets House Wildlife Conservation Society\Central Park Zoo
Who are the program's stakeholders ? (Be sure to include yourself, your target audience, partners, funders and any other stakeholders.)	What does each stakeholder want to know?
Wildlife Conservation Society	Does the project support society's mission? Does it convey an idea of conservation?
Central Park Zoo	How will the addition of poetry affect attendance? Visitor education and enjoyment?
Poetry House	How will this foster an appreciation of poetry?
Zoo Visitors and other Supporters	How is poetry enhancing a zoo visit? What will be learned?
IMLS	How many people will this project affect? What did they learn? How effective are the resources in enhancing understanding of conservation?
II. Program planning: connecting needs, solutions, and results	
Who are the audiences ?	Zoo visitors and other supporters
What are the needs of the audience?	A fun and interesting way to learn about conservation while at the zoo
What are some audience considerations ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Visitors are not always willing to stop and read the signs that convey important messages of conservation. •Signs are often boring or too technical to appeal to children.

What solution fulfills the needs?	Present the spirit of conservation through short, interesting snippets of poetry that do not demand a large time investment from visitors
What will be the desired results ?	Visitors will have both an intellectual and emotional reaction to the poetry that will foster an understanding of the importance of conservation.

II. Logic model summary: program purpose statement

We do what?	Establish a poet residency at the zoo, place 41 poems and excerpts throughout the zoo in an artistic and imaginative manner.
For whom ?	Zoo visitors
For what outcome /benefit(s)?	Visitors understand the importance of conservation.

IV. Program elements

Inputs	Outputs (or counts)
Poet in residence at the zoo	# of public presentations/readings by poet in residence
Zoo biologist to insure that the poems used are generally accurate and good choices for the zoo audience	
Various zoo exhibits and graphic artists to present the final poems in the best light	# of exhibits involved # of graphic artist hours involved

Activities	Outputs (or counts)
Recruit poet in residence	
Pilot run of poetry presentation to avoid missteps and learn about how many poems would be welcomed by the public	
Compile and analyze data for program improvement and progress reports to stakeholders	<p>At least 20% of surveyed visitors remember at least one poem.</p> <p>At least 50% of surveyed visitors report liking the poetry.</p>
Install poetry throughout the zoo	<p>41 poems on conservation placed throughout the zoo</p> <p>a permanent poet in residence at the zoo</p>
Plan opening ceremonies celebration	
Services	Outputs (or counts)
Place poetry in user-friendly locations throughout the zoo	<p>over 1 million visitors each year exposed to the Central Park Zoo's message of conservation through poetry</p>

V. Outcomes

Outcome 1: *Visitors understand the importance of conservation.*

Indicator(s)	Applied to	Data Source	Data Interval	Target
The # and % of zoo visitors who demonstrate increased positive attitudes toward the importance of conservation AND	Randomly selected visitors before and after installation	Benchline survey and post-installation survey	Two month period before installation and after installation	10%
The # and % of visitors who can recall at least one poem and connect the poem to a conservation message.	Randomly selected visitors before and after installation	Post visit survey	Two month period after installation	50%