

The Big Why: Historical Storytelling meets Humanities

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Beyond the Panel, Resources & Answers

Panelists: Dr. Caroliese Frink Reed, Sheila Arnold, Darci Tucker, Brian "Fox" Ellis

ASL Interpreters: Sarah Brough & McKala Hansen

Book Referenced by Dr. Reed in the Panel:

Dr. Reed: The book referenced in the panel is "The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chautauqua: as Performance" by Charlotte Channing. In the book, she mentions a movie with Elvis Presley. I believe the title is "The Trouble With Girls" and it depicts an old time Chautauqua. I watched it and was impressed with the level of detail included.

Extra Questions from Registrants/Attendees:

Research/The Craft-Related

Do you incorporate Q & A as the characters? - from Live-stream Chat

Darci Tucker: Absolutely! I usually have a brief introduction and conclusion, but the majority of the time I'm in character. For some presentations I do as much as an hour of Q&A in character.

I'm always interested in how folks approach research for the story and character(s). Thanks. - Sara Armstrong, Registrant

Brian "Fox" Ellis: I think in three levels. I often start with children's books because they both condense the main stories and give you a bibliography. I always try to find first person, autobiographical material &/or period commentary from the horse's mouth as it were, and then I read contextually, what was going on in that time and place. Not always possible, but I also love on the ground research hiking, canoeing or traveling in the places they lived and worked.

Darci Tucker: Sara, please see my reply to Allen, below. Thanks.

What are the most accurate sources for researching historical events or people? Is lots of research done in proving that a source used is accurate? If possible, are finding relatives of historical people or family members of events part of normal research? - Allen R. DeBey, Registrant

Brian “Fox” Ellis: Allen, read above, and yes, if you can talk to descendants you will get the scoop left out of the history books. I remember one time an older gentleman came up to me before a show and said, “I have been waiting to meet you my whole life! YOU are my great-great-grandpa!”

Darci Tucker: I use a combination of primary sources, contemporary sources and well-researched secondary sources. I don’t have time to do a lot of original research, so I depend on scholars who have spent years of their lives on that single topic. Good clues for a well-researched book are an index (very useful as I’m learning the information) and extensive footnotes (these give context and additional information). In addition, I use reputable museum websites, like Smithsonian, National Geographic, etc. I have not attempted to find relatives or family members, although I have encountered a few, who were delighted to see their ancestors portrayed.

Do you find that is often necessary to talk about your clothing to help the audience acclimate? - Tim Lowry, from Live-Stream Chat

Brian “Fox” Ellis: Good question, Tim, it depends on the age level, but yes, sometimes in an educational setting when changing clothes in front of them, it is a nice bridge to bring the audience back in time.

Darci Tucker: Hi Tim! :) I have rarely found that necessary, since in my introductions I always explain that we are going back in time to the year XXXX. I only occasionally get questions about my clothing.

Current Events-Related

Do you believe that historical dates and statues are being torn down, thrown away, because there are not enough people like yourself sharing interesting facts and stories about our U.S. history? - Nancy Nelson

Brian “Fox” Ellis: Actually, Nancy, like you, I feel strongly about this, but I think we might disagree. I do think if folks learned their history they would save some statues of questionable characters and tear down more of the statues dedicated to so-called heroes. Think about it this way: If you had been an eye witness to your family being murdered by Saddam Hussein or Stalin or, or, or... and you finally won your freedom would you help tear down that statue? Many of these confederate statues were erected in direct response to the Civil Rights Act and the effort to dismantle Jim Crow laws. The confederates were traitors. PERIOD. They attempted to violently overthrow the United States to continue their enslavement of human beings. PERIOD. These are indisputable

facts. I have long believed that we need to stop whitewashing history and share history warts and all. Part of this is erasing the inaccurate enobling of violent thugs.

Darci Tucker: Nancy, I do think that the American public is woefully uninformed about our history, and many hold misconceptions with almost religious fervor. The monuments question isn't an easy one. Those monuments do keep historical events in the public eye, but are the stories that they perpetuate true, or do they perpetuate hurtful mythology?

Darci Tucker, continued: In the case of Confederate monuments, does it make sense for a nation to hold monuments to those who fought AGAINST that nation? I think it's time to let them go. Monuments to our nation's slave owning founders are more complicated for me. While their slaveholding is abhorrent in our modern view, the world's view of slavery was different in that pre-industrial age when everything was made by human hands... the founders were products of their own time, and they fought to CREATE our nation rather than to leave it, which puts them in a different category for me.

Philosophy

How significant is the use of storytelling in helping others understand the "true" history of an event. - Jim Luter, Registrant

Darci Tucker: I think nothing could be more significant. Facts and figures rarely hold the power of stories, because stories allow the hearers to imagine themselves in a similar situation. Once something has been imagined as personal, it's powerful.

Miscellaneous

To what extent do any of the historical storytellers engage in "trauma-informed" training, so that they are mindful of what the audience is experiencing? - Lisa Overholser, Registrant, Question Formed through Live-Stream

Brian "Fox" Ellis: WOW, excellent question, Lisa. I have not had formal training, but I do think storytellers as a group are highly empathic. Our art requires that we learn to read the audience and respond to their responses. I do like to 'go there' with some of the ugly truth of our Nation's story, but try to couch it within a strong sense of hope and determination that we can make things better when we better understand these dark moments. AND I like to make old men cry! When I know their tears are helping them face some difficult moments in their life, so I will also always check in with them after the

show. And I agree with Bruno Bettelheim's The Uses of Enchantment, that stories are a safe place to learn coping skills to deal with the real fears that haunt us.

Upcoming Events of Panelists

Brian "Fox" Ellis

You can watch or listen to my stories any day you like by tuning into my YouTube channel or Podcast, Fox Tales International. Please subscribe, it costs you nothing and means so much to me: <https://www.youtube.com/c/foxtalesinternational> and <https://anchor.fm/s/1e6e3c00/podcast/rss> (or wherever you get your podcasts)

I spent my shelter-in-place turning my programs into multimedia 'books' that include video and audio versions. I have two series, History In Person, which are Chautauqua style programs and Fox Tales Folklore, themed collections of stories, poetry and natural history:

https://www.amazon.com/Brian-Ellis/e/B001JP24GS/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0

Summer and into the Fall, I am the resident historian/storyteller/Riverlorian on the Spirit of Peoria riverboat. Because Illinois has more strictly followed CDC recommendations and cases are reducing AND we are a small boat with lots of outdoor seating, we are planning to resume cruises mid-summer: www.spiritofpeoria.com

The Bishop Hill (IL) Chautauqua will be August 22, Noon until 5 pm with Maya Angelou, Laura Ingles Wilder, Louisa May Alcott, and Walt Whitman.

<https://bishophillheritage.org/news-events/annual-events/>

And next fall, I am recreating Audubon's tour from Cincinnati, OH to New Orleans, LA with more than 40 performances booked in towns large and small along the Ohio and Mississippi. Visit my website later this summer for details: www.foxtalesint.com

Darci Tucker

This summer, I'm doing DARCI'S THROWBACK THURSDAYS most weeks. Meet a historical person or take a glimpse behind the scenes of character development or costuming. Topics are posted weekly on [Facebook at Darci Tucker, Storyteller & Historical Interpreter](#), and on [my website, www.americanlives.net under "schedule."](#)

In mid-July, I will be offering a four-week online course on how to do character interpretation. Check my facebook page and website for details, or email me at darci@americanlives.net.

My book, [Embodying the Story through Character Interpretation: a step-by-step guide to being someone you aren't](#) is available on my website.

I have a [YouTube channel, under “Darci Tucker,”](#) but don’t have much there. I hope to use some of my home time this summer updating the channel, so check back!

AND...if you’re a teacher or museum administrator, contact me about performing for your site next year! I have programs for all ages, and can do them in person or live via Zoom (or the platform of your choice), go to www.americanlives.net for educational programs.

Recommended by Dr. Reed

The Maryland Chautauqua is being sponsored by the Maryland Humanities and will be held July 6 to August 1.

How to Reach the Panelists & Provide Feedback

Dr. Caroliese Frink Reed has a doctorate in Philosophy of African American Studies, has led the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS), and has double Masters in Library Science and African American Studies, plus Bachelors in Secondary Education.
afamstorytellers@gmail.com

Sheila Arnold has performed nationally and internationally with historical/Chautauqua storytelling. She was selected as a George Washington’s Mount Vernon Research Fellow with the paper “New York Presidency: Slaves, Servants, and the Washington Family” in 2019. She has her Bachelors of Arts in African-American & African Studies from University of North Carolina-Charlotte. www.mssheila.org

Darci Tucker has taught at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and schools nationwide, continues to be museum consultant on historical interpretations, and authored “Embodying the Story through Character Interpretation” as well as “Interpreting Leadership.” Her degrees are in Political Science and Sociology. www.americanlives.net

Brian “Fox” Ellis has performed since 1982 and has done historical/Chautauqua since 1989. He has published 100+ articles and has published at least four books within two months recently! He continues to be museum consultant on historical presentations. He has his Bachelors of Arts from Wilmington College, Ohio. www.foxtalesint.com

Go directly to the Online Feedback Form heret <https://tinyurl.com/TheBigWhy-feedback>

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