

Making



Objects

Speak

Wisdom Paper: Walking Tours and Audio Tours

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The challenge I faced in creating this pod cast was to re-think the idea of the traditional walking tour and turn it into an interactive, student-centered pod cast to be taken by an individual student. Walking tours generally consist of a leader taking a group of people from spot to spot, stopping and giving a mini-lecture, which covers a considerable amount of historical, architectural, or cultural material, perhaps taking questions, and then going to the next location.

I knew that I needed to create a shorter tour (45 minutes to one-hour, compared to 2-3 hours). We couldn't expect students to spend more than that amount of time, especially since they had to get to and from the location. I took several typical walking tours, researched the obvious landmarks in the area, and wrote a draft of the tour. I walked the tour with various friends and colleagues over a number of months, revised the tour based on their suggestions, and realized that I had to drastically cut the length of the tour, so much so, that I couldn't even get to the Jewish Lower East Side!

This led to the question : What did I want the students to get out of this exercise? One of the biggest challenges for me had been the realization that I was not going to be able to present "Immigrant New York City," but only some aspects of that very large topic. If I couldn't cover everything I had hoped to, I needed the tour to examine an "essential question" in order to focus each of the 8-12 stops I would have time to cover. I also wanted the question to be relevant enough for students to use in other settings, such as in their own neighborhoods. After many iterations, I determined the question to be: "what can we learn about immigrant groups who lived in a neighborhood over time by looking at the physical environment?" One of the main themes the tour reveals is the overlapping succession of immigrant groups in this area.

Not only did I have to shorten the tour, I had to figure out how to hold the students' attention as they wandered around an unfamiliar neighborhood. The podcast could not be a mini-lecture in their ear - a presentation of objects and locations for them to passively observe. The students had to become "historical detectives," encouraged to engage in "slow looking," a process whereby they stopped and really looked at the neighborhood. I needed to "make the objects speak" by embedding "learning activities" that the students completed along the way. There are many examples of these activities, but one of my favorites is a stop at a funeral parlor in Chinatown. The student is asked to look under the awning above the door of the Wah Wing Sang Funeral Corporation. There he or she finds the name of the original Italian funeral parlor, "Baciagalupo," carved in stone - a literal example of the layering of the groups.

Throughout the tour the student is directed to look underneath awnings and behind buildings; at plaques, memorials and statues; at store fronts, churches and banks, and at the people she encounters to uncover clues to the Irish, Italian, German, Chinese, and many other immigrant groups who over the years have made the neighborhood their home.