

Creativity at the core of art and life

» Storytelling festival inspires community-university partnerships



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introduction



The University of Missouri Extension Community Arts Program (CAP) engages Extension faculty and MU faculty and students with Missouri communities. Working collaboratively, using the arts, we build community and create economic opportunity. CAP has shown evidence of mutual benefit when the arts are the vehicle for engagement between faculty, students and communities.

In 2015, CAP and the St. Louis Storytelling Festival (SLSF) formed a new partnership with plans to increase and diversify community engagement opportunities for Missourians and diversify the economy in the St. Louis region. The annual community event, designed to highlight the central role played by the ageless art of storytelling, is the largest free storytelling festival in the world. Giving voice to the human experience, storytelling allows families and communities to pass on their history to succeeding generations. In this poster, learn how story as an art form is found throughout humanity and how the arts are used as a community engagement tool at the University of Missouri.

learning opportunities



stories. At the 2015 festival, national and regional tellers brought curricula alive for 12,000 area schoolchildren by reanimating historical figures, exposing youth to diverse social and cultural perspectives, and playfully encouraging sound decision-making skills, all through the power of story.

ELEVATING IMPACT

The St. Louis Storytelling Festival has been a mainstay in the community for 36 years, partnering with major area cultural organizations to create enriching and experiential learning opportunities. Festival storytellers amplify the impact of site resources — whether the sites are schools, libraries, historical parks, museums or community-based organizations — by bringing these resources to life through

Festival storytelling at historical sites like the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site (devoted to prehistoric native civilization) and the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site brought larger, abstract themes — like **social justice and environmental stewardship** — to a more personal, relatable level. Artistically crafted narratives shared at these sites by professional tellers build upon what site interpreters and park rangers already do, echoing the importance of community-based learning's narrative core.

Our three festival community storytelling workshops were prime examples of engaged, **community-based learning**. Workshops on family storytelling increased intergenerational dialogue, encouraged the sharing of stories from multiple perspectives and helped foster a sense of identity. Tellers provided specific tools and techniques to make community members' stories engaging, gripping and entertaining, while always allowing the core story to shine through.

ARTS ARE USED AS A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL: SLSF ENGAGES COMMUNITY GROUPS, ARTISTS AND INSTITUTIONS ON A LARGE SCALE. THE 2015 FESTIVAL BROUGHT UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION PROGRAMMING TO 49 TOTAL SITES IN THREE MISSOURI COUNTIES OVER THE SPAN OF 4 DAYS, WITH A TOTAL AUDIENCE OUTREACH OF 13,400.

CREATING RELEVANCE

Throughout its history, the St. Louis Storytelling Festival has dynamically responded to the local community and societal changes through storytelling. Past festival themes have focused on relevant contemporary issues, such as storytelling's ability to convey information just as the Internet exploded onto the scene in the 1980s and '90s, or celebrating St. Louis' increasing cultural diversity through the inclusion of diverse voices.

In the wake of the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black man in Ferguson, Missouri, St. Louis Public Radio created an initiative called "We Live Here," documenting issues of class, race and history that led up to the emotional eruption in the shooting's aftermath. Working with the radio station, the St. Louis Storytelling Festival



"THIS WAS SO GREAT TO HAVE AT OUR SCHOOL. TOTALLY TIED IN WITH OUR TEACHING CURRICULUM. REALLY APPRECIATE THAT THIS IS OFFERED TO US!"

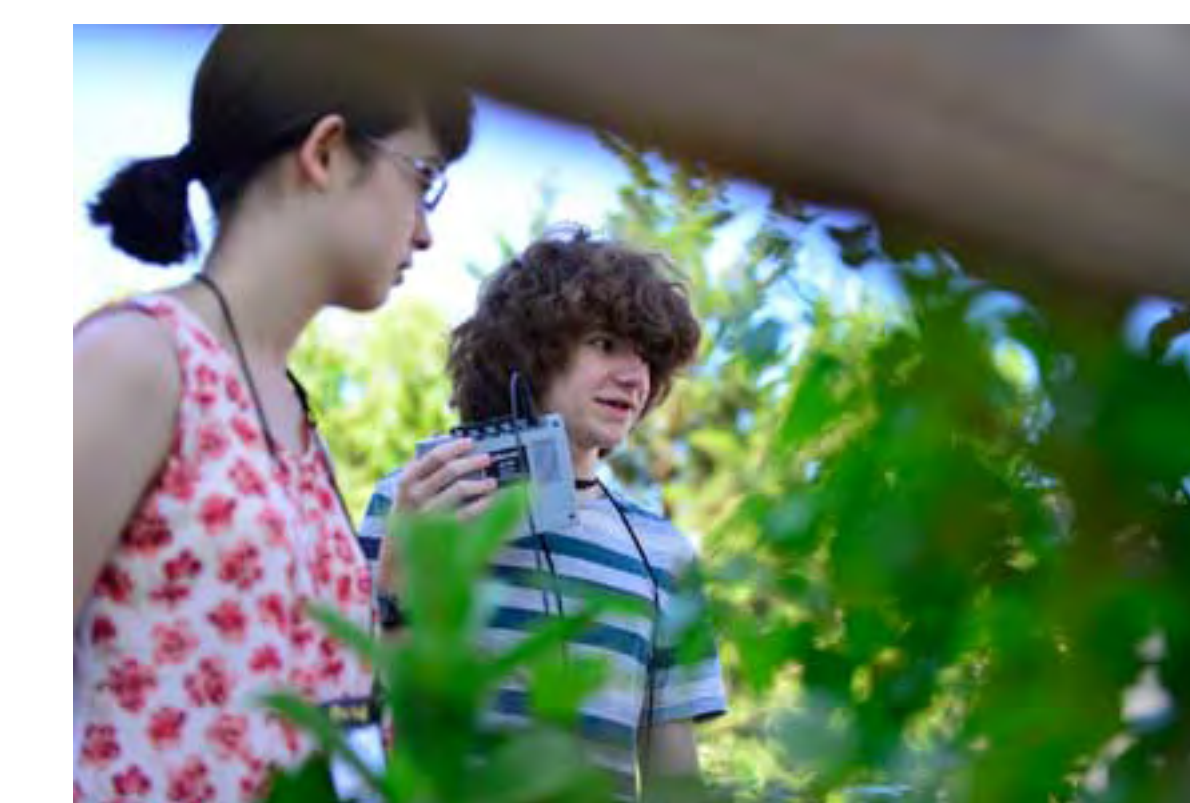
– 4th grade teacher

produced "Storytelling Lives Here," a festival event that enabled storytellers to use their experiences in narrating these issues. In producing the event, SLSF discovered new community groups, such as the St. Louis Story Stitchers Artists' Collective, whose Teen Stitching Squad's gripping performances voiced their experiences living in neighborhoods similar to Michael Brown's.

RECIPROCAL INSPIRATION

Story is at the core of innovative and creative projects on campus where new knowledge and relevancy are generated.

- » Storytellers have been engaged as faculty and students during a **summer camp**. High-school students learned how stories are at the heart of scientific



research during Summers@Mizzou camp "Arts as the portal to science communication," co-sponsored by CAP and MU's Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center. Students learned how creativity, imagination and innovation are the hallmarks of both successful artists and scientists. During the week, students worked in labs with renowned MU scientists,

Heidi Appel and Jack Schultz. Professional storyteller Milbre Burch helped students discover and communicate the story found in the research. Artist Lee Ann Woolery helped students communicate the stories found in the scientific research through visual language. And theatre professor Suzanne Burgoyne taught students theatre techniques to enhance their presentation skills.

- » Stories are at the heart of a **heritage tourism initiative**. The "Legendary Lexington Audio Tour," a walking and driving tour of the history and architecture of the community, is a collaboration between MU, CAP, and the Lexington, Missouri community. Facilitated by CAP through participatory engagement processes, the local community support includes: a local historian instrumental in the development of the stories; a local theatre professional who wrote and produced the script and; 90 community volunteers of all ages engaged as voice actors, as well as many other volunteers involved in fundraising and marketing. The MU School of Music provided a faculty member and a student to compose music and record the audio tour. The final tourism product includes an oversized printed map, a set of four CDs, and an MP3 file on the Lexington Tourism website. <http://www.visitlexingtonmo.com/audio-tours.html>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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