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Virtual Interpretation: Interpreting with Technology

Abstract for:

Can an App Change How You See the World? GLOBE Observer for Interpreters

When you leave the house in the morning, do you triple-check that your smart phone is in your pocket or purse? Or maybe you don't have to check it at all because it lives in your hand. Most people in the modern world, including visitors to natural outdoor settings, never get far from their devices. We can treat this ubiquity of technology as a distraction from the environment around us, or embrace it as a tool to engage visitors and help them see the landscape in new, different, and exciting ways. With citizen science and the GLOBE Observer app, we hope to help interpreters see technology as an opportunity for modern interpretation, rather than a challenge to overcome. The smart phone is here to stay, so let's take advantage of it!

In this article, we explore how citizen science and GLOBE Observer can help visitors make a meaningful connection as part of place-based learning at a variety of venues, from nature centers to parks to urban museums. By not just looking around them, but doing directed data collection, visitors will see their environment in a new way, and feel like they are contributing to a larger purpose. To paraphrase Marcel Proust, the true voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes. We want visitors to be excited by the science connections to NASA data, encouraging them to learn more about how we study our Earth from the vantage points of ground and space. The idea of using the app can be introduced in various ways as part of interpretive programming. Then, because the app is accessible from over 120 countries around the world, visitors can take the experience home with them to collect data in their own neighborhoods, extending the connection. This deeper interaction will also hopefully lead to a longer-term engagement with the natural world, and an increased conservation ethic.

In the article, we will also provide some specific examples of how the GLOBE Observer (GO) app can complement existing themes and programming, such as the collaboration with the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail for a summer 2019 "GO on a Trail" data collection challenge, as well as other resources that are available to support interpretive programming. Overall, we hope that by giving interpreters new eyes for technology, we can help them use the tools we have to offer to give visitors new eyes for the landscape with GLOBE Observer.

Authors:

Kristen Weaver is the Deputy Coordinator for the GLOBE Observer program, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center/Science Systems and Applications, Inc.

Anita Davis is the Lead for the Earth to Sky Interagency Partnership, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center/Science Systems and Applications, Inc.

Jeannetta (Jenna) Giddens represents the Earth to Sky Interagency Partnership, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center/Science Systems and Applications, Inc.

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