**First Person Historical Characterization:**

**Some Ideas for Humanities Scholars Preparing Dramatic Monologues**

By George Frein

"Dramatize, dramatize, dramatize.” - Henry James

The advice Henry James gave to his fellow novelists is advice all humanities scholars could well take to heart whenever they prepare to speak to general public audiences.

For the past 35 years humanities scholars, working in the modern humanities Chautauqua movement, have taken James' advice so much to heart that they make some of their presentations to the public in the form of first-person dramatic monologues. Humanities scholars appear in costume to present programs they call "historical characterizations." To be sure, by the dramatic standards of the stage and movies, the monologues of those of us who have participated in these humanities programs are not, and are not meant to be, very much more dramatic than a good lecture; but they have provoked uncommonly good questions and discussions by quite sizable audiences. They are now a very popular and effective vehicle for public humanities programming around the country.

This essay is an un-dramatic statement of the advice I am often asked to give to Chautauqua scholars and, by extension, advice I would give to anyone interested in developing a program of historical characterization. Here I will unpack James' suggestion that writers "Dramatize, dramatize, dramatize" as advice for Chautauqua scholars.

**Scholarship**

**"Get A Life!"**

Nothing is more important to historical characterization than a good character. My first suggestion is this: get a good character. Do somebody worth doing. Do not do a character who does not have a lot of potential to serve the best and highest purposes of the humanities. Do not sacrifice scholarship for entertainment. Public audiences deserve the best the humanities have to offer. Historical characterization makes it possible to present even difficult figures effectively.

To have a character that audiences will find interesting, you need one you yourself find fascinating and worthwhile. He or she must be available in the form of a good and ample text. The character should have written something substantial and something that is still worth reading. Especially if you hope to portray your character with some frequency, you will need to find the character continually stimulating. The ideal text would include: 1) published works and 2) published or unpublished letters, diaries, journals, and autobiography. In other words, the best characters are those with a thought-provoking text, usually in the form of published works, and then in addition some private material, published or unpublished, available to the scholar. The second set of materials will allow you to enliven and illuminate the first set of materials. In addition to material of good quality, there should also be enough of it to allow you to develop more than one or two presentations out of it. You do not want to have to do the very same program time and again. You do not want a character who, if he were alive today, would have only one stump speech to make. One-note historical characters are usually no more interesting than one-note politicians. Find someone like Walt Whitman, who contradicted himself and then boasted that he was large enough to contain contradictions.

Finally, the character you choose should be a real historical figure. It is my conviction, after 30 plus years of doing Chautauqua characters and helping others develop characters, that historical figures make infinitely better subjects for first-person characterizations than fictional, composite characters ever do. Horace Mann or Bronson Alcott is more worth doing than "The Early American School Teacher." The composite character, even if based on historical sources, allows too much room for ungrounded generalization. It is more authentic for a scholar to serve a unique historical text.

**Begin by Reading the Corpus**

Once you have a serious interest in a specific historical character, read her books through—all of them. You cannot portray a character until you have read everything she has written. If you were going to write an essay about *Little Women* you might not have to read *Little Men, Eight Cousins,* and *Moods.* But, if you are going to stand on stage and speak in the voice of Louisa May Alcott and then take questions as Louisa, you must know what she knew. Historical characterization will require you to say "I" in the person of the one you portray. You cannot limit your knowledge to a part of that person. On some given occasion, a scholar might properly present a monologue which would focus only on the Alcott *of Little Women,* but one must do so knowing all of Alcott's work, having all of Alcott's mentality.

As you begin to make your way through all of your character's published work, begin to read differently than you have ever read before. Read as though you were the writer of the texts you are reading. Remember, when you have finished reading, you will not say, "Louisa May Alcott said . . ." You will say instead: "I said. . . ." "I thought. . . ." "I said to myself. . . ." "I saw . . . ." "I felt . . . ." "I believe . . . . "I am here to tell you . . . ."

As you read your figure's corpus, it will help later when you come to create your presentation if you have marked your text for words, phrases, and sentences that you think you might want to use just as they are. Reading Thoreau, for example, you would certainly mark, for verbatim delivery, the sentence, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately and front only the essential facts of life . . ."

Other passages you will want to include in your presentation, but not verbatim. These you will mark differently from those destined for exact quotation. You will present some significant part of your character to the audience not in his or her exact words but in a reasonable facsimile of your own making. To do this authentically and credibly you will need to compose sentences in the style of your figure. You will want to imitate his vocabulary, grammatical constructions, and other language patterns. You might find it a helpful exercise to write a summary of a chapter from your character's work in his or her style. Thoreau's suggestion that books ought to be read as deliberately as they are written is especially good advice for one reading in order to deliver a first-person monologue. Just out of habit, as a trained humanities student or scholar, you will read listening to your own critical voice as you always do when studying a humanities text. But, now listen sympathetically and with special care to the voice of your author. That is the voice you must cultivate. It is the voice you will use in your presentation. You cannot say, "Well, you know, President Lincoln once said that long ago the founding generation. . . ." You will have to say exactly, "Four score and seven years ago our forefathers. . ." Even if you choose to paraphrase and summarize what is in the text, you will have to use words like "four score and seven" and "forefathers." To do first-person characterization scholars must know the whole of their text and know it as much as possible from inside of text as to both its content and its expression.

**Read the Corpus behind the Corpus**

It is not enough to read your character's books. To present the *character,* and not just his published texts, you must also read all of his pseudonymous or anonymous works, plus any autobiography, letters, diaries, and journals that are available in print or manuscript. Usually this material has been published, and it is just a matter of reading it all. Such material gives the scholar invaluable behind-the-scenes information about the character and his better known texts. I have even found it enlightening and useful to read the marginal notations Herman Melville and John Adams made in the books each man read. You will want to get your figure’s habits of mind as much as possible.

It is not sufficient to present the public persona of your character in a humanities program. Something of your character's private personality also needs to be shown or intimated. Louisa May Alcott wrote for children and came to be known as "the children's friend," but she also wrote "sensation stories" in which she used what one critic has called "a most unladylike vernacular." Both Alcotts existed and should be known, even though she herself would not have revealed them in public in her day. Humanities audiences like to get to know the private as well as the public person. As you read letters, journals, and the like, it is a good idea to mark passages significant for the light they throw on specific public events and expressions in your character's life and thoughts.

To this list of more private papers one should add reviews and criticism made during the figure's lifetime, especially if they were known by the character. The presentation of such criticism in your monologue creates a bit of drama. Audiences always enjoy controversy. Moreover, it is important to introduce multiple voices into the monologue. The humanities are better served when audiences learn about the controversy in which the search for truth is always involved. By quoting from contemporary criticism you allow other understandings than those of your character to be heard by the audience. A scholar portraying Walt Whitman once quoted Rufus Wilmot Griswold who said that *Leaves of Grass* could only have been written by a "love-sick donkey who died of unrequited love." The audience laughed, but later during the question period "Whitman" was asked: "What was it that led Griswold to make that criticism of your poetry? Did he have any particular feature in mind?"

**Read Current Biographies and Criticism**

Having done all that reading, you are still not yet ready to compose your monologue and put on a costume. The next step, however, is one that is instinctive for any humanities scholar. It is a step that will probably begin as soon as you start reading the primary texts. You must now read secondary texts, the scholarship. If you are going to present Thomas Jefferson, you will have to read his biographers and critics as well as the man himself. You will have to read Dumas Malone, Fawn Brodie, Joseph Ellis, Henry Adams, Annette Gordon Reed, and others. Your characterization of Jefferson must be based on your own reading of him, but it must also be critically self-conscious. You must be familiar with the scholarship on your character. If there are schools of thought about her or him, you must know what they are and where you stand in relation to them.

Reading the scholarship will also serve as a sort of second reading of your figure. As you read biographers and critics, you will see how your subject has been treated by others. You will probably find significant features and passages you missed in your own reading. Secondary materials will suggest additional interpretations to the one that has emerged from your own reading. Not infrequently you will want to modify your first view of your character as a result.

Many historical figures are known to the public only through biography, criticism, and popular culture. They are often misunderstood as a result. You must know the generally accepted views of your figure before you present your own interpretation of her or him. It will at least suggest some of the questions you are likely to get after your presentation.

Finally, knowing the history of interpretation on your character will remind you that you are giving an *interpretation.* Yours is only one among a number of possible interpretations. You are not bringing the dead back to life. Your audience will not get the real Christopher Columbus or the real Emily Dickinson. They will get your Columbus, your Dickinson

**A Humanities Program**

Before you sit down to sketch out your presentation, think about why you are doing what you are doing. You are a humanities scholar. You are not an actor. You are not going to memorize lines and perform them. Your work is not going to be a work of art. The costume, gestures, stage (if any), and applause (if any) will not and should not make you an actor. Your purpose is to provide the audience with a common humanities text for immediate discussion, which you yourself will lead, first in-character and then out of character as a scholar. Actors play their characters for applause and art. You must play your character for the questions he or she can generate and for the sake of the discussion that will follow. Actors do not take questions. *Humanities scholars never fail to take questions.* The pattern that has been developed for the modern humanities Chautauqua is that of a two-part question period. First, questions are answered in character. Then, when in-character questioning is brought to a close and the scholar steps out of character (introducing himself or herself as Dr. So-in-so from Somewhere College who became interested in this character for this and that reason), questions are taken and answered in the persona of the humanities scholar.

During the in-character question period you will, in effect, ask the audience to remain in-character with you. You will want them to continue to suspend disbelief and ask you questions such as this: "Mr. Franklin, why do you have such hope for the new US Constitution? After what you just said about this new republic it seems to me that there is more reason than ever to doubt that it will succeed." To get questions like this you will have to raise them in the minds of your audience by what you say in character. Your monologue should not leave the audience with all questions answered. Give your audience the sort of presentation that will provoke questions. Compose a mental script that you expect will lead to important questions.

When you answer questions in character try to bring to mind a passage in your figure's text from which you can quote, at least indirectly. Know your figure's views on the questions of the day and answer by reference to his words: "As I said in my autobiography . . ." or "As I told President Washington in a letter explaining my views on the central bank. . . ." One must never invent answers during the question period any more than one may invent a historical character. One must always be able to justify an answer by reference to something said or written by one's character.

In the out-of-character question period, when you take questions as a scholar, you should show your audience the choices you made in your presentation and interpretation of the character. They should learn something about the present state of scholarship on your character. They should also learn something about the period in which your figure lived, the uniqueness of his or her contribution to life and thought, and its continuing significance today. Now is the time to suggest books the audience might enjoy reading. Now is the time to promote the humanities. including the state humanities council, if it is the sponsor of the program, and to show the audience the value of humanities questioning and scholarship. Let the audience in on your own on-going thinking and research about your character and the times in which he or she lived.

The purpose of first-person characterization is to give audiences a lively humanities text about which they can ask thoughtful questions and then pursue those questions with the help of a humanities scholar who is herself continuing to study such questions.

**The First-Person Text**

The first-person text is not simply an autobiographical text. It is not merely a life story. One should not give a monologue that proceeds chronologically through the character's life. A good monologue will often begin *in medias res*.

The first-person text is a text in the service of the humanities. What you want to offer is an interesting text. It is better to offer two or three ideas, together with an effective line of reasoning that listeners can sink their teeth into, than to skim over the surface of a life from childhood to old age. A mere summary of a life can leave the audience holding little more than a bag of dates, names, and places.

If one were to do a first-person text as Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, one might begin this way: "You know me as the author of *Treasure Island*. . ." and then proceed to talk about the book briefly. One might also hint that there is a story behind its composition. But, then one might turn at once to the topic of the evening's presentation in some fashion as this: "But *Treasure Island* was only one of my books. Did you know that I also wrote a book about my travels across North America? I did, lads and lassies, and it is about that I wish to tell ye a wee bit tonight."

It is nearly always a good idea to begin one's first-person text in the middle of things as Homer did in the Iliad. Do not begin, "I grew up on a farm in Kansas in the 1850s . . ." if you can begin, "The thing that changed my life forever was. . ." Begin as "Meriwether Lewis" once began, "I do not suppose you have spent much time among naked men. . ." Or begin as "Elizabeth Custer" once did: "My parents, you know, did not want me to marry the General."

The text of your dramatic monologue must be historically accurate *for its purposes as a humanities text.* By all accounts Herman Melville was a very poor public speaker. On his first tour he lectured on Roman statuary! One need not bore audiences in the character of Melville just because Melville did. Rather, a "Melville" monologue should be as interesting as were his sea tales. Nathaniel Hawthorne did not like to speak in public, but that fact should not exclude him from the list of possible Chautauqua-type characterizations. Moreover, while a biographer should include almost everything in the name of historical completeness, a Chautauqua program should not. For one thing, there is not enough time. For another, a public speaker, even a dead one, should choose to feature only a few things in any given speech.

The first-person text should be a coherent humanities text: one that is reasonably limited to an appropriate topic or theme. It should not be "The Life and Times of Dorothy Parker" or "The Life and Works of Langston Hughes," for example. If the monologue takes about 30 to 40 minutes, there will still be a substantial amount of time, say 30 or 40 minutes more, during the two question periods in which related features of the life and thought of the character can be developed in answer to audience questions. This is enough time for you to develop a few more of your character's ideas. But it will not be nearly enough time for you to do everything, and you should not try. You want to send the audience home wanting more, wanting to read something by or about your figure.

**In Costume and On Stage**

You are not an actor, and the costume will not make you one. Audiences will know this is not a play, not even a one-man or one-woman play. The costume, however, should be reasonably accurate. It should look like what your character was wearing in his or her best-known painting or photograph. A wig might be necessary, or some gray in your hair. One need not take the pains film directors take to achieve look-a-like historical characters; but one should take enough care with the costume so that one is believable when one says, "My name is Abigail Adams."

There are dozens of Elvis and Marilyn impersonators (not to mention the Civil War reenactors crowd) whose whole performance consists in their looking and sounding exactly like Elvis and Marilyn. But, tall, thin humanities scholars should not hesitate to portray short, fat historical characters. Scholars should focus on scholarship and fidelity to their characters' texts. No amount of look-a-like will make up for inadequate scholarship.

On stage you will need only a little dramatic presence. The amount of stage presence which most teachers have is usually sufficient. Speak emphatically. Pause appropriately. Block out your presentation a bit so that you do not just pace back and forth like a professor going through a lecture (though in truth a monologue is perilously close to a lecture!). Stay in one place, sitting or standing, until you have completed a unit of your program; then move. Move to indicate a change or development of some sort. Do not simply stand or sit in one spot throughout. Remember that if you are standing on a stage in a costume speaking as a character who everyone knows is dead, the audience is going to expect at least a modicum of drama.

Dramatize what you are saying by bringing other figures on stage. You might call an imaginary visitor to the stage, a secretary to take a letter or to check galley proofs, a child to run and errand, a neighbor to bring news. It is a good idea to use other voices in addition to that of your character. Have your character quote or mimic other people such as characters in her novel, critics, friends, family.

Set the stage or the area where you will work with a chair and table. No more. The general rule is to keep it minimal. Do not use a podium or anything else that gets between you and your audience. Look at the audience directly and always. Do not use notes. If you read from a book, an appropriate thing to do in a humanities program, you must read effectively. Remember, it is always harder to read effectively than it is to speak effectively to an audience.

Whatever you do, *never* break character. Never let your own third-person voice interrupt your character from the time you begin your monologue until you step out of character and take questions as the scholar.

**Dramatics Appropriate for the Humanities**

Having said all that, a word of caution is in order. Do not overly dramatize your presentation. Keep it a humanities drama. Do not turn it into a one-woman or one-man play. Few humanities scholars will be tempted to pull out all the dramatic stops for the simple reason that they don't have the acting skills. The amount of dramatics required is very modest. All one really needs to do is to follow the directions contained in the words of his or her character.

Some people who come to do historical characterization out of a theater background are sometimes inclined to over-dramatize. What is perfectly proper for the theater is not fitting for a presentation that tries to serve the purpose of humanities discourse. The dramatics should lead to a good question and answer period and to a thoughtful discussion. Too many costume changes, too much emotion, too loud, too soft, too many gestures, too much movement can distract from the thinking the audience must be doing while listening to the speaker. Dramatize, but keep it in bounds.

**Past Time or Present Time?**

Should your presentation be made in time present or in time past? There is some difference of opinion among scholars who do first-person characterization on this question. Some scholars begin like this: "It is good to be here this evening. To return to the world I left so long ago in order to address a 21st-century audience in a time very different from my own 18th century. . . ." Most scholars, however, prefer to begin in such a way that they ask audience members to believe that *they* are in a previous time.

The advantage of the first scheme is that it allows your character to know everything that the audience knows. It allows you to talk to the audience without worrying about anachronisms. Nor does the audience have to surrender its modernity to listen to your character. In the question period the audience can ask any question it wants without committing anachronisms. Someone could ask: "Mrs. Stanton, from what you said tonight I think you must be 'pro-choice', but my friend Ruth here says that what you say shows that you are 'pro-life'. Which is it?" Speaking as one who has come back to life, Stanton can answer immediately since, at least for this hour, she lives again in the same present time as her listeners. She might say, "I have seen the debate about abortion in your newspapers and I think. . . ."

The advantage of the second scheme is that the historical character does not have to know what, in the nature of the case, he or she never could know. It does require you to draw your audience back into your character's lifetime. But if you do that the audience will be thinking in the context and within the limitations of the historical figure they are hearing. Anachronistic questions will occasionally be asked by a member of the audience who failed to get into character herself. Such questions can easily be set aside for the moment and then taken up at the beginning of the out-of-character question period. One might say, for instance: "That is an interesting question. I have not given much thought to it, so let me hold it for a little while and come back to it in a few minutes. Don't let me forget it, though."

I, myself, do not like the idea of a historical character appearing in the present time and here I am going to argue in favor of the second scheme. It seems to me, that if you are going to put on period costume and speak in first person as someone who is long dead about his or her ideas (and the audience, of course, knows you are doing this) that it makes for a better humanities program if your monologue interprets and illuminates the past of which it is a part. Remaining in the present time while you are in character means that audiences will have the advantage in their interior dialogue with the character they are listening to. Taking the audience back in time means that the advantage goes to the character. The result is that the listeners face a greater intellectual challenge. They must think in another time and place than the familiar present. This is one of the great values of historical scholarship and a value that historical characterization is ready-made to promote.

It is true, that at the end of your monologue, a member of the audience may step out of character and ask an anachronistic question such as this one I once heard asked of Alexander Hamilton: "Mr. Hamilton, You were the first Secretary of the Treasury and you said, 'A national debt is a national blessing.' What do you think of our present debt of 25 trillion dollars?'' The answer Hamilton gave was: '' Sir, you libelously exaggerate! The debt President Washington and I are willing for the nation to incur is only a few million dollars and well within the capacity of the country to carry. If your question is how much larger the debt our young and healthy nation can bear, let me think about it and answer you in a few minutes."

It is not difficult for audiences to suspend disbelief for first-person presentations. They do it every time they go to the movies or read a novel. If one occasionally gets an anachronistic question, like the one to Hamilton, it is easy to set it aside. It is, of course, legitimate for people today to want to know what Hamilton would think about the present national debt if he were alive. But, only if they are willing to enter fully into his historical setting will they be prepared to *speculate* with a historian about the hypothetical when "Hamilton" steps aside and the humanities scholar takes questions and leads the discussion. It seems to me that the first scheme promotes relevance and avoids anachronistic questions by making the whole program one long anachronism. My own preference, and that of most Chautauqua scholars working today, is to pick a date within the character's lifetime (the later the better, usually) and to speak from that date. The fiction of a live 18th-century character is, I believe, a more believable fiction than the fiction of a dead character returned to life a century or more later, reading the newspapers to see what is going on.

**Historical Characterization in Schools**

The Great Plains Chautauqua Society developed historical characterization in the late 1970s as a device for humanities programming designed for the out-of-school public. Now, many such programs are frequently offered to school children.

School children deserve the same kind of historically-accurate presentations scholars offer adult audiences. School children will usually be captive audiences and for that reason alone they should be given all the respect due to the most thoughtful of adult audiences.

The most serious mistake one can make when doing a program for children or young people is to talk down to them. Treat them as people capable of serious thinking and you will win them over to the purposes of your program. To this end, ask them to think along with you. If at all possible, ask very young students to take part somehow in the monologue. Telling sea stories to grade school children, "Herman Melville" began by telling how he came to be called "White Jacket" on one sea voyage and "Buttons" on another. He then had the children give one another nicknames. They usually identified each other as "Adidas," "UKC," "Toucan," "San Francisco," or "Disney World,"—designations based on their tee shirts. "Melville" could then ask them leading questions, calling each youngster by his or her new sea name. "What do you think 'KC'? How would a sailor go about fishing for a whale 80 feet long?" "Disney, what do you think it feels like to stand watch on the top of the main mast of a ship at sea?"

It would also be a serious mistake to offer school children a first person entertainment that was not a serious humanities program. Do nothing but humanities scholarship in the schools. Present a challenging text. Be thought-provoking. Raise serious questions. Require the children to think critically. Always take questions during and after your monologue. Youngsters like to ask questions as much as adults do. Never fail to step out of character to lead a discussion as a scholar. Always show students how a humanities scholar works and how she goes at a text herself. Let students in on how you think about your character and what your critical estimation of her is. Never fail to talk about your character's faults and limitations.

When school children are your audience, include childhood reminiscences. Give the children some idea of how important childhood was in your figure's later life. Tell about parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, and teachers. Show them how childhood was different before TV, the automobile, pizza. What games were played? What chores had to be done? Indicate that childhood is not so much a biological fact as a social construct.

When you accept an invitation to do your "show" in the schools, make sure that the teachers and administrators know it is a humanities program and not a diversion from the curriculum. Ask teachers to prepare the students academically for your presentation and suggest things they might do by way of follow up after you have gone. Insist that teachers attend as members of the audience. Do not let them park the children on you while they take a break. Do not accept an invitation if you are not given enough time for a monologue followed by an ample, two-part question period. Leave suggestions for reading by teachers and students. If possible, provide printed programs with suggestions for further study on the back. Never leave without suggesting something the students would enjoy reading.

**Dos and Don'ts of Historical Characterization**

**Show. Don't tell.**

Henry James' advice, "Dramatize, dramatize, dramatize," is especially good advice for anyone doing first-person characterization. Go through every part of your planned presentation and change those passages that only *tell* the audience something to passages that demonstrate and dramatize something. When Frederick Douglass comes to the story of his fight with a slave-breaker, one Edward Covey, he presents it dramatically: "‘Do you mean to resist me, you scoundrel?’ asked Covey; to which I replied a respectful, ‘Yes Sir, I do.’" Do

not tell the audience what your character thought. Show him or her thinking. In place of a list of conclusions reached, let listeners in on the process which moves your character's thoughts forward. Often this only requires changing past tense verbs to the present tense. Rather than have Henry Adams say. "I was a failure," have him say, "I am the family failure. My father was a congressman and ambassador. My grandfather, John Quincy Adams, and my great grandfather, John Adams, were presidents. They made history. All I do is write about it." In order to dramatize your material, you do not have to act dramatically. It is enough merely to speak a dramatic text. An un-dramatic text will only be made worse by dramatics.

**Show the complexity of your character**

I once saw a first-person characterization of a famous novelist. The portrayal, however, gave no indication whatever that the figure wrote anything at length. In place of a famous author, the audience got a stand-up comic with a string of one-liners, none of which had to do with the essentials of a writing career. The audience loved the humor and laughed a lot, but the humanities were not well served.

**Do not sanctify or sanitize your character**

Do not hide your character's faults. If she or he was anti-Semitic, you cannot deny it. Do not make your figure politically correct. If you do, you not only present a false picture of your person, you also deprive the audience of the chance to learn from his or her failings by inquiring about them during the question period. Indicate that your figure is both likable and unlikable. Leon Edel, the biographer of Henry James, said it is the biographer's task to show readers "the back of the carpet." Edel is right: the underside is as much a part of life as the visible top side. Give at least a hint of the private persona to your audience. Showing the difference between the two sides of the carpet, between private and public life, you will provoke worthwhile questions that the audience will be sure to pursue after the monologue.

**Do not plant questions in the audience**

Never plant questioners in the audience. Such a tactic shows a lack of respect for the audience. When audiences get a good humanities text, they *always* ask good questions. The intelligence of the public can be counted on to produce good questions. You can and should plant questions in the minds of your listeners, however, by what you say. If you show the full complexity and even the inconsistencies of your character, audiences will pick up on them. "Mrs. Custer, the General sounds to me like a dashing young hero. Why did your parents not want you to marry him?" Such a question was planted in one questioner's mind by the contrast between the opening sentence and the body of Libby Custer's monologue. "Mr. Jefferson, you spoke eloquently about democracy and equality, yet you owned slaves! How do you explain the difference between your words and your deeds?" This type of question is raised by listeners only when they are allowed to see the whole of Jefferson’s life and mind. To get the questions you want, you must give a monologue that suggests them. It is a good idea to make a list of questions you want to raise, and then check to see if what you plan to say will suggest such questions to careful listeners. Anticipating questions will also allow you to have answers ready which are carefully grounded in some part of your character's published or unpublished text.

**Serve the humanities**

You can serve the humanities well by getting the audience to put good questions to the text you offer. Remember that the humanities include a variety of intellectual disciplines. If at all possible, try to generate questions that are philosophical, literary, historical, theological, linguistic, and anthropological. Show how your character struggled with such questions, how she was of two minds about her beliefs and convictions—just as most of us are. Always show your figure's line of reasoning. If at all appropriate, indicate the intellectual influences in your character's thought. Mention the books and authors she read, the studying she did, the controversy she engaged in, the schools she attended. Most importantly, allow sufficient time for questions to be put to you as a humanities scholar. Explain what the humanities are, what they do for us individually and as a society. Show the audience how a humanities scholar's mind works. Tell about the sources you use, the authors you return to again and again, the writers you most value, what you like and dislike about your figure. Provoke your listeners to do their own thinking about literature, history, philosophy, and about the schools of thought that have developed on the questions they are asking. Do not be too quick to give your settled opinion. Leave ideas open-ended for your listeners as often as you can. Challenge listeners to think about the implications of their questions. Invite them to read some of the scholarship on your character and his or her times.

**Continue Your Research**

Do not settle into a standard stump speech as you go from performance to performance. Continue to revise your presentation. Develop a number of different presentations on different topics and themes. I always read something new even when doing a topic that I have done before. I re-read a Melville or Mark Twain novel, look at a piece of criticism I have not yet read, or I read a book that the character himself read. This makes it possible for my work to be a life-long intellectual hobby and continually fresh.

**Invite Questions before You Begin**

Let listeners know that they will be able to ask questions when you are finished. Have them make mental notes in the margins of the text they are about to hear. People listen differently when they just sit back and allow themselves to be entertained. You want active listeners. If someone is going to introduce you, she can do this for you: "Mark Twain has agreed to take questions after his address this afternoon, then, when he has left for another engagement, we will continue to talk among ourselves about what he has said. Now, please, welcome, Mark Twain."

**Make Lists of Facts and Quotations**

I keep lists. My largest list is of important quotations I want to have available during the question and answer period. I continually read through these lists so that I eventually come to have many of them committed to memory. It is also good to make a list of family members, relatives and friends, another list of places of residence, another of dates of important events, and another of facts and figures which will allow you to concretize your answers and produce verisimilitude.

**Do Not Memorize a Written Script**

If you choose to write out your monologue, do not treat it as so many lines to be memorized. Some passages you may want to give word for word as they appear in your character's text, and these you will memorize. But, it is better not to commit the whole monologue to memory. Unless you are a well-trained actor, memorization will tend to freeze your presentation so that it will sound memorized and will lack directness and immediacy. It is better to tell a story than recite one. Memorized texts somehow tell the audience that things are all settled. An un-memorized text suggests your character is thinking aloud and that questions will be welcomed. And, questions are what a humanities program is all about. Applause without questions indicates a failed presentation.

**Answer Questions Briefly**

Though the question periods are more important in a public humanities program than the monologue, they can more easily disappoint the audience if your answers are too long. The single greatest mistake you can make during the question period is to go on for too long on any one question. It is a typical professorial mistake. Answer only the question asked. Do not answer all the implications and related questions you can think of. Long answers kill good questions and inhibit others in the audience from asking questions. Better to be short and to the point. It is even better to be short and not to the point than to be too long. If you feel the question needs a longer answer, make a suggestion for further reading.

**Dramatize to Entertain and Educate**

Mark Twain said of the old, traveling Chautauquas which were popular at the turn of the century, that they were the only institution he knew of in which the public could be both entertained and educated at the same time. The contemporary revival of those old traveling tent Chautauquas began on the Great Plains in 1976 and were sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the state humanities councils in the Great Plains states. Historical characterization is now a feature of humanities programming all across the country. First person historical characterization was created as a vehicle for the discussion of topics that serve the humanities. The modern humanities Chautauqua uses the trappings of costume, first person dramatic monologue, and a modest amount of entertainment in order to do serious education in the humanities. Historical characterization is an effective tool in public humanities programming whenever scholars discover how to let *the inherently dramatic voice of the humanities* express itself in the presence of attentive audiences.

Good luck!

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September 8, 2021