

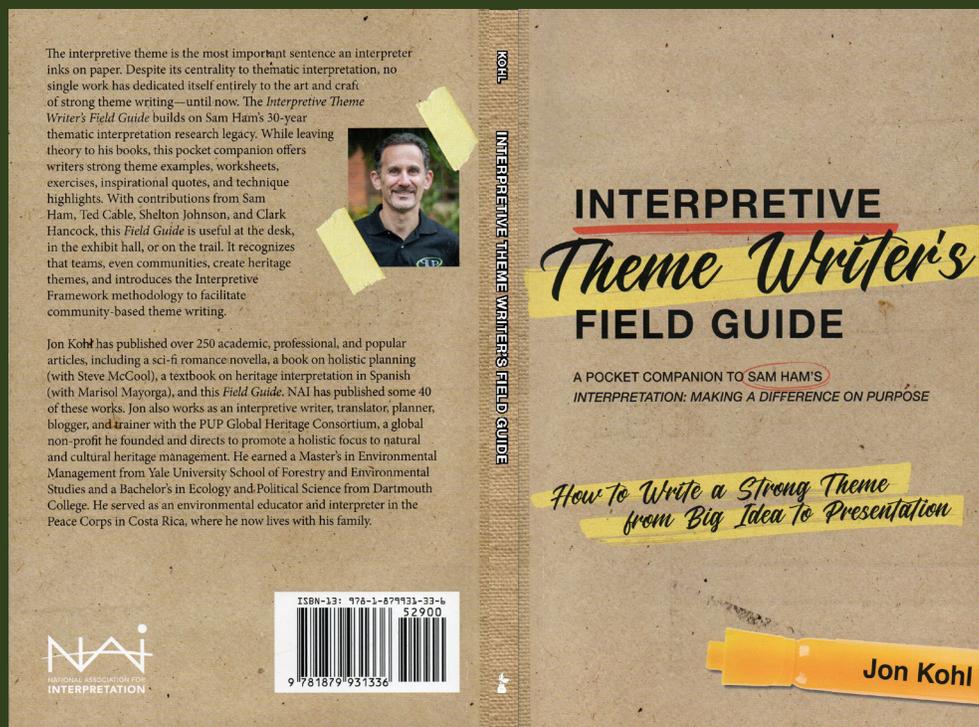
# Interpretive Theme Writer's Course for Heritage Managers, Interpreters, and Communicators

An interpretive theme is the most important sentence a heritage manager, interpreter, or communicator will ever write.

No other course delves into the craftsmanship, psychology, and philosophy of why themes beat at interpretation's heart. When an interpreter, team, or community begins with a powerful theme and builds a strong presentation structure from it, audience transformation can happen. This course frames the craft and art of theme writing in the light of a universal constellation of Big Ideas available for theme writers.

Starting 10 November Wednesday, 3-5 pm EST

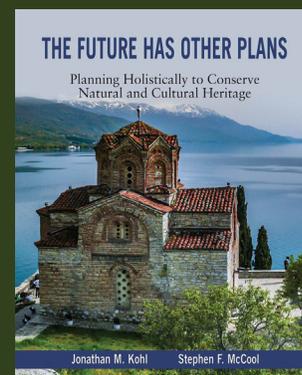
## Based on the field guide by Jon Kohl



Published by the National Association for Interpretation



Other books by  
Jon Kohl related  
to interpretation



“Having a professional interpreter want to build on my work — and hopefully improve it in some way — is not only a bona fide contribution to interpreters and the field, but also a critical passing on of the interpretation field’s leadership torch from one of numerous greying professors to the next generation. Talk about sustainable development.” — Sam Ham, First Word to *Interpretive Theme Writer’s Field Guide*

### Format

5 weekly 2-hour ZOOM sessions with asynchronous discussion and materials on Slack. 10 hours live class + home works, videos, discussion online, final project, total of 20 hours

### Audience

Heritage managers, communicators, interpreters, zoo/aquarium/museum educators, rangers, naturalists, and fans of Sam Ham’s work. Maximum attendance: 25

### Objectives

- Deepen appreciation for how thematic interpretation transforms people.
- Sharpen skills crafting interpretive themes.
- Learn how to derive presentation structures from themes.
- Understand how themes anchor heritage interpretation in general.
- Broaden awareness about how teams and communities write themes.
- Explore universal mind-expanding Big Ideas available for powerful interpretive themes.

### Requirements

- Create a full theme during the first four sessions with personalized instructor feedback.
- Structure theme-based simple presentation.
- Write a final theme (“final project”) and a narrative defense of how that theme embodies provocation (relevance), ease of processing, and presentation structure. This is a course requirement.
- Attend at least 4 of 5 sessions to earn certificate of completion.
- Read book for course readings and exercises.

### Value

- Full value \$125
- Discounted value \$99 for
  - PUP Members
  - Group discounts (3 or more people)
  - Members of the Interpretive Theme Writer’s Think Tank on FB
- Participants enjoy a 15% book discount off cover price: \$24.65 + shipping from NAI

## Frequently Asked Questions

[How will this course help me?](#)

[How will I learn?](#)

[What will I study?](#)

[What do I get?](#)

## Jon Kohl

**28 Years of Experience in Heritage Interpretation, Management, and Communications**



Jon is a writer, editor, speaker, and interpreter. He has 4 books and 265 academic, professional, and popular articles, including 40 for NAI publications. He has been practicing interpretation since the National Zoo of Costa Rica in 1993 in the Peace Corps when he first discovered Ham’s work. Sam not only mentored him in thematic interpretation theory, but edited and published his first book in his Applied Communication Series. Sam later reviewed the *Field Guide*, endorsing it with his name on the cover and later became advisor to the NGO that Jon founded for holistic heritage management. Jon has also worked as an interpretive planner, blogger, trainer, and speaker in heritage area management and community development, all of which influences his book and course. Jon serves as associate editor of *Journal of Interpretation Research*. He is a long-time member of NAI, AIP, InterpEurope, and now InterpatMX and ICOMOS’s International Scientific Committee on Interpretation and Presentation. His bachelor’s in ecology and government is from Dartmouth College and his Master’s in Environmental Management from Yale University. He lives with his family in Costa Rica.



“In the *Interpretive Theme Writer’s Field Guide* Jon Kohl show us that great themes are not born, they’re made.” — Shelton Johnson, US National Park Service Ranger, Yosemite National Park

Course sponsored by



and the Interpretive Theme Writing Think Tank

Click to see Shelton’s multimedia reading of his Foreword to the *Field Guide*



## How will this course help me?

At first glance, the book-course seems little more than about writing, until you realize that learning about themes journeys to the heart of thematic interpretation. In this course you will learn not only about writing techniques, but about how strong theme design interacts with psychology and provokes deeper thinking. To do this, however, you must also study what strong themes look like, using guidelines set down by Sam Ham, and open your mind to Big Ideas. We have mental habits going back decades that interfere with strong theme writing, and much contradictory guidance circulates throughout the interpretation field about how to write themes.

Aside from learning techniques to download Big Ideas from the universe, we practice cognitive interpretation thinking skills such as open-mindedness, critical and abstract thinking, and perspective-taking. We also come to understand and learn to write themes in teams and to facilitate community-based processes to generate themes. The course itself is both interpretive and provocative, designed not just to improve your skills, but evolve your thinking. Many interpreters do not practice these skills but by honing them, you become more competitive in the field, at the very moment in history that artificial intelligence and robotics has already begun invading the ranks of frontline interpreters.

## How will I learn?

Though online courses limit hands-on learning, theme writing is by nature a virtual, non-physical event so less affected by the medium. We discover ideas and techniques through weekly discussions, videos, and presentations. The course operates in synchronous ZOOM sessions and asynchronous Slack space. We review basic sentence grammar before practicing time-tested techniques to generate Big Ideas. Then we use established writing techniques to craft a strong theme, use it to create a presentation outline structure, and then investigate techniques for group theme writing. The final project involves your writing a second strong interpretive theme and then defending why you consider it strong. You will get personalized instructor feedback on your Big Ideas and themes and peer feedback on your presentation outlines.

## What will I study?

Session	Objectives
Theme Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the centrality of theme to interpretation</li> <li>• Differentiate primary and secondary audiences</li> </ul>
Big Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret why the Big Idea is critical to interpretation psychology</li> <li>• Learn to use at least two techniques to inspire a Big Idea</li> </ul>
The Vehicle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how a vehicle enhances the processing of Big Ideas (A vehicle is a refined theme sentence that delivers the Big Idea.)</li> </ul>
Presentation Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice a technique (theme dissection) for deriving a presentation structure from a theme</li> <li>• Learn about different presentation structure options</li> </ul>
Interpretive Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how themes are written at individual, team, and community levels</li> <li>• Explain the value of community-based interpretive frameworks and their principal components</li> </ul>

“Although I have read many publications written by Jon Kohl, this may indeed be the very best one yet. This inspired and nearly poetic book is a crystal-clear example of good theme writing.”

— Brian Day, Editor, *Applied Environmental Education and Communication*

## What do I get?

- 15% discount off purchasing copies of *Interpretive Theme Writing Field Guide*
- 1 interactive presentation a week including the recording and slides in PDF form
- Personalized instructor feedback on your Big Idea and both themes
- New material unavailable in the first edition, including a new chapter on how writers use themes to structure presentations
- Access to *Slack* for discussions, course materials, and contacts of classmates
- Discount for membership to the PUP Global Heritage Consortium, co-sponsor of course
- Bragging rights for participating in the first English version of this course (given multiple times in Spanish)
- When you complete the course, you receive personalized feedback on 1 draft theme any time after the course.
- Certificate of completion for 20 hours if you fulfill the three requirements
  - a. Attend 4 of 5 live sessions
  - b. Complete homeworks for Big Ideas, Theme, and Structure
  - c. Complete the final project of a theme and its defense

**REGISTER**  
**INOPERATIVE**

“Jon Kohl has set out to demystify theme-writing and has produced a well-written and very useful work which deserves to sit on your desk alongside Sam Ham’s books.”

— Kev Theaker, Trustee, Association of Heritage Interpreters (UK), *AHI Journal*

## Closing Thought

We often speak of meaning-making in interpretation. Indeed the seed of that process begins with the cultivation of a Big Idea, which when refined and cast into a strong presentation structure, grows and grows into greater meaning both for the interpreter but more importantly for the audience provoked into reflecting on how the Big Ideas fits its worldview, background, and experiences. If that seed is weak when planted, at best it will germinate and shortly die thereafter, may never flower or fruit. This happens to so many “interpretive” presentations largely descriptive and offering little about which to think and grow.

Ultimately there is a mystical aspect of interpretation that few interpreters ever explore. This because both interpretation and spirituality expand awareness and understanding of our place in the universe.



While interpretation helps understand our place in the universe, NAI instructor and outdoor adventure guide Rick Morales knows that this field guide belongs in the field, here in Panama’s Darien National Park.

“The resources this book provides are amazing. In addition to superb activities and exercises, it includes invaluable resources such as examples of outstanding and weak themes as well as a massive listing of action verbs from Sam Ham’s book. I find myself going back to these pages time and time again; the way a good field guide should. My summary of how important this book truly is: If words have meaning, then strong themes have power. This means that *Interpretive Theme Writer’s Field Guide* is truly a source of empowerment.” — John Miller, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*