

Quest History and Local Uses

What is a “Quest”?

Questing, inspired by the 150-year old British tradition of Letterboxing, has become one of the fastest growing recreational/educational activities this side of the Atlantic. A Quest is simply a treasure hunt. A Quest’s clues and map lead to a hidden treasure box, but the clues are treasures too. The clues are the signs—the evidence, really—that one can learn to “read” as the pieces tell a story about the site’s natural and cultural “treasures.” Questing is a model of place-based education that forges connections to the special places where Quests exist. Place-based education is about discovering the stories of special sites and using them as the foundation for learning, community building, and stewardship. Its core practices include:

- investigating our natural and cultural surroundings;
- adopting specific settings or issues in the community for in-depth study, as well as studying regional, national, or global issues through the lens of the local;
- deepening understanding through the study of local primary and secondary resource materials;
- meeting, sharing perspectives with, and learning from our neighbors, including elders, wisdom-holders, and partnering community organizations;
- sharing these “lessons learned” through community service.

What are some educational aspects of Quests?

Questing is local and it is personal, collaborative and multigenerational. The lessons are interdisciplinary and curriculum can cover: agriculture; anthropology; art; science; math; nature; engineering; geology; language; poetry; sociology; spelling; structural; history; etc.

Where did The Trustees learn about Questing?

Vital Communities, a nonprofit based in White River Junction, Vermont, created Valley Quest in the Connecticut River Valley region. Their Quest program was the winner of the 2005 New England Environmental Education Alliance Program of the Year. Attached are the Fall 2005 *Vital Communities* Newsletter and some information about Questing. (Additional information can be

found on their web site: vitalcommunities.org. In 2005, The Trustees provided two Vital Community Quest training sessions for our staff in order to develop Quest programs at our properties. Quests fit well with The Trustees' statewide education plans.

Why are The Trustees bringing Quests to our special places like Ravenswood?

Quest participants “celebrate and strengthen community life” making “lifelong connections to the distinct landscapes and cultural features” discovered on the Quest. Educational programming at The Trustees embraces place-based education to forge connections to our special landscapes and landmarks inspiring stewardship into the future of Ravenswood, Cape Ann, and special places across Massachusetts. To quote, The Trustees' President, Andy Kendall,

“One of the most significant challenges facing today's environmental movement is to ensure that more people are exposed to, understand, and are concerned about the natural and cultural treasures that are disappearing from their communities and across the state.”

A Quest for Ravenswood:

A “self-guided” Quest available at Ravenswood encourages visitors of all ages to see more closely the natural and cultural treasures that a casual walk in this park doesn't reveal. The treasures or clues of the tour/quest reveal an incredible story of the park's designation as a gift from a generous businessman, Samuel Sawyer, and the notable naturalist, Mason A. Walton. Some “treasures” include:

- Ecologically significant habitats: glacial moraine, old forest woodlands, vernal pools, sweetbay magnolia, and a stunning Gloucester harbor view.
- Culturally significant history: Native Americans, quarry & maritime history, and the resource management provided by the trustees.
- Natural history of the land before the designed landscape...and what it may become.

The Hermit's Haven Quest was developed in November 2005 by a dozen of The Trustees' staff members including the Cape Ann Staff: Superintendent, Joseph Christian, Nate Mineo, and Chris Wood, and was managed by Susan Bellincampi with Steven Glazer.