

Digging Deeper: Bringing Field Archaeology to the Classroom

Announcing the collaboration between *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones* and the *Maya Research Program*

By: Thomas Riddle II and C. Colleen Hanratty

Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones is an ever-evolving educational project that uses the world's most famous archaeologist as a catalyst to inspire interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Primarily based on the award-winning series, *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones*, this web-based tool provides historic, cultural and scientific resources related to the numerous fictional adventures that Indy is involved in throughout his life.

When the series debuted on ABC Television in 1992, George Lucas hoped to make history exciting for viewers of all ages, but particularly to students. "I wanted young people to realize that history is really about people more than it's about events," says Lucas. "I wanted to show that those people are just like we are, regardless of their impact on philosophy, music, religion and culture. And Indy's childhood was a natural vehicle for the kind of stories I had envisioned."

And what a vehicle it is. Through these stories, Indy interacts with some of the early Twentieth Century's most notable figures and participates in some of its pivotal events. Think of it as Forrest Gump with a fedora and bullwhip. Through Indy's eyes we witness the horrors of battle, the intrigue of espionage, and the creation of a new nations and a new political landscape following the First World War. He travels on safari with Teddy Roosevelt, learns about opera from Puccini and is introduced to archaeology by none other than Howard Carter during his excavations in the Valley of the Kings. And that's only a fraction of his adventures.

The feature-length films in the series are supported with 94 companion documentaries that relate directly to the topics and themes of the films and allow viewers to delve further into the real-life events that inspired the stories. The documentaries, produced by CBS News veteran David Schneider, provide insights from scholars, historians and luminaries from all disciplines and include exclusive interviews with General Colin Powell, Henry Kissinger, Gloria Steinem, Martin Scorsese, Barbara Boxer, James Earl Jones, Deepak Chopra, Sir Martin Gilbert and others.

"The great thing about this series is that Young Indy's adventures are drawn from the true stories of people and events that are surprisingly dramatic," says Schneider. "History does come alive and it's

fascinating to learn how the triumphs and failures of those who came before us are directly connected to our lives today.”

Because Indy meets such an extraordinary group of historic figures who significantly impact a wide variety of fields, this series is a terrific way to engage learners of all ages in multidisciplinary studies. The website, www.indyintheclassroom.com, supports and encourages these studies by providing background information and links to books, news articles, journals, and lesson ideas related to more than one hundred topics, events and people from the early 20th Century alone. Not to mention exclusive previews for all of the Young Indy documentaries.

While much of the content is based on the Young Indy series, other material takes teachers and students beyond the films...and beyond their classrooms. Information is provided on how to participate in hands-on learning through local historic preservation projects, world-wide virtual field trips and student-created museum-style exhibitions open to the school and/or community.

The newest addition to the website is known as The Adventure Logs. Inspired by Indy’s penchant for keeping a journal throughout this life, The Adventure Logs will follow a variety of individuals as they travel to locations around the world. These intrepid adventurers will post journal entries that detail their travels, with each entry supported by links to additional information, such as the historical, cultural and environmental context of their location.

The first adventure features Laird Malamed’s journey to Antarctica as he participates in the race-of-a-lifetime, the Antarctic Marathon. And later in the spring, the team from the Maya Research Program (MRP) will contribute to The Adventure Logs as they provide regular updates during their twentieth season at the Blue Creek site. Beyond this, plans are in the works for creating virtual field trips that will allow students to visit the Blue Creek site and others in order to get an up-close and personal look at what it’s like to be an archaeologist.

“We are very excited about collaborating with Dr. Guderjan and MRP in creating educational outreach opportunities,” says Wes Dodgens, co-author of the content for *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones*. “We hope that our work will inspire similar organizations to seek ways to connect with educators or others who share a general interest in history, archaeology, anthropology and environmental studies.”

“The [Maya Research Program](#) is very pleased to contribute to the content for *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones*, “ notes Dr. Tom Guderjan, president and project director for the Maya Research Program. “MRP’s mission statement is grounded in public outreach and education – and this collaboration will certainly reach numerous educators and other organizations interested in Maya archaeology, anthropology, and conservation.”

The Maya Research Program is a U.S.-based non-profit organization (501C3) that sponsors archaeological and ethnographic research in Middle America. Each summer since 1992, MRP has sponsored archaeological fieldwork at the ancient Maya site of Blue Creek in northwestern Belize. “Our goal is, first and foremost, to conduct research that adds to the body of scholarly knowledge and helps us better understand the past of the complex ancient societies of the Americas,” notes Dr. Guderjan. “Another key MRP goal is to encourage the participation of students and volunteers -- anyone who wants to experience the real world of archaeological or anthropological research and understand how we learn about other cultures may join us. We see this as a critical educational component of MRP's work, and it helps us accomplish our research goals as well! So many of our participants return year after year that MRP has become an extended family. About half of our participants are university students and the other half are professionals and retirees. We have had over 2000 students and volunteers participate in the project over the last 19 years and we are looking forward to our 20th season at Blue Creek in 2011.”

The Maya Research Program’s affiliated scholars are internationally recognized as leaders in their fields and come from over a dozen universities and colleges worldwide. Recent support for the project’s research has come from the National Geographic Society, the National Science Foundation, the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, the Heinz Foundation, and the American Council of Learned Societies. MRP's work at Blue Creek has produced an academic book, scores of published papers, five doctoral dissertations and more than ten master's theses. In 2011 MRP again offers opportunities to participate in the Blue Creek project and learn about the Maya of the past and today. The Blue Creek project is open to student and non-student participants, regardless of experience. From May to July of each year, MRP hosts four two-week sessions for students and volunteers at Blue Creek. Everyone is a full participant in the effort and is involved with field excavations and laboratory work.

“The collaboration between the Maya Research Program and *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones* is a phenomenal opportunity to provide the students with ‘hands on’ information about the ancient and modern Maya as well as archaeological, laboratory, and conservation techniques. Too often the public does not realize the immense effort that goes into an archaeological project since all they see on television is an archaeologist easily brushing off an artifact with a paintbrush. Little do they realize there were 10 meters of overburden the team had to carefully remove with pickaxes and shovels to get to that find!” notes Dr. Guderjan. Tim Preston, a member of MRP’s board of directors and project archaeologist, emphasizes “while tombs and caches are certainly important and exciting – often the most crucial and significant find in a season is a simple piece of broken pottery that helps us date a complex piece of construction.”

The Maya Research Program and *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones* invites the public to join the Blue Creek archaeological project – either through direct participation in Belize or indirect participation through “The Adventure Logs.” Either way, participants will certainly learn a great deal as both projects offer the public a portal into the complex and exciting world of archaeology.

Thomas Riddle II is a K-12 curriculum consultant, adjunct professor of education at Furman University and creator of *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones*. For additional information about *Adventures in Learning with Indiana Jones* please see their website: <http://www.indyintheclassroom.com/> or Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/IndyintheClassroom>

C. Colleen Hanratty is a graduate student at Southern Methodist University and has worked with the Maya Research Program for the past 15 years. For additional information about the *Maya Research Program* please see their website: <http://www.mayaresearchprogram.org> or Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/group.php?gid=25931554663>