

THE HUNTSVILLE ITEM

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They dress the part, they walk the walk and they talk the talk. But the characters decked out in clothing from the 1800s strolling around the grounds at the General Sam Houston Folk Festival are modern-day people performing a role like real actors. However, there's more to portraying historical figures than simply donning an outfit and toting a musket or tool from nearly 200 years ago. There's also research and study that goes into the role. And, almost to a person, there's passion in the performance.

The Folk Festival, which started Friday and ends today, features dozens of re-enactors and role-players at various stations or walking the grounds at the Sam Houston Memorial Museum.

For others, the re-enactment of historical scenes and characters is more than a chance to educate. It's a chance to heal. That's the message promoted by **history teacher Naomi Carrier**, who runs the Talking Back living history theater group. At the Folk Festival, the group relived a scene in which a slave is auctioned. While the concept may be uncomfortable, especially for the black actors in the show, Carrier said it's important to portray those scenes just the same.

"We don't do it for any kind of vengeance," **Carrier** said. "We have to do research to make our facts right. More than anything we have to be right. We call what we do living history.

"We have this love of nostalgia, but if we're going to revisit the past, we have to revisit all of it," she said, including the slave auctions. "Without the slave auction, it would be like portraying Sam Houston and leaving out his connection with the Cherokee."

Paul Matthews, who portrays one of the men auctioning off the slaves, said it was tough having to adopt a racist tone that was more common in the 1800s, but he treated it like any other acting performance. "I try to put myself into that time frame," he said. "You try to lose yourself mentally into that time, when feelings toward women and blacks were different."

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