

3.2 COLLECTIVE MEMORY: MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS

? FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What can we learn about a society's values and history from the memorials and monuments it constructs?
- How do memorials and monuments reflect the ways in which a society acknowledges and remembers its past?

STANDARD #2 TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson focuses on the ways in which monuments and memorials reflect a society's values and history. After the students have researched the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, they will have the opportunity to design their own memorial to commemorate this event.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Collective memory is a memory or memories shared or recollected by a group, as a community or culture. We must understand that cultures are not stagnant, and that they are constantly reevaluating and remaking themselves and their pasts. One way people remember the past is by building monuments or memorials. Monuments are intentional and purposeful creations designed to provide a bridge to the past, to lives, and to events.

Throughout Germany there are many memorials and monuments that reflect the collective memory of the German people. Some are buildings, such as the Palace of Frederick the Great, Sans Souci in Potsdam (near Berlin); others are as simple as the rose-colored *Litfaß* column on

Rosenstraße dedicated to the demonstration of the German women protesting the arrest of their Jewish husbands or the bust of Sophie Scholl with the White Rose placed each day in a vase in the classroom building at the University of Munich — the memorial to the White Rose Resistance Movement during World War II.

A memorial helps people understand why an event or person was significant. The creation of a memorial often stimulates public debate, because individuals and groups have different views of the events, people, or ideas to be memorialized. Memorials may take the form of concrete monuments, historic buildings, or even locations. Memorial design reflects the point of view, values and perspectives of the artist, as well as a society's collective memory.

Traditional monuments focus on courage in war or battle or on an individual who made a difference in society. Since memorials reflect the memorial designer's own *zeitgeist*, they have become more abstract over the past few decades. If the purpose of a monument or memorial is to keep memories alive, does the type of public art used, realistic vs. abstract, matter?



🕒 TIME:

(2-3) 45 minute class periods

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- Call for Submissions: The Fall of the Wall Memorial Project (**Handout 3.2.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Memorials and Monuments PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.2.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**)

PROCEDURE:**DAYS 1-2:**

- **Anticipatory Set:** Divide students into small groups and provide them with a list of memorials and monuments in their country's capital. Alternatively, the teacher may direct students to these websites:
 - Canada: <http://www.ottawa.worldweb.com/SightsAttractions/MemorialsMonuments/>
 - USA: <http://dc.about.com/cs/sightseeing/a/Monuments.htm>
- Ask student groups to discuss the following questions:
 1. What periods of our country's history are represented?
 2. What types of events and/or people are kept alive in the nation's memory?
 3. Why do you think these events and/or people are remembered by the whole country?
 4. What other events and/or people might someday have their own monument or memorial in the capital? Explain your answers.
- After introducing the term "collective memory," the instructor should direct the following question to the whole class: What do the memorials and monuments in our capital say about our values and history?
- Ask students to get back into groups and to begin working on the assignment Call for Submissions: The Fall of the Wall Memorial Project (**Handout 3.2.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**).

**DAYS 2-3:**

- Ask student groups to complete the assignment Call for Submissions: The Fall of the Wall Memorial Project (**Handout 3.2.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**).
- Once groups have finished, ask them to present their proposals to the class. As the other members of the class listen, they should use the questions below in order to critique each submission:
 1. What is the memorial's design? Is it realistic or abstract? Describe it.
 2. Where is the memorial located, and what is the relationship of the site to the event?
 3. What are your feelings when you view the memorial?
 4. How effective is the memorial in conveying the fall of the Berlin Wall?

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- Designing an appropriate memorial is a complicated process. What aspects of the design did the members of your groups agree upon? Where did your opinions differ?

MODIFICATION:

- The teacher may assign each group to design a Fall of the Wall memorial for different audiences or at different locations. This lesson should lend itself to participation by students who are visual learners and thinkers.

EXTENSIONS:

- Ask students to read and discuss excerpts from James E. Young's *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*.
- Show the Memorials and Monuments PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.2.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**). Then ask students to choose a memorial or monument and to research the event or subject it commemorates. Afterward, they should use the questions from the group discussion to form a critique of their chosen subject:
 1. What is the memorial/monument's design? Is it realistic or abstract? Describe it.
 2. Where is the memorial located, and what is the relationship of the site to the event?
 3. What are your feelings when you view the memorial/monument?
 4. How effective is the memorial/monument in conveying the event and/or person that inspired it?

Sources:

Young, J. E. (1993). *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

This lesson has been adapted from the work of 2008 TOP Fellow Jacqueline Littlefield.