



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2008 Volume III: Pride of Place: New Haven Material and Visual Culture

Living Memorials: Honoring Your Family

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I teach 1st grade at Wexler-Grant Community School, a school that begins with headstart and ends with 8th grade. We have an interesting history. Until 2002-2003, we were two separate schools, Helene W. Grant and Isadore Wexler. Our population of students is approximately 90% African-American and the remaining 10% is made up of White, Hispanic, and Indian. We are a community school which means that our building is open to the neighborhood in a variety of ways. We open the gym to the youth so that they can play basketball; the cafeteria is used for African drumming, Tai Chi, Pilates, and more. Other types of meetings, seminars, conferences, and workshops take place in our building for various organizations throughout the community. We have a family resource room that provides services for parents, grandparents, and students. We try to truly embrace and embody what community means in our name.

Rationale

No matter what grade I teach, every year I take my students on a walking field trip to the Grove Street Cemetery. I have taken a class there for a field trip at least once a school year since 2002. The Grove Street Cemetery has a wide variety of headstones and grave markers to identify where a person is buried in the cemetery. Some of these elaborate headstones are beautiful and artistic. These wonderful memorials commemorate the life of a loved one. Other stones are very simple and have a quiet beauty that expresses just as much love as the big elaborate grave markers. One of the reasons I bring my students to the Grove Street Cemetery is because there are many famous New Haveners who are buried there. This is important because our school is on 55 Foote St. We walk down Foote St. until we reach Ashmun St. We then walk on Ashmun St. until we reach the Grove Street Cemetery. Why is this important? Andrew Hull Foote is buried in the Grove Street Cemetery as well as Yehudi Ashmun. Both of these people have connections to New Haven and were important figures in history. Andrew Hull Foote was an Admiral in the United States Navy who served during the Civil War. During the time of 1849 to 1851, Foote patrolled the African coast. This experience caused Foote to become a very vocal abolitionist. Yehudi Ashmun was a young Congregationalist minister who served as governor of the newly created Liberia from 1822 to 1828. During the crucial early formative years of Liberia, Ashmun's courage, versatility, and energy was largely responsible for the security and progress of the new settlements. Even today, the main street that runs through Monrovia, the capital of Liberia is named after Ashmun. Yehudi had devoted his life to the resettlement of Blacks in Africa. This creates a connection to my

students that was never there before. New Haven is rich with street names that are named after real people and not some composite, arbitrary items in nature like Meadowbrook. It hopefully opens their minds to be more curious about other street names like Whitney Avenue (Eli Whitney-inventor of the cotton gin and guns with interchangeable parts), Sherman Avenue (Roger Sherman-the first mayor of New Haven and the only person to sign all four great state papers of the United States), and Dwight Street (Timothy Dwight-American Congregationalist minister and eighth president of Yale University from 1795 to 1817). Many of the people buried in the Grove Street Cemetery were very important not only to New Haven history, but United States history as well.

As I began to do research into memorials, I started to realize the naming of a street after someone *is* creating a memorial. It dawned on me that this way of thinking also applies to buildings as well. My school is named after two outstanding educators who made a difference in the lives of New Haven children, Helene W. Grant and Isadore Wexler. Unfortunately, both of these wonderful teachers have since passed away, but the fact that a school has been named after each one is still important to their relatives and the students whose lives they impacted. I know this first hand because when the merger between the two schools was happening, there was a small discussion amongst the staff of Helene W. Grant, of which I was a part of, about approaching the district and asking the powers that be about dropping the Isadore Wexler name and just renaming the new school Helene W. Grant. We quickly realized that to drop the name of Isadore Wexler would probably be hurtful to his family as well as to his former students and colleagues. Thus the name of our school is Wexler-Grant. New Haven has a few schools that have merged and rather than dropping one name and keeping the other, or renaming the school all together, New Haven has combined the names of the two schools. For example, there is King-Robinson, Conte-West Hills, and Ross-Woodward to name a few. It is important for New Haven to keep a small legacy of these amazing people alive through the naming of its schools.

I want this unit to focus on creating memorials for people who are still alive. Specifically, I want to focus on people who are relatives of my students. There are many examples of memorials that have been created while people are still alive. The Dean Center in North Carolina, Chapel Hill is named after Dean Smith, longtime basketball coach of the University of North Carolina. John Daniels School in New Haven is named after the former mayor John Daniels. Both Smith and Daniels are still alive. I want my students to understand what commemorate means and to create a memorial of their own. I want my students to create a variety of art forms to represent a memorial of someone they love. I want them to create a memorial for themselves. We will use songs, poems, drawings, and sculptures. We will explore the creation of early 18th and 19th century memorials via the Grove Street Cemetery through modern day memorials like the Amistad memorial in front of city hall and different war memorials.

Why Do We Want To Remember?

What does it mean to commemorate? The Webster online dictionary tells us that to commemorate is to “call to remembrance.” It is to mark an event, or a person, or a group by a ceremony or observance or monument of some kind. To commemorate is to prod a collective memory in some conspicuous way. Collective memory has been given its most modern definition by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in his book *The Social Frameworks of Memory* in 1925. In his book, Halbwachs proclaims that all memory, even personal memory, is a social process which is shaped by various groups in society such as family, religious, or geographical. His

most influential essay on this subject was posthumously published in 1950 after Halbwachs' death in a Nazi concentration camp. It was titled *Historical Memory and Collective Memory*. In this essay, Halbwachs insists on a distinction between history and collective memory. He believed that history aims for a universal, objective truth severed from the psychology of social groups, while "every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time." So what does this mean? Halbwachs believed that our view of the past does not come primarily from professional historical scholarship, but from a much more complicated and interwoven set of relationships to mass media, tourist sites, family tradition, and the spaces of upbringing with all their regional, ethnic, and class diversity. These are just a few of the many factors that come into play. Whereas today, personal memory is now understood to be a highly selective, adaptive process of reconstructing the past, shaped by present needs and contexts, collective memory is a product of social groups and their ever evolving character and interests. This leads to the next question to be asked: How does someone commemorate? A person will usually commemorate someone or an event by creating some type of memorial. What is a memorial? My definition of a memorial is a representation, often physical, that celebrates the life and deeds of a person or calls to memory an important event. Every life touches another. When someone has done something to enhance the life of someone else, it creates a stirring of emotion that propels people to create something that signifies the difference that the person has made. Songs and poems are written. Statues and paintings are created. Since man has been able to express himself there have been memorials from the cave paintings in Lascaux, France to the September 11th memorial in New York City. Memorials often represent the life of someone and are created after they have died. However, memorials can be created and presented while someone is still alive. Great examples of this can be seen during the holidays of Mother's Day and Father's Day where cards and gifts are given to express love and appreciation for the work mom and dad have done. These holidays usually put people into a frenzy of trying to find the "right" or "perfect" gift, a gift that represents mom or dad. Parents often save these cards and gifts to allow them to reminisce and think back to happy times. The gift has become a personal memorial.

Personal Memorials

I would like to delve into the area of personal memory. Paul Connerton in his book *How Societies Remember* (1989) believes that there are three distinct classes of memory. He comes to this conclusion by looking at the verb "remember." He believes that the verb "remember" enters into a variety of grammatical constructions and the things that are remembered are of many different kinds. ¹ Connerton believes that the three distinct classes of memory are *personal* memory, *cognitive* memory, and a third class of memory which does not have a particular name, but deals with having the capacity to reproduce a certain performance. ² Let's start with personal memory. Connerton believes that they refer to those acts of remembering that take as their object one's life history. He says that we speak of them as personal memories because they are located in and refer to a personal past. Connerton states that these figure significantly in our self-descriptions because our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves. Our self-knowledge about our own character and potentialities is to a large extent determined by the way in which we view our own past actions. ³ The second distinct class is cognitive memory. Connerton says that cognitive memory covers uses of "remember" where we may be said to remember the meanings of words, lines of a song, jokes, stories, mathematical equations, or truths of logic. ⁴ What is interesting about this class of memory is that it requires not that the object of memory be something that is past, but that the person who is remembering the thing must have experienced or learned of it in the past. The third and final class of memory is simply having the capacity to reproduce a

certain performance. Connerton says that remembering how to ride a bicycle, or how to type, or how to read and or write is in each case a matter of a person being able to do these things more or less effectively when the need arises to do so. ⁵ With this third class of memory, people frequently do not recall how or when or where they have acquired the knowledge in question. Most times it is only by the fact of the performance that they are able to recognize and prove to others that they remember. There are some that would argue that the third class of memory is habit-memory but Connerton feels that these scholars have not truly paid attention to this type of memory. He feels that more research could and should be done in this area.

The reason for exploring the area of personal memory is to get a better understanding of the foundation of why people create memorials. Personal memory is the basis for creating personal memorials for the loss of a loved one or to celebrate the deeds and/or actions of a person. My students will be creating memorials for some important people in their lives. They are going to have to rely heavily on all three types of personal memories to accomplish their tasks. Their personal experiences with loved ones in a variety of settings will set the foundation for the creation of their memorials.

Community Memorials

In 1800, a North Carolina Congressman made the bold statement, “Monuments are good for nothing.” During the founding years of the United States, many people argued that democracy and the spread of literacy had made commemorative rituals and monuments obsolete, leftovers from the days of monarchy and superstition ⁶. Congress was reluctant to fund a monument to George Washington, prompting John Quincy Adams to make his famous remark, “democracy has no monuments.” Many Americans during that time period believed that “true memory” did not lie in a pile of stones, but in the living hearts of its people. It took the Vietnam War Memorial Wall to help Americans truly recognize the importance of memorials and their significance in society. After the Civil War, Walt Whitman in his book *Specimen Days* struggled to determine what role memory should play as the war became more and more remote from contemporary society. ⁷ Whitman worked as a nurse in field hospitals during the war and witnessed intense suffering that was surely very hard to forget. Whitman saw war at its most visceral level, that at the core of war is pain and causing pain and dying and inflicting dying. Whitman wondered if society should have a responsibility to bear this memory. William Dean Howells, an American realist author, and his good friend Oliver Wendell Holmes had similar feelings about the issue of public monuments and their responsibility to society. Howells made it very clear that the reality of warfare had no place in public monuments. ⁸ Howells based his argument on photographs he had seen of battlefield corpses at Antietam. He was living in Venice, Italy during the time of the Civil War. Howells believed that the Civil War was evil and that the best way for society to return to its senses was to forget all things military and commemorate only the noble “ideas” that had justified society’s descent into violence and destruction. ⁹ According to Howells, the only thing worth remembering was the “idea of our war,” which was “our immutable destiny, as God’s agents, to give freedom to mankind.” ¹⁰

The Civil War began to change how people viewed monuments. Today, we as a society assume that there *will be* a war memorial to commemorate the war in a public venue. It’s almost taken for granted that the dead in particular deserve a lasting recognition of their sacrifices in public space. We even have basic expectations about what the memorial can and cannot say, and what a memorial can and cannot show. However, after the Civil War, none of these expectations were yet set. Before the Civil War, the basic monument that one would

find would honor and celebrate commanding officers. The idea of commemorating monuments to ordinary soldiers and veterans had not reached wide public acceptance. It was only in the aftermath of the Civil War that the common soldier monument became a customary type of monument.

Memorials can be used to tell a story, to mark a time or event in history, but, from whose point of view? The French used memorials to build civic pride and redevelop their fragile national identity after losing the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. Since 1865, there have been literally tens of thousands of military monuments erected in this country based on various wars. However, how does one look at a monument that recognizes the losers of a war? There were many monuments erected to honor the Confederate soldier and Confederate leaders in the south. Just like the French, they were used to build civic pride and forge an identity. The Civil War was largely about the South's right to secede, more so than it was about slavery. However, it is usually taught that the Civil War was over the issue of slavery. Thus, anything that has to do with the Confederate army is usually associated with slavery. In today's society, African-Americans and non-southerners look at Confederate monuments with a jaded eye. In 2006, the University of Texas was debating about what to do about the statues that honor Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee. Many people believe that Confederate monuments belong in museums. Some feel that in a museum, these monuments can be interpreted properly. Leaving a Confederate monument in a public space could be interpreted as wanting to glorify slavery. Many feel this way about the Confederate Flag. However, by removing these items, is a message being sent that the original interpretations of the past are no longer valid or relevant?

Memorial Headstone Typologies

There are many different ways in which a person or event can be memorialized. In death, the most common way today is with a headstone. A headstone can serve two main purposes. One, it marks the spot in a cemetery where the deceased resides. Two, it may give information about a person, their name, date of birth and the date they died, as well as other information about the person. Though I want this unit to focus on living memorials, my students will be taking a trip to the Grove Street Cemetery. I think that is important to have a general knowledge about what they are seeing and why certain figures and shapes are being used to commemorate someone's life. It is believed that a cemetery divulges much about death, but it also divulges much about life. ¹¹ The cemetery is a microcosm of the society all around it. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were three types of figures you would see on headstones: Death's Head, Cherub, and Urn and Willow. The Death's Head headstones became popular in the 1680s and by 1750 headstones moved toward the Cherub. The Cherub headstone saw its beginnings in the 1740s and dwindled down by 1810. The Urn and Willow headstone began to really become popular in the 1790's and by the 1820's had replaced the Death's Head and Cherub as the headstone of choice. Though these dates reflect a cemetery in Stoneham, Massachusetts, these styles of headstones could be found in most old cemeteries throughout New England.

A question one might ask is, "Why a Death's Head?" From the modern eye it seems scary and foreboding, however, during the early 1700's, the Death's Head was a reflection of the religious beliefs at that time. Orthodox Puritanism was the dominating religion in New England at that time. The Death's Head was a more mortal and neutral symbol to display on a headstone. It served as a graphic reminder of death and resurrection. ¹² The epitaphs on a headstone that featured a Death's Head design would focus on decay and

the brevity of life. An example reads as such:

My Youthful mates both small and great
Come here and you may see
An awful sight, which is a type
of which you soon must be ¹³

Other epitaphs that could be found on a headstone that had a Death's Head design had an emphasis on hard work and exemplary behavior. An example of which reads:

*He was a useful man in his generation,
a lover of learning, a faithful
servant of Harvard College above
forty years. ¹⁴*

Examples of Death's Head headstones can be seen in figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. They represent the different styles in Death's Heads from very early in its style to the progression of later Death's Heads. These photos were taken at the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven, CT.



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2



Figure 1.3

During the heyday of the Death's Head headstone, the Cherub headstone would be very hard to find. The Cherub was considered to be a heavenly being and to use its image on a headstone verged on heresy. The Puritan church felt using its image might also lead to idolatry. ¹⁵ So as the decline of orthodox Puritanism continued, the use of Cherubs in headstones began to also be used more. The further from Boston, the more quickly the Cherub replaced the Death's Head as the headstone of choice. The reason for this is believed to be that the Puritan church was strongest in Boston and the further people were away from the church, the less enforcement of Puritan values and ethics and the more readily they were able to accept the changes. ¹⁶ The focus of Cherubs was on resurrection and later heavenly reward. ¹⁷ An example of an epitaph that had a Cherub on the headstone read as such:

Here cease thy tears, suppress thy
fruitful mourn
his soul-the immortal part-has
upward flown
On wings he soars his rapid way
To yon bright regions of eternal
day. ¹⁸

Here are three examples of the Cherub headstone found at the Grove Street Cemetery. The Cherub can be difficult to identify because the later Death's Head moved away from the skull and more towards looking like the human face. Due to the overlap of styles, the Death's Head began to look more "cherub like" in its final phase. Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show the progression of the Cherub. The image of figure 2.2 is not a picture from straight on. There was a shrub in the way and the photo had to be taken on an angle.



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

The final early style of headstones that I would like to show my students is the Urn and Willow. This style began to become popular in the 1790's and by 1810 had replaced the Cherub as headstone of choice. The Urn and Willow design interestingly enough became used as cenotaphs, a memorial erected to commemorate those actually buried somewhere else. The Urn and Willow design became popular as the rise of less emotional, more intellectual religions, such as Unitarian and Methodism became more widespread.¹⁹ The weeping willow represented the sadness here on earth and the urn represented the soul living forever in heaven. The pictures of Urn and Willows can vary. Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 show different styles of the Urn and Willow. Interestingly, the headstones that had Urns and Willows were much more faded than many of the Death's Head headstones, even though the Death's Head headstones are much older.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

Taking my students to the Grove Street Cemetery will be a great way to see how people celebrated the life of their loved ones in the past. It will hopefully give them some additional creative ideas for how they want to create a living memorial for someone in their family. The cemetery has some very unique and interesting headstones and statues and obelisks that should stimulate different thoughts and ideas.

I had an opportunity to meet a living legend this past summer. Dr. Helen S. Faison is the director of the Pittsburgh Teacher's Institute. She and I were both at Yale taking part in the National Initiative, a teacher's institute on the national level. I found out during our time there that there was a school named after her in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Helen S. Faison Arts Academy opened in September of 2004 and focuses on the arts. As I have stated earlier, New Haven has many schools that are named after outstanding local educators. I have never had the opportunity to meet any of them. I had always wondered what someone has to do to have a school named after them. I spoke with Dr. Faison one-on-one for about an hour. Dr. Faison told me that her mom died when she was young and she went south to live with her grandmother. The schools were segregated and they only went as high as 7th grade. Despite the hurdles that society tried to throw Dr. Faison's way, she was able to persevere and graduate high school. She then went to college where she received all of her degrees from the University of Pittsburgh, where she received her bachelor's degree in 1946, her master's in education in 1955, and her doctorate in 1975. She was the first African-American and woman to be a principal in Pittsburgh; she was also the first African-American and woman to hold the title of Deputy Superintendent and interim Superintendent of the Pittsburgh school system. Dr. Faison's students have gone on to become prominent people in Pittsburgh. At 84 years old, Dr. Faison walked all over the Yale campus with the other Fellows and never seemed to be tired. She was truly an inspiration to everyone and it

gave me an insight into what type of person it takes to get a school named after them. Dr. Faison didn't go seeking fame and fortune, she was the best teacher that she could be and demanded excellence from her students. All of the accolades that followed were simply because she put her students first and her wants and needs second.

This curriculum unit was very difficult to complete. My mother had been battling colon cancer for the past five years. The disease began to really take its toll in the months of April, May, and June. My mom lost her battle with the disease on June 9, 2008. With this unit focusing on creating memorials for loved ones, I would like to dedicate this curriculum unit to my mom, Betty J. Thornton. Her insistence to "finish what you start" and "always do your best" has enabled me to struggle through the most difficult period in my life and create something she could be proud of. This unit is my memorial to my mother.

Lesson 1

Project Your Personality

Students will bring in an object from home that represents who they are. They will do an oral presentation. In their presentation, they will describe the item and tell the class what it is used for. They will then give three reasons of how the object represents them and tell why the item is important to them. A rubric will be used to grade each student.

Lesson 2

Acrostic Poem

Students will use Microsoft Word on the computer and create two Acrostic Poems using their name and the name of a family member. An Acrostic Poem is a poem where a word is spelled out vertically and each letter is used as the first word in a description of the word that is spelled vertically. The students will create two, one for themselves and one for a loved one. Around each Acrostic Poem will be a border chosen by the student. The students will then use the clipart in Word and choose four clipart pictures to put in each corner that represents them. Clipart in Word has a search function that allows you to type in a word and Word will try to find a visual representation of that word. So if a student types in pretty or strong or fast, Word will display clipart images that represent the word. The students will then show their Acrostic Poem to the class and the class will have to figure out what each of the four clipart images mean. The second Acrostic Poem that they create will be for a loved one at home and the student will have to explain the four images to their loved one.

Lesson 3

Art Project

Working in conjunction with the art teacher, the students will create a work of art that commemorates a loved one in their family. Using clay, photos, paint, or drawings, the students will create a work of art that commemorates a loved one in their family who is still alive. The students will choose what type of medium that they would like to use. They can create a sculpture, write a song, adapt a song, write a poem, create a collage, whatever they decide to create. We will visit the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven, CT to get various ideas for sculpting. There will be many different examples that the students will be immersed in so that they will have a variety of options to choose from. Hopefully something will grab their attention as a medium that they would like to use to create their living memorial. The students will then write a paragraph describing their work of art and why they chose the medium that they used.

Student Resources

Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco -- A book that takes place during the Civil War where a young black boy helps an injured young white boy whose hand shook the hand of Abraham Lincoln

The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco -- A book about a quilt that has passed down four generations of a Russian Jewish immigrant family.

The Wall by Eve Bunting -- A boy travels to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall with his father to find his grandfather's name.

The Memory String by Eve Bunting -- A girl named Laura has a memory string, a string with buttons from memorable occasions, and tells how each button got on the string.

My Mama Had a Dancing Heart by Libba Gray -- A ballerina uses the memory of her mom's love for life as an inspiration as she leaps across the stage.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr -- Just after World War II and the bombing of Hiroshima, a little girl becomes sick and believes in the legend of making one thousand origami cranes to become healed.

Teacher Resources

Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade by Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin - A collection of essays that examine how monuments preserve memory.

Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves by Kirk Savage - This book explores how the American history of slavery and its violent end was told in public spaces and how monuments arose amidst struggles over race, gender, and collective memory.

A Date with Destiny by Brent Ashabranner - The story of how the memorial for the women in military service was founded and located in Washington, D.C.

How Societies Remember by Paul Connerton - This book treats memory as a cultural rather than individual faculty.

Appendix A

Connecticut Social Studies Standards

Content Standard 2

Students will use historical thinking skills to develop an understanding of the major historical periods, issues and trends in United States history, world history, and Connecticut and local history.

Educational experiences in Grades K-4 will assure that students:

locate the events, peoples and places they have studied in time and place (e.g., on a time line and map) relative to their own location;

demonstrate knowledge of major trends in state and local history, including history of original peoples, early settlements and selected changes over the past two centuries; and

place the history of their own families in the context of local, state, national and world history.

Appendix B

Name _____ Date _____

Directions:

Bring in an object from home that represents who you are. You will do an oral presentation to the class. In your presentation, you will describe the item and tell the class what it is used for. You will then give three reasons of how the object represents you. Finally, tell why the item is important to you. Practice at home and have your parents grade you. You can use index cards to write down the information if you have trouble remembering.

Project Your Personality Rubric

Instructions	Possible points	Grade Yourself	Teacher's Grade
Greet the class properly i.e. Good morning, Good Afternoon and state your name clearly.	5		
Describe the item and tell what it is used for.	10		
Tell why the object is important or special to you.	10		
Give 3 examples of how the object represents who you are; your personality.	75		
Total Points	100		

Additional comments: _____

Appendix C

Acrostic Poem Rubric

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions	Possible points	Grade Yourself	Teacher's Grade
Project is neat; name and date are on the project.	5		
Poem has a border.	5		
Four images, one in each corner that represents an aspect of the person in the poem.	40		
Acrostic poem makes sense, there are no typos.	50		
Total Points	100		

Additional comments: _____

Appendix D

Art Project Rubric

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions	Possible points	Grade Yourself	Teacher's Grade
Project is neat, name and date are on the project.	10		
Proper handling of materials.	10		
Ability to capture the viewer's eye.	40		
Paragraph is well written and there are no typos or grammatical errors.	40		
Total Points	100		

Additional comments: _____

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