



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Touchstones

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.06.08
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Public monuments are collective artifacts which are capable of informing us of the values and beliefs of the people who conceived, made, and installed them. “Touchstones” is an attempt to apply a methodology and discipline of object analysis to extract this information from selected monuments in New Haven.

My choice of objects was dictated by three general purposes. First, in familiarizing students with a methodology that introduces and develops new and precise analytical skills, I begin with small, simpler monuments dedicated to specific events and individuals. Second, this selection seeks to create a physical path of discovery in proximity to the school and then extends further into center of town. Through this spatial mapping, an image of the city as a pattern of interconnected and characteristic places will emerge. Third, having established conceptual and spatial structures for this study, I have sought to initiate an understanding of the city as a temporal structure of events, in the past as well as in the more obvious present. As a corollary to these objectives, students will use this extracted information to design monuments of their own. This design project is described at the close of this essay.

Briefly stated, the methodology of object analysis includes three separate procedures: description, deduction, and speculation. One of these procedures is emphasized at different monuments, thereby clarifying the distinctions inherent in each of them. However, it must be understood that this methodology is an integrative as well as a differentiating mechanism. Because of this, overlaps and correspondences are sometimes unavoidable. Also, by limiting certain ways of interaction at each monument, a greater number of monuments can be observed. This variety will be useful in creating alternatives for the design project which follows.

Before I proceed to the study of specific monuments, a strategic point should be noted. In order to convey the quality of monuments as events, the site visits have been arranged to correspond with the occurrence of certain holidays. This coincidence allows them to be experienced as ritual “pilgrimages” which reinforce and revitalize the thoughts and feelings that these monuments evoke. This strategy also serves to ritualize the learning of the discipline of object analysis as a patterned and structured procedure.

Finally, it is to be understood that, in addition to the verbal descriptions and exchanges that take place during these “pilgrimages,” students will photograph, sketch, and write their responses at each of the monuments. Collectively, they will maintain a cumulative spatial map of the parts of the city they have discovered and develop a time-line schematic diagram of dates, names, and events which they derive from the monuments.

(Recommended for Photography, Visual Arts, and Social Studies classes, grades 7 and 8)

Key Words

American Architecture Monuments New Haven Connecticut History

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