

Centennial: Secrets From Beyond...Stories Headstones Can Tell

Summary

by Mari Domanski. History can be found in many places.

Materials

Make contact with the following local sources: public, private and family cemeteries: stonecarvers, mortuaries; epitaph samples; headstone rubbing or samples.

Information collection sheet. See Packet A.

Cameras for taking pictures of headstones.

Optional:

National Geographic - Fantasy Coffins of Ghana,- September 1994.

National Geographic - Mummy Unearthed from the Pastures of Heaven, October 1994.

Instructor, April 1977, 'A Grave Situation,' Lynn R. Bondurant, Jr.

Early New England Gravestone Rubbings, Edmund V. Gillon, Jr.

Background for Teachers

Where can you find life span information, biographical data, religious affiliation, gender data, causes of death, and loves beyond time? Correct, the cemetery. How communities deal with their dead can be a treasure trove of information and insight.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will recognize the cemetery as a unique repository of a community's history.

Students will identify the types of information cemeteries can provide and how these can change over time.

Instructional Procedures

See preface material for the Utah Centennial Lesson Plans book.

Create a list of places in your community where you can gather information about your community.

Sketch a map of these places (libraries, city hall, etc.) in your community. Share student maps. Are there any other places? Did cemeteries make the map?

Share samples of the types of information that can be found in cemeteries. Discuss where this information can be found other than the cemetery.

Show samples of headstones/epitaphs. Discuss and list what types of information can be found on these. Some types are: dates, gender, relationships, age, causes of death, ethnic/religious/occupational affiliations, humor, love, decorations on headstones, stone types, etc.

Decide what information to collect, who will collect what, how many samples are needed, etc.

Visit a local cemetery, if this is not possible, slides of the cemetery or samples of the information from a cemetery can be used. Before going to the cemetery brainstorm appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Agree to a researchers code of conduct for both the cemetery and the information to be collected.

Collect the information by completing the information sheets, or photograph headstones to complete the sheets later.

From the information collected create databases. Decide which information you can best visually present. Present the knowledge. Discuss what other types of information can be secured from different kinds of cemeteries. Some other types of cemeteries include military, native cultures, foreign, etc.

Extensions

Prepare and set up a talking headstones display to share what has been discovered. Perhaps this could be setup in the local library or city hall.

Design an ad campaign to encourage respectful and responsible behaviors for these repositories of community history and loved ones. What types of local history cannot be found in cemeteries? Where can the missing information be found. Create a map of these alternate sources and identify the type of information that they hold.

Describe how using cemeteries as sources of information can make them both treasures and victims. In what ways has your perception of cemeteries changed? What other 'hidden' information sources can you identify and access?

As we change the way we bury our dead what happens to the knowledge from cemeteries?

Authors

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