Unknown: Memorializing African American Cemeteries

In this lesson plan, students will evaluate the methods and meanings of memorials at an African American cemetery.

**Learning Goals**:

**Curriculum Connections**

VA. 912. H. 2.4 Research the history of art in public places to examine the significance of the artwork and its legacy for the future.

SS. 912.A.1.1 Describe the importance of historiography which includes how historical knowledge is obtained and transmitted when interpreting events in history.

SS.6.W.1.4 Describe methods of historical inquiry & how history relates to other social sciences.

SS.912.G.5 / SS.7.G.4 Understand how human actions can impact the environment

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and analyze common signs and symbols associated with an African American cemetery
2. Reflect on the many ways communities remember the past and ways the past can become "unknown".
3. Create public art plaques to memorialize graves with no identification.

**Materials and Resources**

Sway Presentation: *Unknown: Memorializing African American Cemeteries*

Unknown: Worksheet A

Projector

Screen

9” round silicon molds

Sand Quick Dry Cement

Acrylic Paints

Cement Sealant

**What is Sway?**

Sway is a free Microsoft program that allows teachers to make visually enhanced lesson plans for students. You may use this sway presentation as a whole group or allow students to individually follow along on their own device.

**Sway presentation can be active through this link:**

<https://sway.office.com/v15Q03UQyLKuZBCr?ref=Link>

**Learning Activity 1**: **Brainstorming Hidden History**

Distribute *Worksheet A.*

In Sway, advance to *Chapter 1: How might people and communities try to remember those who lived in the past?* Instruct students to pair with their shoulder partner to brainstorm ways people actively try to remember those who lived in the past

“With your shoulder partner identify 3 ways people try to actively remember those who lived in the past.”

Allow students enough time to share their ideas with the class. Encourage to think about actions, writings, music, and other ways people can memorialize.

Next, have students engage in Visual Thinking Strategies to analyze the image of grave goods left at the Rose Hill Cemetery.

“This photograph shows items left behind at a grave in the historic Rose Hill Cemetery in Tarpon Springs, Florida. Using your Visual Thinking Strategies:”

1. What do you see?
2. Look again - at second glance what smaller details do you notice?
3. What might the mourner be trying to "say" through these objects?

Provide students time to share and record their answers.

**Learning Activity 2: Image Analysis**

Advance to the next slide, *Chapter 2: Understanding the meaning of symbols*. Next, ask students to look at common symbols found on headstones in many cemeteries. Encourage students to try to identify patterns of meaning or imagery.

<https://www.rosehillcemeteryproject.com/signs-symbols-at-rose-hill-cemetery>

**Learning Activity 3: Thinking about historiography and remembering.**

Advance to *Chapter 3: How do graves become “unknown?”* Explain, sometimes people become "unknown". Allow for discussion of the term “unknown”. What might that mean? Instruct students with their shoulder partner to discuss and share:

What does it mean to be "unknown"? In what ways are the people still "known"?

Again, encourage students to use their Visual Thinking Strategies with the archaeology GPR map for the Rose Hill Cemetery. Ask students to hypothesize the meaning of “ground truthing”. As students review the map ask them to record 1) At first glance I see… 2) Upon further inspection, I noticed… 3) GPR and ground truthing has revealed…

**Closure**

Advance to *Chapter 4: Remembering with meaningful art*. Ask students to reflect: Why might it be important to memorialize those with no known identity? How might those with no known identity shaped local history?

**Evaluation**

Students will create their own public memorial artwork for those with no known identity in cemeteries. Ask students to think back to the symbols often found at the Rose Hill Cemetery. Which symbols "spoke to them"? Instruct students to incorporate at least two symbols of meaning into a memorial plaque for an "unknown" at the cemetery. The goal is to create a meaningful piece of public art to create remembrance for an individual with no known identity.

Teachers who are interested in engaging students in this public artwork project may contact the Rose Hill Cemetery Place-Based Learning Project Director, Shannon Peck-Bartle, for 9” round concrete memorial plaques ready for student art. Ms. Peck-Bartle can arrange for the plaques to be placed at the cemetery in locations of known burials with no memorial marker. Please encourage students to date and sign the bottom of their plaque.