



UNIT: CONTESTED HERITAGE AND PUBLIC MEMORY

TARGET LEVEL: High School or Higher Education (ages 16-22)

FORMAT: Online or in-person

MATERIALS: computer, internet connection

SKILLS PROMOTED: critical thinking, historical research, thinking through writing, evaluating primary sources, presentation and communication



This lesson asks students to apply the concepts of monument, memory, and history to design a new monument to the Civil War. It is recommended that students complete the How to Read a Monument: Design, Form, and Intent lesson plan on the Commemorative Cultures website before undertaking this lesson.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will use the lessons they have already learn in monument design, form, and intent to create their own monuments to the Civil War.
2. Students will think about how the Civil War has been represented in monuments prior to the current moment and consider whether any elements of the conflict require more attention through memorialization.
3. Students will “pitch” their monuments to their class to hone skills in presentation and making compelling oral arguments.

KEYWORDS

Postmodernism: According to the Victoria and Albert Museum, “Postmodernism was a drastic departure from the utopian visions of Modernism, which had been based on clarity and simplicity. The Modernists wanted to open a window onto a new world; Postmodernism's key principles were complexity and contradiction. If Modernist objects suggested utopia, progress and machine-like perfection, then the Postmodern object seemed to come from a dystopian and far-from-perfect future.” In monument construction, postmodernism emerged in sites like Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which challenged traditional monumental forms and elevated the viewer’s experience of the site.

RESOURCES

1. Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial competition drawing, 1980/82. [images: <https://www.loc.gov/item/97505164/>] [text: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Maya_Lin%27s_original_competition_submission_for_the_Vietnam_Veterans_Memorial]
2. Examples of “new” Civil War monuments: Wilmington, NC [<https://www.thedailybeast.com/this-brand-new-civil-war-monument-celebrates-black-troops>]; Chickamauga, GA [<https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/18/us/new-confederate-monuments/index.html>]; Washington, DC [<https://www.nps.gov/afam/learn/photosmultimedia/index.htm>]

ACTIVITY

1. Before class, students should read Maya Lin's proposal for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. They should also complete the **How to Read a Monument: Design, Form, and Intent** lesson, and/or use the Commemorative Cultures website (civilwarmonuments.org) to locate three different Civil War monuments and primary source documents that describe their design (such as dedication pamphlets, speeches, and newspaper articles).
2. In class, ask students in small groups to close read Maya Lin's proposal for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and consider the following questions: 1) How does Lin think about the monument's situation within a landscape? 2) How does Lin's soldiers' memorial resemble and differ from soldier memorials dedicated to Civil War veterans? 3) How does Lin want the memorial's viewer to interact with and understand the monument?
3. Ask each student to brainstorm how they might conceive of a new Civil War monument, using Lin's proposal as a guide. Teachers may wish to share examples of monuments to the Civil War erected in the last few decades, listed under Resources. What narratives might students wish to tell with a new monument? What materials and landscapes might they choose? Students can expand on their ideas through the assessment below.

FURTHER READING: For more on the transition from soldier monuments to modern (and postmodern) memorials, see Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

ASSESSMENT

1. Write a 3-4 page essay in which you propose a monument or memorial for your hometown. Your essay should address the following questions and topics:
 - a. Describe the monument. What does it look like? What are its dimensions? Does it include words, and if so, what are they?
 - b. What is the intended effect of the monument on its viewer? How might different viewers interpret it differently?
 - c. Where would the monument be located and why? (E.g., a park? In the middle of a road? In the middle of a town, or near the outskirts? Somewhere different entirely?)
 - d. How does the monument relate to narratives about the Civil War? Does it represent something that is well-known about its location or something that is rarely discussed? Why did you choose this form for your monument?
 - e. What does your proposed monument tell us about monuments more generally? What version of history is your monument preserving, and what history might it be ignoring or choosing not to tell?
2. Find a way to represent your idea for the monument visually. Options for the visual representation include a sketch, collage, model, or PowerPoint presentation. Students will spend approximately 5 minutes presenting their proposed memorial to the class. Presentations should include the visual representation of the memorial, and students should explain why they have chosen the design, location, etc. After the presentations are over, the class may vote on which proposed monument should be erected.

