

Lesson Plan: Symbolism and Memorial Design (Art & Design)

Subject

Visual Arts, Design, Humanities

Grade Level

Middle School (Grades 7-8) & High School (Grades 9-12)

Time Allotment

2-3 class periods

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze symbolic elements in memorial design.
- Understand how design choices (materials, form, space, light) convey meaning and evoke emotion.
- Critically evaluate the artistic and symbolic effectiveness of the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- Apply design principles to conceptualize and sketch their own memorial.
- Appreciate the role of art and design in commemorating historical events and individuals.

Materials

- Images and diagrams of various famous memorials (e.g., Vietnam Veterans Memorial (DC), Lincoln Memorial, 9/11 Memorial, local war memorials).
- Detailed images of the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial (different angles, lighting conditions, solstice shadow).
- Art supplies: sketchpads/paper, pencils, colored pencils/markers, rulers.
- (Optional) Access to digital design tools.

Procedure

Day 1: Analyzing Memorial Design & Symbolism (45-60 minutes)

1. **Introduction to Memorials (15 minutes):**
 - Begin by asking: "What is a memorial? Why do societies build them?"
 - Show images of a few well-known memorials (e.g., Washington D.C. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall). Discuss their purpose: remembrance, honor, education, healing.

2. **Introduction to the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial (20-25 minutes):**
 - Show detailed images of the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
 - Discuss its key features:
 - **Form/Shape:** Circular plaza, granite walls, central gnomon.
 - **Materials:** Granite, grass, sky. Discuss the tactile and visual qualities.
 - **Space:** How does the design guide visitors through the space? Is it open, enclosed, reflective?
 - **Names:** The importance of individual names.
 - **Gnomon & Shadow:** Emphasize the unique shadow alignment that points to names on their date of death. Explain how this connects lives to celestial cycles.
 - **Discussion:** "What do you think each element symbolizes? How does the gnomon's shadow create a powerful message?"
3. **Elements of Symbolism in Design (10-15 minutes):**
 - Introduce common symbolic elements in memorial architecture:
 - **Color:** (e.g., black granite for solemnity, reflection)
 - **Shape:** (e.g., circles for eternity, lines for journey)
 - **Light/Shadow:** (e.g., illumination, passage of time, transient nature of life)
 - **Materials:** (e.g., stone for permanence, water for reflection/purity)
 - **Absence/Presence:** (e.g., empty spaces, engraved names)
 - **Assignment:** Students select one other memorial (from images provided or their own research) and analyze its key symbolic elements in a short paragraph.

Day 2: Conceptualizing a Memorial (45-60 minutes)

1. **Review & Brainstorm (10 minutes):**
 - Review the symbolic elements discussed.
 - Introduce a hypothetical scenario: "Imagine you are tasked with designing a small memorial for a group of local heroes (e.g., first responders, community leaders, or for a specific historical event like a local natural disaster)."
2. **Design Challenge: Sketching a Memorial Concept (30-40 minutes):**
 - Students will sketch a conceptual design for their own memorial. They should consider:
 - **Purpose:** What is it commemorating? What message do you want to convey?
 - **Location:** Where would it be placed? How would it interact with its surroundings?
 - **Key Features:** What would be the central element(s)? (e.g., a wall, a sculpture, a garden, a light feature).

- **Symbolic Elements:** What materials, shapes, colors, or use of light/shadow would you incorporate to convey meaning?
 - **Visitor Experience:** How would people interact with the memorial? (e.g., walk through it, sit and reflect, read names).
 - Emphasize labeling their sketches and providing brief annotations explaining their design choices and symbolism.
3. **Share & Critique (10-15 minutes):**
- Students share their preliminary sketches with a partner or small group.
 - Encourage constructive feedback, focusing on clarity of concept and symbolic effectiveness.
 - **Assignment:** Students refine their memorial sketch and prepare a brief (2-3 minute) explanation of their design choices and symbolism.

Assessment

- **Symbolism Analysis Worksheet:** Graded on accuracy and depth of analysis of existing memorials.
- **Memorial Concept Sketch:** Graded on creativity, clarity of design, thoughtful incorporation of symbolic elements, and effective annotation.
- **Oral Explanation:** Graded on clear articulation of design choices and symbolic intent.
- **Participation:** Engagement in analysis and critique discussions.

Extension Activities

- **Model Building:** Build a small-scale 3D model of their memorial design using found materials.
- **Digital Design:** Use simple digital tools (e.g., SketchUp, Tinkercad, or even drawing apps) to create a more polished design.
- **Art History Research:** Research other examples of commemorative art (e.g., stained glass, public sculptures).
- **Photography Project:** Take photographs of local memorials and analyze them through an artistic lens, focusing on composition, lighting, and mood.