

History Hunters Cemetery Tour

A cemetery tour is a valuable opportunity to teach students about state and community history, as well as the variety of historical information that they can find in a cemetery.

What students can gain from visiting a cemetery:

1. Become familiar with and respect the local cemetery
2. Learn appropriate traditions for cemetery visits
3. Identify and interpret common symbols used on tombstones
4. Appreciate contributions made by community's past leaders and how they shaped the community's growth and development
5. Use tombstone rubbings as a documentary tool

Possible activities and organizing a visit to a cemetery:

1. Brainstorm with your class reasons that a cemetery makes an excellent place to conduct research.
2. Prepare a brief history of the cemetery, or invite a local community historian to the class to share that information.
3. Make copies of local cemetery map for each student (or student team), highlighting burial places of important people in the community and some tombstones with symbols that you want your students to notice. Background information about tombstone symbols can also be distributed ahead of time and discussed.
4. With the help of your local historical society, prepare brief biographical sketches of each important person discussed, or arrange for volunteers to stand at the graves designated on the maps and talk briefly about the significance of the person buried there. When dealing with a large group, it may be desirable to divide students into small groups and create a route through the cemetery that will allow rotating through several starting points along the predetermined route.
5. After finishing the tour of the cemetery, students will work in groups of two. They will select the tombstones which demonstrate some of the

themes discussed in terms of community history, decorative symbols or other locally significant information to make their rubbings. The teacher and one student can demonstrate placing the sheet of newsprint over the tombstone. One partner holds the paper in place while the other takes a large crayon (minus the paper covering) and rubs the side of it carefully, but fairly vigorously, over the tombstone until the impression of the stone is visible. The rubbings can be displayed in the classroom.

6. Students come away with an appreciation for the local cemetery as an important source of historical information, and something about those who have made an impact upon the community's history.

A Sample Sheet for the Cemetery Visit

Please do not walk on the graves!

Some things to look for:

- Symbols: weeping willows, flowers, hands, lambs, angels, Masonic emblems
- Shape of monuments: rectangular, obelisk, tree trunks, statuary--dominated
- Markers made from various materials: bronze, granite, limestone, marble
- Messages: "Budded on this earth to flower in heaven"
- Number of children who died under five years
- Earliest birth date in cemetery
- Earliest death date in cemetery
- Unusual first names
- Military markers for different wars