

Unit Title: History in Our Own Backyard

I. Rationale

In this unit, students will learn about Tennessee history through Elmwood Cemetery along with the history of Memphis.

II. Sources

Elmwood Cemetery, 824 South Dudley Street, Memphis, TN 38104

901.774.3212

www.elmwoodcemetery.org

III. Duration

The duration of these lessons will take several days to complete. Instruction time will vary depending on pace and student understanding. Each lesson takes about 20 to 30 minutes.

IV. Goals and Related Instructional Objectives

TLW recognize and understand different symbols used on grave markers.

TLW explore the history behind several important figures buried in Elmwood.

TLW discuss important figures in Memphis.

TLW review the history of the Civil War and the effect it had in Tennessee.

TLW learn about yellow fever and the impact it had on Memphis.

Lesson Title

Taking a Step into the Cemetery

Objective

TLW be introduced to Elmwood Cemetery.

Long Range Objective

TLW understand Tennessee history through important figures and symbols found in Elmwood Cemetery.

Instructional Strategies

1. When introducing this lesson, ask students: “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of a cemetery?” Wait for a show of hands, take responses from about 4-7 students. Next, ask students if they can *name* a cemetery that they have been to.
2. If no responses, introduce the name Elmwood. Write it for students to see. Ask the students if anyone has ever been to or heard of this cemetery. Explain that Elmwood Cemetery is a cemetery that has been in Memphis, TN since 1852. That makes it 159 years old. (For older students, try to have them estimate how old the cemetery is before telling them)
3. Tell students that a cemetery is more than just a place for the dead. This cemetery is right here in Memphis and on the National Register for all of the history that is within it. Play the video about Elmwood Cemetery via the link in the lesson plan. It is about 7 minutes long.
4. To conclude this lesson, have students draw their answer to the question at the beginning of the lesson. They will take one piece of paper, write the word that came to mind when they thought of the word cemetery, and draw a picture. For older students, have them write one paragraph about the word that comes to mind when they think of the word cemetery and why it makes them feel that way. Drawing for older students is optional. Save these for later.
5. Briefly review facts about the cemetery.

Materials and Media

Computer

<http://www.elmwoodcemetery.org/videos/>

Paper

Pencils

Crayons/colored pencils

Alice's Elmwood Tour, page 2

Extras!

For older students, upper elementary to middle school, incorporate facts about Elmwood listed below (also found on page 2 of Alice's Elmwood Tour)

- Established in 1852 by 50 local businessmen who wanted to revamp the overgrown churchyard cemeteries and create a park like atmosphere for the living which ties into how Victorians romanticized death
- The name was changed from graveyard to cemetery, which is a Greek word meaning sleeping chamber.
- Originally began as 40 acres and another 40 acres were purchased after the Civil War.
- The cemetery is set up like a neighborhood because each plot has an address and each plot houses a family member.

Lesson Title

Why the Ivy?

Objective

TLW recognize and understand different symbols found on grave markers.

Long Range Objective

TLW understand Tennessee history through important figures and symbols found in Elmwood Cemetery.

Instructional Strategies

1. Begin by reviewing what was learned about Elmwood the day before. Clarify or correct if needed.
2. Ask students what a headstone looks like, what is found on it (name, birth date, death date, sometimes a picture, sometimes a quote). Ask if all headstones look alike and briefly discuss differences (color, size, height).
3. Explain to students that there are several symbols found on many graves to give you a brief caption about the buried person's life. People place a photo, a quote, a name, the reason for their death, their accomplishments in life, but many people decide they want a symbol on their headstone. These symbols give you lots of information about the person that was buried.
4. Begin by showing several different symbols found in Elmwood.
 - Pearls: tears shed for a loved one
 - Butterflies: Soul of man
 - Dove: devotion
 - Wreath: eternity
 - Ivy: Strength/Endurance
 - Lily, flowers: purity
 - Angel: religious symbol
 - Limbs of a tree: represents how many children the person had. If there is a broken limb, this means the child died before the parent
 - Bathtubs: sometimes used as planters, the size indicates the age of the child
 - Angel with an upside down torch: a life cut short
 - Roses: love
 - Cut rose: unending love
 - Sphere/circle: eternity
 - Columns: a great life that has ended
 - Scratches/breaks in tree bark: a hard life

- Books: educated or scholarly
- Palm branches: everlasting life
- Rope: eternity or strength
- Lamb: Christ, usually found on a child's grave
- Bridge: span from life to death

4. After explaining a few of the symbols, show a few pictures of other symbols. Leave pictures out for students to look at. Discuss the history of the following people buried at Elmwood: Mattie Stephenson, Robert R. Church, John Smith, A. Maceo Walker, Wade Bolton, or any historical figure of your choice buried at Elmwood. Explain to students that they will pretend to create the headstones for one of these people. They will choose two symbols they believe best represent the person and choose what will be placed on the headstone (name, birth/death date, quote, photo).

5. Review several symbols and their meaning.

Materials and Media

Paper

Pencils/crayons/colored pencils

Alice's Elmwood Tour packet

Computer

Extras!

- Have students pick a partner and each student draws two symbols they believe represent their partner (remind them nothing negative).
- Explain to students that they will choose a few symbols to represent themselves. They may choose only 2 symbols to draw. For much younger students, have them choose one. On the back of the paper, the student must write what their symbols mean. Once students are finished drawing, have a few show their drawings. Before having the student explain, ask the class if they can recall what that student's symbol means.
- Have students explain the meaning behind a symbol of their choice.