

Memorials and Sculptures

A Project by 5- through 7-Year-Old Children
at Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center, Peoria, Illinois
Length of Project: 5 months

Teachers: Jean O'Mara-Thieman, Heather Goocher, & Kendrya' Johnson

Phase One

Beginning the Project

The students selected the topic of memorials after they read about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his future memorial in Washington, DC. They initiated the project in the block area by constructing their concepts of Dr. King's future memorial, as well as constructing other memorials from the Washington, DC area. I added the study of sculptures as a means of expanding their knowledge, as a means of providing a comparison, and as a means of developing their creativity and ability to investigate. As we looked to our community for information and resources, the class wanted to know: What is a memorial? What is a sculpture? Is the White House a memorial? Do we have memorials and sculptures in Peoria? These questions developed as the boys and girls worked in the block area and during discussions.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

We began to explore memorials and sculptures within our community. We started with our school as we investigated how it got its name and how the entry bench got there. Our investigation expanded to neighborhood sculptures and memorials on Jean Baptiste du Sable, Ira Nelson, and Romeo B. Garrett. As we walked to each of these sites, the students took their clipboards and sketched the different memorials and sculptures, noting the shapes and materials used. On the computer, the boys and girls observed other memorials in the Peoria area.

The class took a walking tour of the city, guided by a member of the Peoria Historical Society. Another member of the Historical Society came to the classroom to show slides and answer questions. Before we created our own sculptures, we visited the Peoria Art Guild, and we had a Bradley student sculptor bring samples of sculptures and work with us on the uses of clay. On another site experience, the class visited Springfield to see Lincoln's home and his memorial.

Students represented their learning in a variety of ways. They created and wrote about their own sculptures, developed a class newspaper about local memorials and sculptures, and wrote a book about local memorials and sculptures. The construction area was utilized throughout the project for block building of memorials and for creating a neighborhood map of memorials and sculptures.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

To culminate our study, the boys and girls displayed their sculptures and writings throughout the building. They placed their neighborhood map with its memorials and sculptures in the hall along with their memorial and sculpture book. Newspapers were available for all to read as part of the display. The students invited their families and friends to stop by and see their project work. The children acted as resources for all who came.

Comments

It is so powerful to see a project initiated by the children. There is no building of the interest; it is there! In this project, the children constructed much of their own learning and developed many of their own goals and areas of investigation. It certainly allowed them to be successful learners. Initially, I had been concerned that the investigation was too abstract for the boys and girls, but the use of the book *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, by Mem Fox, and the accessibility of materials alleviated that problem. This was an excellent topic. Because we are in the city, we were in an excellent position to take walking site visits to numerous memorials and sculptures, many located in or by our city buildings. The project helped all of us develop an interest in and appreciation of our community. Further, it helped the children develop a beginning understanding of time and the effects of the past on all of our lives. One child, LeBrandon, stands out in this project because he so loved history that he was able to motivate the entire class to delve into this topic.

