



Creating a Memorial

Grade Level(s):

6 - 12

Subject Area(s)

Language Arts - Writing, Civics, U.S. History

Estimated Time

One 45-50 minute class period

Summary

There are so many war memorials (more than 8,500 in the U.S. alone) that it's easy to overlook the meaning that each one can carry. A very important war memorial in Mexico City celebrates "Los Niños Héroes," a group of Mexican military cadets who died in the final major battle of the U.S.-Mexican War. The students will explore the ongoing historical significance of the memorial to "Los Niños Héroes" and then come up with their own ideas for a U.S. national war memorial for the U.S.-Mexican War.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about the kinds of events that lead to the creation of war memorials.
- Gain a better understanding of the components of a war memorial.
- Explore the ways that public displays like memorials can help heal nations and the relationships between nations after wars.
- Consider why some nations may decide not to create memorials to certain wars.
- Create ideas for an American war memorial for the U.S.-Mexican War.

Materials Needed

This activity can be completed using a computer lab where students can access the [video clips](#) and handouts themselves via "The U.S.-Mexican War" website. It can also be done by using one classroom computer with a projection device. In the second scenario, you will need to provide the students with the following handouts:

- ["Los Niños" Worksheet #1](#)
- ["Los Niños" Worksheet #2](#)
- [Video Clips Library \(http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/resources/video_library.html\)](http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/resources/video_library.html)

Video clips used:

- "The Battle of Chapultepec and 'Los Niños Héroes'"
- "President Truman visits the Chapultepec memorial"



LESSON PLANS

Procedure

Pre-viewing Activity: Discuss with students the importance of war memorials. Have the students brainstorm a list of war memorials, particularly ones that they have actually seen. Why do they think we have war memorials? What are the purposes that memorials can serve?

Take the students back to the time of the U.S.-Mexican War by setting up the video clips they are about to see. Explain to students that at this point the war is almost over and the Mexican forces have virtually no chance to stave off the U.S. invasion of Mexico City. Yet the Mexicans have prepared for one last battle in defense of the Chapultepec Castle. The Mexican forces are depleted and they must rely on young military cadets to help them fight the battle. For some background, you can reference the following article which has information on the boy heroes: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninos_Heroes

Viewing Activity: Tell students to go to "The U.S.-Mexican War" website to access the two video clips, "The Battle of Chapultepec and 'Los Niños Héroes'" and "President Truman visits the Chapultepec memorial" (or display the videos with a projection device in your classroom). Explain to students that in the first video clip they will learn about "Los Niños Héroes" and their role in the last major battle of the U.S.-Mexican War, the battle of Chapultepec. Tell students that in the second clip, they will see the memorial that was created in honor of "Los Niños Héroes" and learn about the role of the memorial. Have the students think about the questions on the "[Los Niños](#)" [worksheet #1](#) as they watch the videos. Ask students to complete the worksheet after they have watched the video clips.

Post-viewing Activity: After students have completed the worksheet, have them discuss their answers and their responses to the video clips. Then direct them to the following article to get more background on the significance of Truman's visit to the memorial – <http://www.mexicofile.com/thebrave.htm>. Have students discuss Mexico's response to Truman and its importance in healing the old wounds between the countries. Have the students consider how deep those wounds must have been for Truman's visit to be deemed so significant (after all, the visit came almost 100 years after the end of the war). Tell the students that in more recent times, President Clinton also visited the memorial.

Explain to students that the U.S. federal government has never built a memorial to commemorate the U.S.-Mexican War (within the United States; the U.S. government did fund a memorial in Mexico City). Ask students to consider possible reasons for this. If they do not reference it, remind them of Ulysses Grant's quote from the above article, describing the war as "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." Ask students whether this opinion may have contributed to the lack of a national memorial.

Break the class into small groups. Tell the students that with the knowledge they have about the U.S.-Mexican War, each group will now create ideas for a U.S. national memorial to the war. Have the students use "[Los Niños](#)" [worksheet #2](#) as a guide for this activity. Go over the following questions from the worksheet with the students to prepare them for their task:

- What is the goal of your memorial?
- What is the target audience of your memorial?
- Whom would your memorial honor?
- What words, if any, would be on your memorial?
- What would your memorial look like?
- In what city or state would your memorial be?



- What would be the setting for your memorial?

Tell students that each group must minimally answer all of the questions on the worksheet, but that they can also include any additional ideas that they have. Have each group select a member to create a simple sketch of what their memorial would look like.

Have each group present its ideas and sketches to the entire class; then have the students offer each other feedback.

Classroom Assessment

To assess the students' work, consider the following:

- Did the students show a grasp of the importance of "Los Niños Héroes" and Truman's visit to the memorial?
- Did the students' show that they understood the purposes of war memorials in general?
- Did the students' ideas for a war memorial achieve the goals that they had set for themselves?
- Did the students work well together in their groups?
- Did the students make clear and coherent presentations of their ideas for a war memorial?

Extensions and Applications

While there are no U.S. national memorials to the U.S.-Mexican War, there are indeed several memorials that were built by states and counties in the United States. Have the students go to the following website to explore some of them: <http://www.dmwv.org/honoring/monmem.htm>

Have the students compare the actual memorials they will see here with the ideas that their groups created. Are there similarities? Differences?

To learn more about some of the memorials at the National Mall in Washington, have students visit: <http://www.nps.gov/mall/monuments/monument.htm>

And for a more personal take on memorials, have the students go to the site dedicated to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: <http://www.vietvet.org/thewall.htm>

There are some very moving and powerful responses to the memorial here.

For younger students: This activity can also be adapted for younger students. Rather than creating new ideas for a memorial, focus on the story of "Los Niños Héroes." Have the students brainstorm questions that they would like to have asked the boy heroes. Then have the students write imaginative letters to them.

National Standards

McRel K-12 Standards Addressed:

Language Arts

- Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.



- Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

Geography

- Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Civics

- Standard 23: Understands the impact of significant political and nonpolitical developments on the United States and other nations.

U.S. History

- Standard 9: Understands the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.

Online Resources

Below are the links for sites referenced in this activity and others:

- The U.S.-Mexican War (1846 - 1848)
<http://www.pbs.org/usmexicanwar/>
- Background on the "Los Niños"
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninos_Heroes
<http://www.mexicofile.com/thebrave.htm>
- Background on other memorials
<http://www.dmwv.org/honoring/monmem.htm>
<http://www.nps.gov/mall/monuments/monument.htm>
<http://www.vietvet.org/thewall.htm>
- American Friends Service Committee
Information about *Eyes Wide Open*, an exhibit on the human cost of the Iraq War
<http://www.afsc.org>



“Los Niños” Worksheet #1

Complete this worksheet after you watch the video clips.

1. Who were "Los Niños Héroes"?

2. Why do you think that Mexico created a memorial in honor of "Los Niños Héroes"?

3. Why do you think that Harry Truman decided to visit the memorial to "Los Niños Héroes"?

4. What impact do you think Truman's visit to the memorial had on the Mexican people?



LESSON PLANS

“Los Niños” Worksheet #2

Instructions: Work with your group to create ideas for an American national memorial to the U.S.-Mexican War. Answer all of the following questions and have a member of your group draw a simple sketch of what your memorial would look like. If you have additional ideas about the memorial that aren't addressed in the questions, feel free to add those ideas to the bottom of this worksheet.

1. What is the goal of your memorial?
2. What is the target audience of your memorial?
3. Who would your memorial honor?
4. What words, if any, would be on your memorial?
5. In what city or state would your memorial live?
6. What would be the setting for your memorial?

Additional group ideas about the memorial: