
"CEMETERY HUNT"

TO THE TEACHER:

These exercises come from **"The Cemetery As A Learning Resource"** by Harvie Walker and Stanley King (BC Teachers' Federation Lesson Aids Service) and from **"A Guide for the Recording, Care and Use of British Columbia's Heritage Cemeteries"** by Norm Truswell and Dave Townsend.

"Cemetery Hunt" allows students to learn about their community's past from a new perspective. Cemeteries are a unique and exciting way to learn about history, especially when the activities are done near Halloween. These lessons would work well with a unit concentrating on local history, families and genealogy or change in BC communities.

NOTE:

generally cemeteries are open to the public, but if you are unsure, check with the church or the authority who runs the church before you go to make sure it's alright to bring your class to the cemetery.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- gather information from sources other than books
- gain a connection to the past; sense of community history
- learn about different people, cultures, traditions and beliefs
- discover the pioneers who developed the community

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- see the individual activities
- parental supervision

ACTIVITY 1:

Cemetery Appearance
(grades 1-7)

Use the following questions to generate discussion while touring the cemetery:

1. Where is the cemetery located? Why is it there?
2. How does the more recent part of the cemetery differ from the oldest?
3. Are there special "sections" in the cemetery? What are they for?
4. Are there gravestones missing? Why do you think that most of the big, impressive gravestones are old? Does it tell you anything about changing attitudes of society?

ACTIVITY 2:

Gravestone Detective
(grades 1-7)

Gravemarkers can offer a wealth of information. This activity allows students to be detectives as they try to discover as much information as possible about the people buried in the cemetery by reading and interpreting the gravemarkers.

Have each student pick one grave and use the **“Gravestone Detective”** worksheet to find information about the person buried there.

ACTIVITY 3:
Demographic Data
(grades 3-7)

The collection of demographic data is a good way to learn about trends in the community (e.g. many deaths in one year may indicate there was an epidemic or disaster of some kind).

a. “Average Life Span” worksheet

In this worksheet students collect the dates of death and the dates of birth from a number of gravestones. Using the data, they can determine ages, and then calculate the average life span.

b. “Death Rate by Age Group” worksheet

Have the class collect data in a given area of the cemetery or from a previously determined number of gravemarkers.

Try taking samples from both the 19th and 20th century if possible and note the differences. Also try noting the months in which people died. Are there any differences between the “summer” half and “winter” half of the year? Look at the children’s graves. Do their numbers increase or decrease over time? What does this indicate about changing technology?

c. “Ethnic Trends” worksheet

Have students record the birthplace from a number of gravemarkers. Do the students notice a change in the number of different nationalities over time? Does this say something about immigration to the community?

NOTE:

a small sample is often misleading and some cemeteries, in particular those beside churches, may attract a particular religious or ethnic group.

ACTIVITY 4:
Epitaphs (grades 1-7)

Epitaphs are the messages written on the gravestone. Often one finds inscribed words, symbols or images which provide information and in some cases insights about the person buried there. The source for an epitaph can range from scriptural passages to personal messages written by a loved one.

The following examples are from the Ross Bay Cemetery in Victoria.

“The corn was reaped while it was green. The sun went down while it was day”
(this individual was 22 and died in the Point Ellice Bridge disaster May 1896)

“Sleep on Sweet Mother/ and take thy rest, God/ called Thee Home, He/ thought it Best”

Have the students pick a grave with an interesting epitaph and write it down. Back in the classroom have the class write an essay about the epitaph. Discuss the possible meaning of the message, how it might reflect the culture, religious beliefs and/or nationality of that person and the community.

Or have each student pick a grave without an inscription. Do a quick sketch highlighting the main design elements and have them write an imaginary epitaph which might fit the grave they have chosen.

ACTIVITY 5:
Community Names
(grades 1-7)

Look at the last names on the gravemarkers. Ask the class if they notice anything about them. Do any of the names still appear in the community today? Where? (e.g. street names, parks, buildings named after founding pioneers, phone book) How do names in the cemetery relate to the community? Did these people play a key role in the development of the town (e.g. founder of the first school)?

ACTIVITY 6:
Cemetery Art
(grades K-7)

a. Rubbings

Make a series of rubbings of unique designs, images or epitaphs. You will need the following: newsprint (60cm by 90cm sheets), tape, and artists' charcoal, non-smudge wax crayons or chalkboard chalk.

Place paper on the stone and tape it down. Remove moss & lichens only if necessary (disturb as little as possible). Use long, sweeping strokes, holding the crayon on its side against the paper. Colour the surface evenly with firm pressure. Dark colours work best.

b. Sketches

The gravemarkers in a cemetery are a great way to practice sketching. Have the class draw the largest, smallest, most intricate, etc. gravestone they can find.

Back at school have the students write essays based on their experience in the cemetery (feelings toward the dead, attitude changes). Or have them write a short biography (real or imaginary) on the person whose gravestone they drew. Another idea is to have them write poems about the dead. Read the poem "Elegy" by Thomas Gray as an example (included in this section).

c. Story Telling & Legends About Death

A graveyard provides an ideal place for scary local stories. If your town has a legend about a tragedy or a "haunted" house, tell it in the graveyard! Other topics to consider include: First Nations or other cultural legends about death; ways in which the dead are remembered (e.g. portraits, street names, cenotaphs for the war dead); and other forms of disposal (e.g. cremation).

ACTIVITY 7: Symbolism (grades 1-7)

While observing the gravestones, notice the different markings (crosses, animals, shapes, etc.) and colours-these are symbols. The following list of symbols comes from **"A Guide for the Recording, Care and Use of British Columbia Heritage Cemeteries"** by Norm Truswell and Dave Townsend. The meaning for the symbols are what they would have been for the Victorian era (1800s), but the interpretation of symbols is a subjective process, so students should be encouraged to say what they think the symbols mean.

This list is provided as a basic interpretation guide, in case the class has questions about what the images mean-it is NOT comprehensive.

a. Colours

BLACK--solemnity, sickness, death

BLUE--heavenly love, colour of the Virgin Mary (often represented by light blue marble)

WHITE & BLACK--purity of life, humility

WHITE or GOLD--purity, innocence of the soul, often used on a child's grave

BROWN--spiritual death, renunciation of the world (like a monks' robes)

GREY--ashes, mourning

GREEN--hope, regeneration of the soul

PURPLE--divine power, nobility, truth, love, passion, suffering

b. Geometric Figures

CIRCLE--eternity, never ending existence, often has cross in centre

TRIANGLE, TREFOIL--holy trinity (God, Christ and Holy Spirit), wisdom

SQUARE--earth, earthly existence

PENTAGON (5 point star)--wisdom, magic, protection against evil, wounds of Christ (there were five of them)

6 POINT STAR--star of David, typically used as a symbol of Judaism

SWASTIKA--found on Buddhist memorials (seal of Buddha's heart), Chinese representation of the male and female (like yin-yang)

c. Animals and Body Parts

WINGED BIRDS (other than doves)--divine, winged soul

DOVE--Holy Spirit

BUTTERFLY--rare, resurrection of Christ, often on a child's grave

LAMB--very common, purity, innocence, often on a child's grave, symbol of Christ

SHELL--pilgrimage, fertility, resurrection

EYES--refer to the "all seeing eyes of God", represents the "all-knowing and ever-present God", often seen in combination with a triangle

HANDS--very common on gravemarkers, a hand with a heart is symbolic of charity and is common on 19th c memorials. Is mostly on the graves of Fraternal and Social Organizations. Clasped hands indicate farewell

d. Vegetation

Almost every known flower had some sort of meaning in the Victorian era. These are just a few.

BROKEN BRANCHES or BUDS--life cut short (death of a child)

FLOWERS (general)--love, grief, happiness

BUTTERCUP--cheerfulness

FERN--sincerity

IVY--memory, immortality

DAISY--innocence, child's grave

LILY--purity, return of happiness, humility, majesty, Virgin Mary

POPPY--peace, rest

PINE TREE--fertility, regeneration (associated with the colour green)

ROSE--love, beauty, hope

WHEAT--resurrection, bread and wine, fertility, body of Christ

VINE--God's blood

THISTLE--earthly sorrow, Christ's crown of thorns

PINEAPPLE--hospitality, good host

DAFFODIL--regard, death of youth, desire, art, grace

CROCUS--youthful gladness

DEAD LEAVES--sadness, melancholy

HONEYSUCKLE--bonds of love, generosity, devoted affection

MORNING GLORY--resurrection, mourning, youth, farewell

FOR-GET-ME-NOT--remembrance

WEeping WILLOW--mourning

e. Other Motifs

CROSS or CRUCIFIX--cross on which Christ died, God's love for the people

HARP--associated St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians, Heaven

ANCHOR--hope

SUN--dawn of life, resurrection

WHEEL--commerce, travel

HEART--charity

VEILS--sorrow, mourning, grief

GATE--entrance to Heaven

FLEUR-DE-LIS--holy trinity, Virgin Mary, symbol of France/Quebec

CANDLE--light of the world

WOMAN & CROSS--hope

WOMAN POINTING UPWARDS--faith

WOMAN HANGING ON CROSS--faith

MENORAH (seven branched candle stick)--Jewish symbol of the divine, cosmic tree

"GRAVESTONE DETECTIVE"

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Locate the following:

- a. The oldest gravestone (date) _____
- b. The youngest person buried there (name) _____
- c. The oldest person buried there (name) _____

2. Pick an interesting grave and find the following:

- a. When did this person die? _____
- b. How old were they when they died? _____

Does this tell us anything about medical care, disasters...? _____

- c. Where was this person born? _____

Why do you think this person would have come here? _____

- d. Does the gravemarker give any information about jobs, or significant achievements? _____

- e. Does the style or decoration tell you anything about ethnicity, religion...? _____

"AVERAGE LIFE SPANS"

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

First and Last Names	Year of death	Year of birth	Age
1 .			
2 .			
3 .			
4 .			
5 .			
6 .			
7 .			
8 .			
9 .			
10 .			
11 .			
12 .			
13 .			
14 .			
15 .			
16 .			

To calculate Average Life Span:

Total age (sum of all ages) / 16 (number of ages) = average life span

Average Life Span for my sample is _____

"DEATH RATES BY AGE GROUP"

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Using the information gathered on the "Average Life Spans" worksheet, group the people in your sample by age.

AGE	NUMBER
0-5	
6-10	
11-15	
16-20	
21-25	
26-30	
31-35	
36-40	
41-45	
46-50	

AGE	NUMBER
51-55	
56-60	
61-65	
66-70	
71-75	
76-80	
81-85	
86-90	
91-95	
96-100	

Look at the results and give possible reasons for high death rates in certain age groups.

"ETHNIC BACKGROUND"

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

NAME OF PERSON	NAME OF COUNTRY
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
15.	

Major country represented _____, _____%

"Elegy"

Thomas Gray
(1716-1771)

Written in a Country Churchyard

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save from that yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Off did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow off the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the Poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:-
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to these the fault
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind;

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the maddening crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never lean'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorials still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops of the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,-

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
'Off have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away,
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn;

There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
The wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noon-tide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove;
Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
Along the hearth, and near his favourite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;

The next with dirges due in sad array
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne,-
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.

THE EPITAPH

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A Youth, to Fortune and to Fame unknown;
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere;
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
He gain'd from Heaven, 'twas all he wish'd,
a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),
The bosom of his Father and his God.

"Elegy" comes from A Book of English Poetry collected by G.B. Harrison, 1950