Cemeteries: Where History Lives

(Zilker Family plot. Oakwood Cemetery, Austin, Texas. All photos, Texas Historical Commission, 2016)

Summary

Cemeteries are steeped in the history and the stories of real people. To help students interpret this information, this lesson explores typical memorial and physical features found in most cemeteries. By experiencing a gallery walk through Oakwood Cemetery (established in 1839), the oldest cemetery in Austin, Texas, and becoming familiar with cemetery-related vocabulary, students will build a foundation for understanding the history that lives in cemeteries in their own communities.

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Time Frame

1-2 class periods. If possible, a field trip to a local cemetery may be substituted for the gallery walk.

TEKS (Grades 4 & 7)

TEKS Social Studies curriculum correlations:
4th Grade: 21B-C
7th Grade: 21B-C

TEKS ELA curriculum correlations:
4th Grade: 2A-B, 13B, 18A, 21A-C, 25
7th Grade: 2A-B, 25 A-D

TEKS Fine Arts curriculum correlations:
4th Grade: 1B, 2C, 3A-B
7th Grade: 1A-B, 2A, 3B

TEKS Mathematics curriculum correlations:
4th Grade: 4A
7th Grade: 1A, 3A-B

Objective(s)

Students will:

❑ **Identify** typical memorial and physical features found in a cemetery
❑ **Report** observations of these features using cemetery-related vocabulary when possible
❑ **Predict** the meaning of symbols and ways people remember their loved ones

Guiding Question

❑ What features in a cemetery might help a visitor learn the stories and history of the people buried there?

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Vocabulary

cemetery, epitaph, footstone, grave, headstone, monument, railing, symbol, tomb, vegetation

Engagement

To introduce the lesson, ask students what they already know about cemeteries. Conduct a class poll by completing these sentence stems and then sharing responses.

- ❑ A cemetery is _____.
- ❑ Three things I may see at a cemetery are: _____, _____, and _____.
- ❑ One way cemeteries can tell us about our history is _____.

USING TECHNOLOGY: Use www.pollanywhere.com to create and conduct a poll with the above sentence stems. Display answers in real time. Use this discussion as a launch point for the lesson.

Whole Group Instruction

Select and print images from **Images of Oakwood Cemetery** (Resource A) to create a cemetery gallery walk experience. Review **Cemetery Vocabulary** (Resource B) with students prior to the walk.

Small Group Instruction

Assign partners to complete the gallery walk together. Be sure students are answering questions from their **Guided Observations Worksheet** (Resource C). Debrief with the class after students have recorded their observations. Ask groups to share their answers. Some guided discussion questions include:

- ❑ What is the most interesting thing you noticed on or near a grave?
- ❑ If you were travelling to a cemetery, what would you do first?
- ❑ What were some symbols you noticed? What do you think they might represent?

Independent Practice

Have students create a Cemetery Visitor's Guide for Oakwood Cemetery or a cemetery in your community using the **Cemetery Visitor's Guide template** (Resource D) and vocabulary words from **Cemetery Vocabulary** (Resource B).

Exit Ticket

Ask your students to reflect on the activity and respond to the following questions:

- ❑ Were there any images that you expected to see but did not see?
- ❑ Describe one symbol or physical feature of a cemetery that helps people remember the past or the lives of people buried in the cemetery.

Extension

If time and scheduling permits, schedule a trip to a local cemetery. Adjust the questions on the **Guided Observations Worksheet** (Resource C) as necessary for that cemetery.

Resources

A) Images of Oakwood Cemetery
B) Cemetery Vocabulary
C) Guided Observations Worksheet
D) Cemetery Visitor's Guide template

**All resources can be found below

Images of Oakwood Cemetery
Resource A

Note: Below each figure are the vocabulary words associated with the image. These terms may be included in the gallery walk or deleted to encourage student discovery.

Figure 1: headstone, grave, symbol

Figure 2: headstone, grave, symbol

Figure 3: headstone, grave, epitaph

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Figure 4: headstone, grave, epitaph,

Figure 5: footstone

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Figure 6: headstone, footstone, grave, symbol

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Figure 7: grave, symbol, epitaph
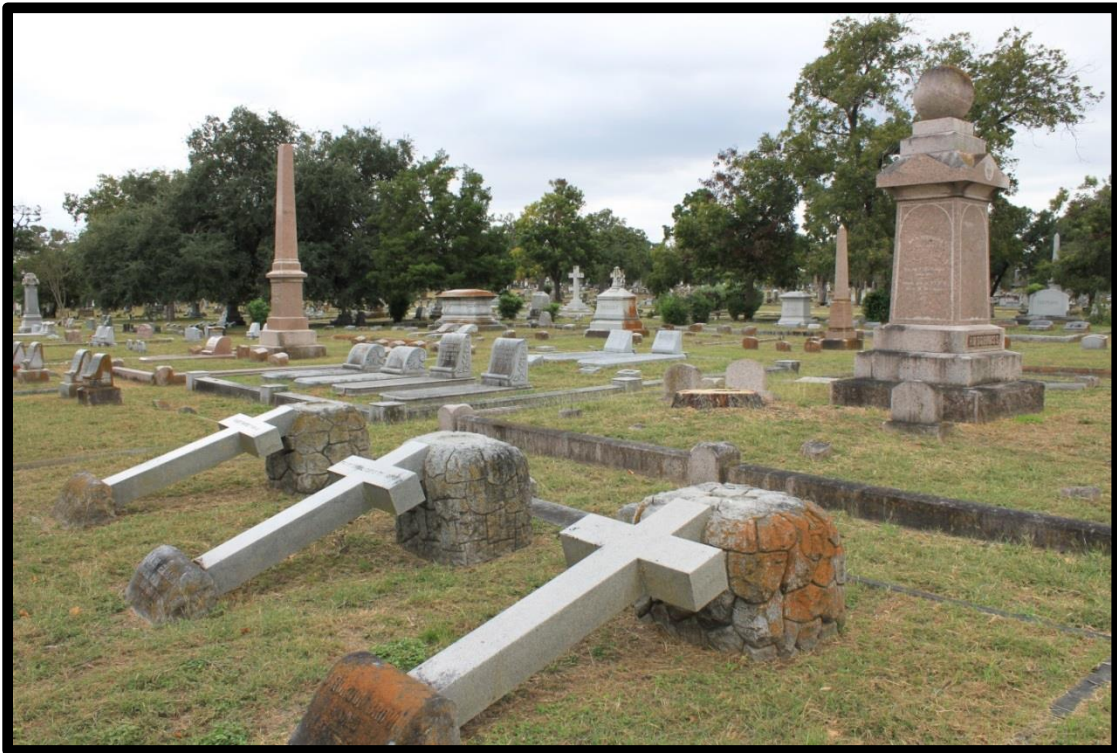
Figure 8: monument, grave(s), vegetation

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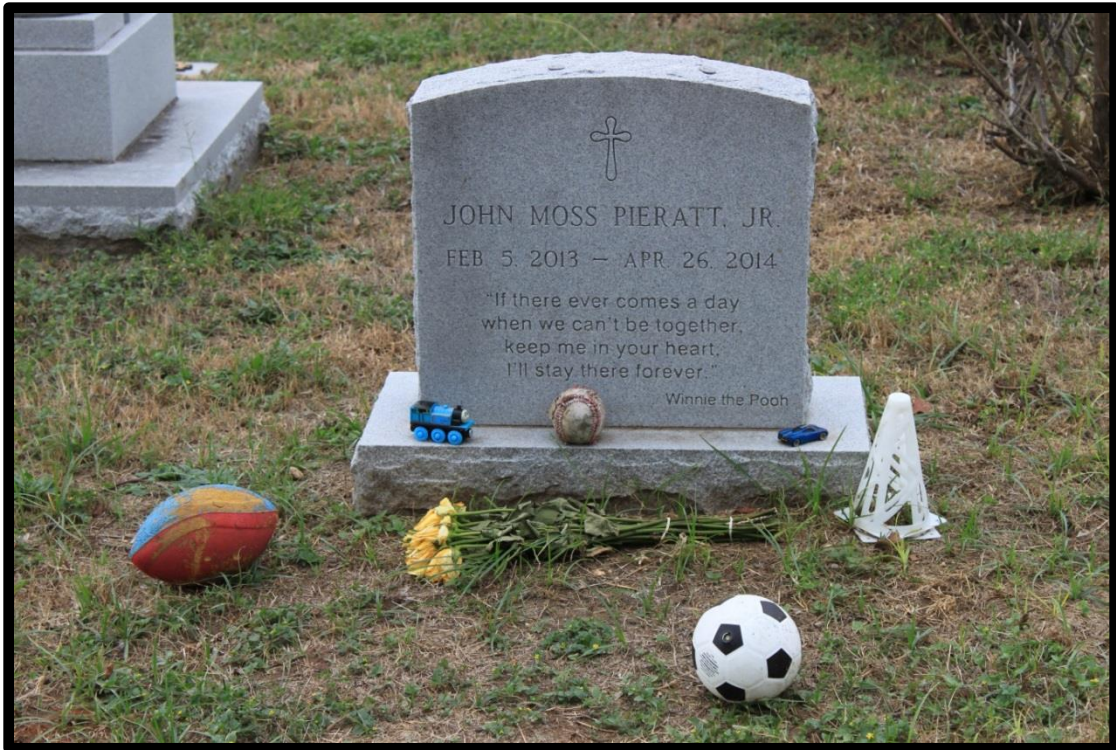
Figure 9: headstone, grave, symbol, epitaph

Figure 10: tomb, grave

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Figure 11: grave, vegetation

Figure 12: vegetation

Figure 13: vegetation, monument, headstone

Figure 14: headstone(s), grave(s), railing

Figure 15: monument, symbol

Figure 16: grave

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Cemetery Vocabulary
Resource B

cemetery   Area of land set aside and maintained as a burial place for the dead.

epitaph   Short saying or poem carved on the headstone.

footstone   Marker, smaller than a headstone, placed at the foot (end) of a grave.

grave   Area of ground where a person is buried, including the headstone and footstone.

headstone   Marker, often made of carved stone or metal, placed at the head of a grave to identify who is

buried there.

monument   Grave marker that is usually large and stands upright.

railing   Fence that surrounds a grave or several graves.

symbol   Design, letter, picture, object, etc. that stands for something else. (For example, the symbol

♡ often stands for "love/loves.")

tomb   Above-ground structure where family members are buried together.

vegetation   Plants and trees located in an area.

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Guided Observations Worksheet
Resource C

Describe one grave site using your vocabulary words. Record the shapes, sizes, colors, and positions of the items in the picture.

How are monuments and headstones alike? How are they different? Why might a family choose a monument to mark the grave of a family member?

Describe one headstone or monument symbol that you identified. What might this symbol tell you about the person's life or beliefs?

Identify an epitaph. Write the epitaph below and describe why you think it was included on this grave.

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List the different types of vegetation you observe. Circle any that you think are not native to the location. Why do you think those types of vegetation are in the cemetery?

Locate two headstones that gives birth and death dates. Write down the names and dates for each headstone. Then calculate how old each person was when s/he died.

Why do you think some grave sites are well kept while others are damaged and in need of repair?

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Cemetery Visitor's Guide

Resource D

Instructions:

1) Cut along the outside of the boxes and fold down the middle, length-wise.
2) On each of the inside pages, draw a picture of something a visitor might see at a cemetery.
3) Write a description for each of your drawings. Use words from the vocabulary list.
4) Add a title and an illustration to the front of the guide.
5) On the back of the guide, write a poem or saying that might be found on a headstone or monument.