

## Earth, Stone & Memories

STONES THROUGH HISTORY ACTIVITY – A LIFE IN CONTEXT - CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

*NOTE: We do not advocate any activity that would involve physically touching the headstones in a historic cemetery. Creating “rubblings” or marking the stones with crayons or shaving cream to help read them is discouraged. If you have questions in regard to such activities, please contact the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.*

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Plan to visit a local historic cemetery. Anyone associated with a genealogy or historical society would be able to tell you where to go. In fact, many society members may be able to offer a tour of the site and provide a history of its existence and tell you about many of those buried there.

Ask each student to select a headstone. Stones with readable inscriptions that include the individual’s birth and death dates are recommended.

Photograph each selected stone.

- *If travel is not possible, you may complete the activity using photographs you would acquire from a local historic cemetery on your own.*

Take a piece of paper and turn on its side. In the upper right hand corner, write the selected stone’s inscription – the individual’s name, birth and death dates and any other information included on the stone. Either glue a photograph or have the student sketch the stone in the upper left corner.

Draw a straight line on the lower half of the paper. Place the individual’s birth date on the point where the line begins and their death date at the opposite end. For example:

1822 \_\_\_\_\_ 1915

Mark each year, five or ten-year increment, as room allows.

Using color pencils, draw a line or a dot to identify major events that occurred during that person’s life. If the individual lived during the Civil War, draw a red line above the years 1861 – 1865. Additional dots or lines may be drawn to represent other events, like the arrival of Halley’s Comet (1910), United States involvement in World War Two (1941-1945). Local events count too – like the year a community was established or when your school was built. Whatever events fall within the birth and death dates inscribed on the headstone may be included.

Consider including major technological advancements during the person's lifetime: steam engine, automobile, flight, telephone, radio, television and medical advancements like antibiotics or vaccinations.

Establish the total number of events each student should identify – perhaps 10 or 15 or more. Each is represented by a dot or color line and labeled.

Create a second timeline below the first to show which president was in office during those years.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ENRICHMENT

Other than name, birth and death dates, what else was present on the headstone? Many older stones include symbols that represent the individual's involvement in various organizations like the Freemasons or Odd Fellows. A short discussion about these groups would enrich the activity because many exist today.

Was there any design elements on the stone, like a weeping willow tree or a lamb? What do these symbols mean?

Is there an epitaph? What does the epitaph tell you about the person and their life?

Was there any other feature of the grave, like an iron fence or stone copping?

Did the stone appear weathered and difficult to read? What affects a stone's appearance? A discussion about weather and how it can erode stone would be an interesting perspective to help students learn about time. Another issue for many cemeteries is lawn mowers and weed trimmers. Damage from each may be seen on many stones. A third threat to many rural cemeteries is vandalism.

What are the oldest stones found during the activity?

What events affected this person's life, if at all?

Can you identify a major historical event that has occurred in your lifetime?

