

# Monument / Memorial Design: Comprehensive Group Activity

This is a **fully developed, classroom-ready group activity** for **Monument/Memorial Design**, where students design and justify a monument, memorial, or commemorative space. This project works beautifully for **wars, tragedies, cultural heroes, Indigenous histories, civil rights movements, revolutions, scientific breakthroughs, and literary figures**.

**Students collaboratively design a monument, memorial, or commemorative space and justify the artistic, cultural, and historical choices behind it.**

Works for:

- **Wars & battles** (WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Civil War, etc.)
  - **Tragedies** (Holocaust, genocides → with careful framing; natural disasters)
  - **Cultural heroes** (artists, activists, scientists, leaders)
  - **Social movements** (Civil Rights, women's suffrage, labor rights, LGBTQ+ rights, Indigenous sovereignty)
  - **Historical turning points** (revolutions, migrations, peace treaties)
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## I. Purpose of the Activity

Students learn to:

- Interpret how societies remember history
  - Represent historical significance through art + symbolism
  - Practice design thinking
  - Make evidence-based decisions
  - Consider multiple perspectives and ethics of representation
  - Connect emotion, memory, and history
  - Engage in civic and cultural literacy
  - Present and justify a public-facing project
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## II. Group Setup

**Group Size:** 3–6 students\*\*

**Group Roles**

1. **Lead Historian** – ensures historical accuracy & context
2. **Cultural/Community Representative** – advocates for voices affected by or connected to the event
3. **Artist/Architect** – drafts the visual design
4. **Symbolism Specialist** – chooses colors, shapes, materials, iconography
5. **Landscape/Spatial Designer** – designs the surrounding space, pathways, visitor experience
6. **Presenter/Writer** – prepares the final explanation and oral defense

Roles may rotate during the project.

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### III. Materials Needed

- Poster paper, butcher paper, or large whiteboards
- Sketching tools: markers, colored pencils, rulers
- Optional: clay, cardboard, model-building materials
- Research materials (articles, photos, primary sources)
- Symbolism brainstorm sheets
- Design justification outline
- Rubric + reflection sheet

Digital option: Canva • Google Slides • Tinkercad • Procreate • SketchUp.

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### IV. Step-by-Step Procedure (60–120 minutes or multi-day)

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#### Step 1 — Topic Selection & Background Research (10–15 minutes)

Groups select the figure/event:

Possible focuses include:

- **A fallen soldier or unknown civilian**
- **A group harmed or marginalized**
- **A hero of a social movement**

- **A moment of injustice**
- **A cultural milestone**
- **A migration story**
- **A landscape affected by trauma (e.g., Hiroshima, Wounded Knee)**

Students research:

- What happened
- Who was impacted
- Why it matters
- What emotions or ideas need to be conveyed
- Existing monuments (what works? what doesn't?)

Lead Historian provides a timeline & context summary.

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## **Step 2 — Identify Purpose & Message (5–10 minutes)**

Groups answer:

- What do we want visitors to FEEL?
- What do we want visitors to LEARN?
- What message or values should this space express?
- Whose perspective is centered?
- How do we handle sensitivity or trauma respectfully?

This becomes the **mission statement** of the monument.

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## **Step 3 — Brainstorm Symbolism Elements (10 minutes)**

Symbolism Specialist leads a brainstorming session on:

- Shapes (circle = unity, triangle = conflict, spiral = journey)
- Colors (red = struggle, blue = peace, white = mourning, green = healing)
- Materials (stone = permanence, glass = fragility, metal = modernization, wood = tradition)
- Orientation (facing sunrise = hope, facing west = memory, facing water = reflection)
- Height & scale (overwhelming? intimate?)
- Cultural symbols specific to the community

Every choice must connect to the history or values.

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## Step 4 — Design Sketches (15–20 minutes)

Artist/Architect + Landscape Designer create:

### Required components:

- Main structure design
- Placement on the land (pathways, entrances, seating, viewing angles)
- Visitor experience (sequence of movement through the space)
- Inclusion of names, quotes, timelines, or abstract art
- Materials & dimensions
- Symbolic elements (water, fire, greenery, sculpture, sound, light)

Groups create at least **two concept sketches**, then vote on one.

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## Step 5 — Build the Final Design (15–30 minutes)

Groups produce:

- A polished drawing OR
- A scaled model (cardboard/clay) OR
- A digital 3D rendering

The design must include:

- Title of the monument
  - Site map
  - Key features labeled
  - Paths or viewing points
  - Quotes or inscriptions
  - Symbolic explanations
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## Step 6 — Write the Design Justification (10–15 minutes)

Presenter/Writer leads a **1–2 page rationale**, including:

### Required Elements

1. **Historical Context** – What event/figure is being commemorated?
  2. **Purpose** – What emotions and ideas should the monument evoke?
  3. **Audience** – Who is it meant to honor or educate?
  4. **Symbolism Explanation** – Every major design choice explained
  5. **Spatial Experience** – What visitors will see, feel, and do
  6. **Ethical Considerations** – How does the design avoid glorifying harm or reinforcing bias?
  7. **Legacy Statement** – Why this monument matters today
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## **Step 7 — Oral Defense / Presentation (10 minutes per group)**

Each group presents:

1. Mission Statement
2. Final design (poster, model, slideshow)
3. Symbolism choices
4. Visitor experience
5. Historical reasoning
6. Ethical considerations
7. Q&A from peers (“Why did you choose \_\_\_?”)

Teacher may allow students to perform as an official “Design Commission.”

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## **V. Optional Extensions**

### **1. Community Stakeholder Perspectives**

Groups represent different community groups debating the monument’s design.

### **2. On-Site Installation Proposal**

Students research where the monument would be placed in the real world.

### **3. Letters to the Design Committee**

Students write public comment letters for or against another group’s design.

### **4. Virtual Reality or 3D Model**

Students build models in SketchUp, Tinkercad, or Minecraft.

## 5. Multimedia Component

Add soundscapes, lighting concepts, or QR-coded audio tours.

## 6. “What If...?” Revision

Groups modify design to reflect an alternate historical outcome.

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# VI. Assessment Options

## A. Design Rubric

- Historical accuracy
- Symbolism + clarity of purpose
- Creativity + originality
- Ethical representation
- Visual quality

## B. Justification Rubric

- Strong reasoning
- Clear explanation of design choices
- Evidence from history
- Cultural sensitivity

## C. Presentation Rubric

- Organized
- Engaging
- Clear responses to questions
- Accurate information

## D. Reflection Questions

1. How do societies choose what or whom to memorialize?
2. What responsibilities do designers have when representing trauma or conflict?
3. Which symbolism choices were most meaningful to your group?
4. What perspective was hardest or most important to represent?
5. How do monuments shape memory and identity?