

Historica Canada Education Portal

War Gravesites as Expressions of Nationalism

Overview

When honouring our war dead, how do nations express nationalism and maintain the memory of the dead individually and/or collectively?

Aims

Students will gain an appreciation for how the forces of nationalism have shaped and continue to shape Canada and the world. They will explore a range of expressions of nationalism and develop understandings of nation and nationalism (in relation to land, geography, collectivism, citizenship, ethnicity, culture, languages, politics, spiritualism, religion and patriotism).

Activities

Procedures:

1. Students can be presented with photographs or websites of various war cemeteries located in Western Europe. Photos should compare individual markers first, and then overall cemetery design. This initial exposure may include description of sites.

2. For each site/photo students should brainstorm how the image communicates identity and/or nationalism.

3. In larger groups, students should appreciate and analyze the similarities and differences between the national expressions. Consider:

- Materials used
- Design of markers
- Data on marker
- Atmosphere/ambience of the site
- Placements (geography, markers, etc.)
- Symbols (flags, crosses, statues, etc.)

4. Have a class discussion: What aspects of nationalism could be attributed to nations based on how the war dead are honoured?

Enrichment: Students can continue this discussion with an in-depth comparison of the websites for each grave commission or museum.

Resources

[Overview of Normandy Grave Sites](#)

[Tyne Cot Cemetery](#)

[Commonwealth War Graves Commission](#)

[Omaha Beach Cemetery](#)

[National War Memorial – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Monuments of the First and Second World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)