

Cemetery Secrets

Adapted from "[Cemetery Secrets](#)," by Paddy Bowman, 2004 Life Cycle CARTS Newsletter

Cemeteries may seem unlikely fieldtrip destinations, yet they offer intriguing clues about history and local culture and opportunities to conduct primary research and practice documentation skills such as note taking, sketching, and photography.

Supplies Pencil, paper, Cemetery Secrets Worksheet, optional sketchpad and camera

Directions

1. Choose a cemetery where you are allowed to explore, many are open to the public. Be prepared to behave respectfully. Inventory your assumptions about cemeteries.
2. Study the Cemetery Secrets Worksheet to prepare. It suggests elements to document, from names to religious and cultural symbols and epitaphs (short sayings etched onto gravestones). Make four copies of the worksheet
3. Using the Cemetery Secrets Worksheet, walk around the cemetery and choose four gravestones to document. Complete a worksheet for each. You may also sketch or photograph gravestones or details of graves that interest you.
4. After completing the worksheet, analyze your data. What surprised you, how did the cemetery differ from your assumptions, what did you learn about local history and culture? Your findings are important primary sources of local history and culture. Tell your Cemetery Secrets story in a short essay, slideshow, or podcast.

Bonus Activities

- Map a cemetery, marking boundaries, paths, and various sections.
- Compare epitaphs from different time periods or cultural groups.
- Locate a family plot or several gravestones with the same surname. Do you think these individuals are related or are husband and wife? How can you tell? Are other relatives buried in the same area?
- Use the PBS online lesson "Written in Stone" to study gravestones further.
www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/educators/technique-guide/written-in-stone
- Learn more also in "[Cemetery Secrets](#)" on the Local Learning website.