

Dying to Try a New Thematic Unit?

Try a Trip to the Cemetery

Are you tired of going on the same field trips year after year? Having your students explore the community does not have to be complicated. Often, the best trips are the simplest. Field trips, like other strategies for presenting information, should relate to curricular activities. These activities help students build a deeper understanding of the concepts and principles being explored in the lesson.

A trip to the cemetery can be enlightening as students come to see that for Christians, it is only a temporary resting place, with eternity looming in the horizon. Exploring a cemetery invites questions in every discipline, especially history. Students can begin to understand the different eras that preceded their lives and find their place in history from learning about the past, present, and future.

Make sure that your students know the purpose of the field trip. To prepare them to visit the cemetery, use the K-W-L-H model technique to help activate prior knowledge. Ask students "What We Know" (K) about cemeteries. List their ideas on the chalk board or have them record them on paper. Next, have students tell "What We Want to Learn" on the field trip (W). Again, record these questions or ideas. After the trip, summarize "What We Learned (L)." Record these ideas, too. Then use these categories and the information in the (H) section, "How We Can Learn More," to find more information about the topic. Students also can use the categories to create graphic organizers that help them review and write about what they've learned.

Before the field trip, visit several cemeteries yourself. Sabbath afternoon is a good time for this type of activity. I

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have found it best not to use too small or too large a cemetery. A small cemetery limits the searches, particularly if the class is large. In a large cemetery, the students can be hard to manage, and they will have difficulty keeping track of where they have been.

Listed below are suggestions for integrating this activity into various disciplines. The ideas can be used either at the cemetery or as follow-up activities in the classroom.

Bible Activities

Cemetery Activities

- What biblical names did you find on tombstones? Which ones appeared most often in this cemetery?
- Tell what will occur at this cemetery during Christ's second coming. Draw a picture of the cemetery then.
- Find Bible texts inscribed on tomb-

stones. Do some seem to be used more than others in this cemetery?

- Would you like a Bible verse on your tombstone? If so, which verse? Why is this verse important to you?

Classroom Activities

- Use a Bible software program to search for texts relating to death and resurrection. Did you find more texts about death or about resurrection in the Bible?
- Act out a scene of a family being reunited with their loved ones when Jesus returns.
- What do you think might be said in your eulogy?
- Discuss in small groups why Christians have hope when friends and family die.

- Read about Jesus' burial and resurrection in the Gospels and *The Desire of*

BY MICHAEL ENGLAND

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Agēs and reflect on its implications for your life.

- Research the history of cremation.

What does the Bible say about cremation? Is it wrong for Christians to choose cremation?

- What are some meaningful ways we can reach out to someone who has lost a loved one? Make a list of these service activities and then use them when a church member or relative passes away.

- Discuss the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. What does this parable mean? What was Jesus trying to teach?

- Using a diagram or flow chart, show how a person's death affects others.

- Report on various denominations' beliefs about life after death.

Language Arts

Cemetery Activities

- Record any poems you find on tombstones.
- What is the most unusual name that you found? Tell why you believe this person was given such an unusual name.
- Find the longest, shortest, saddest, and funniest epitaphs. Tell what you would like your epitaph to say.

Classroom Activities

- Write a letter to your great-great-great-grandchildren describing your life.
- As a class, write to the cemetery director requesting information.
- Read a book about well-known cemeteries. Why are they considered famous?
 - If you could be buried anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?
 - Design a personal will. (Invite a lawyer or trust services director from the local conference to talk about the components of a will.)

Creative Writing Ideas

- There should/should not be cemeteries because . . .
- My idea of hell is . . .
- Examine your life. What changes would you make if you knew you were going to die today?
- My idea of heaven is . . .

Pictures Removed

- I would/would not like to live forever because . . .
- When I think about death, I feel . . .
- The most unusual thing I found in the cemetery was . . .
- Cemeteries make me feel . . .
- Write a poem about your feelings on death.

Science/Health

Cemetery Activities

- What kind of fence or wall is around the cemetery?
- Research the materials from which grave markers are made. Are certain kinds of markers more prevalent in this cemetery?

- Are some of the grave inscriptions hard to read? Research reasons for this.
- Did you find patterns in the dates of death? If so, see if you can discover the causes of death from cemetery records.
 - What kind of trees are in the cemetery?
 - Make a list of the types of wildflowers that you see in the cemetery.

Classroom Activities

- Design a poster depicting practices that could cause an early death, such as the use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, etc.
 - What materials are used for constructing coffins? Research the durability of these materials.

Picture Removed

Students will need the following supplies: a pen, crayons and butcher-block paper, a clipboard (or heavy-duty folder to write on), and a packet that you assemble with the assignments.

longest? Compare life spans of the men and the women. Which group lived longer? Why?

- Sketch the different geometrical shapes of grave markers and label each shape. Were certain shapes used more often than others?

Activities in the Classroom

- Make a graph depicting the data in one of the previous examples.
- Build a model of a grave marker, designing it to scale.
- You have just been hired by a city to design a new cemetery layout. Using graph paper, draw the design to scale.
- Find out how much a funeral costs. Draw a graph illustrating your findings.
- Research the average life span of your own family, going back at least five generations. Draw a family tree and a time line illustrating your findings.

Music

- Write a hymn about the death of Christ.
- Research the kinds of funeral music used in your country. How does this compare to the music used in other countries?
- Research the time signatures from songs used in funeral services.
- Where did funeral music originate?
- What is the purpose of music at a funeral?

Family Activities

Visit another cemetery with your parents. Compare data you collected during the school field trip with this one. Write a report on your findings.

Tips for Teachers

After you go on this field trip a few times, you will be able to think of many more ideas

- Research vaults where coffins are placed. What is the significance of using a vault versus a burial?
- Using the list of causes of death you made at the cemetery, research the prevalence of these diseases at various times in history.
- What is a living will? After doing research, discuss this and related topics, such as organ donation.

Social Studies

Cemetery Activities

- List all the military ranks that you found. Who was the highest-ranking military official buried in the cemetery?
- List all the wars mentioned on the tombstones.
- Find various symbols on grave markers. Place paper on the grave markers and rub each design with a pencil. Research what they mean.
- List all the countries that are mentioned on the tombstones.
- Record as many causes of death as possible. (It may be necessary to visit the cemetery office to obtain this information.)

Classroom Activities

- Work with two or three other students to research burial rites in other countries. How have burial procedures changed during the course of human history? Does this relate to the people's beliefs about an afterlife?
- Research is the purpose of placing objects in the grave with the deceased.

- Form a discussion group to study the steps for planning a funeral/burial service.
- Find out how long casket liners last before decomposing.
- Research one of the occupations you found mentioned on the tombstones.
- Read about the history of the funeral procession. What customs do other countries have in regard to processions?
- Did you find your last name on a tombstone? If so, use genealogy World Wide Web sites to see if these people are related to you.
- Should there be cemeteries for animals? How would you organize such a cemetery?

Math

Cemetery Activities

- Compare the ages of death of the people in the cemetery to the average age of death found in the Book of Genesis.
- Give the name, and dates of birth and death of the person in this cemetery who lived the longest time.
- Give the name, and dates of birth and death of the person in this cemetery who lived the shortest time.
- What were the longest and shortest names you found?
- Compute ages of death and then find the average for various time periods (1850-1874; 1875-1899; 1900-1924; 1925-1949; 1950-1974; 1975-1999). During which time period did men have the shortest life span? The longest? During what time period did women have the shortest life span? The

to integrate into your own classroom environment. A word of caution: Some of these topics may not be suitable for younger students. You will need to evaluate your students' developmental level to determine their readiness for some of the above topics.

Student supervision while at the cemetery is crucial. Make plans for this well in advance of the trip. Arrange for chaperones to assist—your local pastor would be a good one to ask. Students will need the following supplies: a pen, crayons and butcher-block paper, a clipboard (or heavy-duty folder to write on), and a packet that you assemble with the assignments. Discuss cemetery etiquette (see the Web site at the end of this article) with the students prior to the trip.

If possible, take pictures and publish the results of your trip in your school newsletter or Web page. Have several students write about their discoveries and submit them to the local newspaper, along with pictures. ☞

Dr. Michael G. England is an Associate Professor of Education at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. He has taught grades K-10 and has served as a principal of three junior academies.

Selected Web Sites

Sociology of Death and Dying: This should be your first stop. An incredible resource covering all areas of death and dying
<http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/death.html>

CREMATION RESOURCES

Cremation vs. Burial: Christian Controversy
<http://www.religioustolerance.org/crematio.htm>

<http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/questions/ethics/cremation/cremated.shtml>

History of Cremation

<http://www.cremationinfo.com/cope/history.html>

Process of Cremation and Planning Guide

<http://www.preplannet.com/whatis.htm>

Pictures of Cremation Urns

<http://www.afuneralstore.com/urns.htm>

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

History of Funeral Customs

http://www.wyfa.org/basics_2.html

The Purpose of the Funeral

http://www.wyfa.org/basics_5.html

Cross-Cultural Funeral Rites

<http://www.biomed.lib.umn.edu/hw/ccf.html>

Marriage and Funeral Rites in Classical Athens

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/classes/JSp.html>

The Psychological Significance of the Jewish Way of Burial

<http://www.biomed.lib.umn.edu/hw/psychj.html>

Contemporary English Cemeteries and Funeral Practices

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/england.html>

The Tombstone Traveller's Guide—Exploring American Cemeteries and Funeral Practices

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/index.html>

Releasing the Spirit: A Lesson in Native American Funeral Rituals

<http://www.biomed.lib.umn.edu/hw/releasing.html>

Funeral Customs in China

<http://www.chinavista.com/experience/funeral/funeral.html>

Funeral Industry Glossary of Terms

http://www.funeralnet.com/info_guide/cre_glossary.html

Military Funeral Customs

<http://www.marylandguard.com/mil-dept/funeral.html>

Assyrian Rituals of Life-Cycle Events

<http://www.aina.org/yoab.htm>

Customs of Various Religious Faiths

<http://www.funeral-care.com>

EULOGIES

How to write a eulogy:

<http://www.capecod.net/~bbarsant/class/eulogy.html>

<http://www.funerals-online.com/1eulogy.htm>

<http://www.commemorate.net/>

MUMMIFICATION

Mummification: A Philosophical Examination

<http://www.summum.org/mummification/philexam.htm>

Instructions for Mummifying Your Small Pet

<http://www.summum.org/mummification/pets/instruct.htm>

History of Embalming

http://www.wyfa.org/basics_3.html

WWW ONLINE MEMORIALS

Online Memorials, Epitaphs and Obituaries

<http://imminentdomain.com/>

Worldwide Cemetery (memorial to loved ones on the Internet)

<http://www.cemetery.org/>

FUNERALS

Funerals and Rip-offs

<http://www.xroads.com/~funerals/>

Funeral Scams

<http://www.afuneralstore.com/funcem.htm>

Funeral and Burial Costs

<http://www.aarp.org/confacts/money/funeral.html>

Tombstone Etiquette

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/etiquet.html>

Funeral Etiquette

<http://www.turnerporter.ca/etiquet.htm>

Burial Sites on the National Register of Historic Places

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/register.html>

Being a Supportive Friend to a Grieving Person

<http://hospice-cares.com/hands/gfriend.html>

SYMBOLS

Gravestone Symbolism and Iconography

<http://members.aol.com/TombView/symbol.html>

Death and Symbolism

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/symbol.html>

Deadly Superstitions

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/super.html>

EPITAPHS

Final Words - Epitaphs and Epilaughs

<http://www.netins.net/showcase/kadinger/epitaphs/epitaphs.htm>

Collection of Tombstone Epitaphs

<http://home.flash.net/~leimer/epitaph.html>

Many Resources on Epitaphs

<http://quotations.about.com/arts/quotations/msubepitaph.htm?rnk=r1&terms=Epitaphs>

GENEALOGY SITES

Ancestry.com

<http://www.ancestry.com/ancestry/search.asp>

Family Search

<http://www.familysearch.org/>

The Genealogy Home Page

<http://www.genhomepage.com/>

Genealogy Instructions

<http://www.earthlink.net/~howardorjeff/instruct.htm>

Genealogy Pages

<http://www.genealogypages.com/>

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH

Study Guides on State of the Dead

<http://www.amazingfacts.org/bibleschool/afsg.asp?guide=10 & page=0>

<http://www.capitalmemorial.org/bstudy17.htm>

Do Humans Beings Have Immortal Souls?

<http://mcdonald.southern.edu/bible/study/im-soul.htm>

Resurrection: The Gateway to Eternity

<http://mcdonald.southern.edu/bible/study/gateway.htm>

DENOMINATION SEARCH

Click on Denomination to Go to Their Home Page

http://www.crosssearch.com/Church_and_Denominational_Resources/Denominations/Denominations

http://magellan.excite.com/lifestyle/religion_and_beliefs/christianity/denominations/