

The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia

An Educator's Guide: Elementary School



mel.virginia.edu



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A **glossary** of terms, an annotated **bibliography**, and additional **resources** for further research.

NOTE:

The activities in each unit are numbered 1 through 3 and follow a suggested pattern of **1 = pre-visit**, **2 = during your visit**, **3 = post-visit**. However, each activity can be easily modified to stand alone or work in another order.



Over a decade of work led up to the realization of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia. The making of the Memorial was an effort that involved students, faculty, staff, alumni, the design team, and the local community in Charlottesville and Albemarle. After decades of advocacy by students and others, the university inaugurated a process to build the memorial in 2016. Working with the President's Commission on Slavery and the University, the design team hosted numerous community forums and after months of listening, they began the design process. The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers was opened to the public in 2020 and is now a prominent and permanent memorial to this history in the landscape of the university.

This educational module was produced in 2021 and is intended for use by middle school educators across the country and those here in our community. This module is intended to be used in conjunction with the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers website, which includes a wealth of information about the history of slavery and resistance, more information on the history and symbolism of the memorial, and information about the community this memorial is designed to honor.

To read a more complete history of the making of the memorial, visit:
<https://mel.virginia.edu/memorial>.



Introducing the Design Team

THE DESIGN TEAM FOR THE MEMORIAL TO ENSLAVED LABORERS

Each member of the team represents a key area of expertise that is essential to the successful completion of the memorial project:

- **Meejin Yoon** is an architect, designer, and principal of Höweler + Yoon Architecture based in Boston. She is also a Professor and Head of the Department of Architecture at MIT. She recently completed the Collier Memorial on MIT's Campus, in honor of the MIT Police Officer slain in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon Bombings.
- **Dr. Mabel O. Wilson** (UVA '85) is a historian and designer. She is a professor of Architecture at Columbia University. She recently published *Begin with the Past: Building the National African American Museum of History and Culture*.
- **Gregg Bleam** of Gregg Bleam Landscape Architect is a landscape architect based locally here in Charlottesville. He has previously taught at the UVA School of Architecture, teaching graduate and undergraduate landscape and architecture courses for ten years.
- **Dr. Frank Dukes** (UVA '75) is a Distinguished Institute Fellow at the Institute for Environmental Negotiation here at UVA. He has extensive experience in facilitating conversations among diverse communities and has led the community engagement portion of the design process.
- **Eto Otitigbe** is a polymedia artist who creates sculpture, installation and public interventions. In 2015 Otitigbe was awarded a CEC Artslink Project Award for travel to Egypt where he participated in outreach projects and explored several of the monumental antiquities. Otitigbe received a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship for study at the National Museum of African Art. Otitigbe's role on the design team is focused on creating imagery for the exterior surface of the memorial that pays tribute to the enslaved laborers. His design process includes historical research, community outreach, and dialogue with members of enslaved descendant communities.

Activity 1: Understanding the Memorial: Who Is James Hemings?

Learner Outcome

Time: 20-45 Minutes

Students will learn the contributions of James Hemings and understand that many enslaved laborers were not given credit for their work.

1. Using [this link](#), **introduce** James Hemings' story to the class focusing on his experience as an accomplished chef.
2. Looking at the student handout (WS-1), have students **identify** the foods (see answers below).
3. Once students learn the names of these dishes, **explain** that **only two** of the many dishes that James Hemings prepared were historically attributed to him. The rest are considered Jefferson's creations, much like UVA is considered Jefferson's University.
4. Prompt students with the following **scenario**: *You have worked so hard on a drawing for weeks. When it's time to turn it in to the teacher, your friend Taylor says your drawing is their drawing. Everyone talks about how good the drawing is and says nice things to Taylor all day. How would this make you feel?*
5. **Reorient** students to think about how the stories and contributions of the enslaved laborers have been unrecognized for so long. Using the handout (WS-1), have students fill out the boxes at the bottom of the page.

WS-1 Answers: Mac 'n Cheese, Ham, Ice Cream, French Fries

3-5 Expansion:

Extending beyond writing what students would say to James Hemings (WS-1), students can pair off for small discussions.

WS-1: Food Made by James Hemings

Write what you see in each picture on the lines below.









.....

Write three words about
how you are feeling.

What if you got to have lunch with James Hemings?
What would you say to him or ask him about his life?

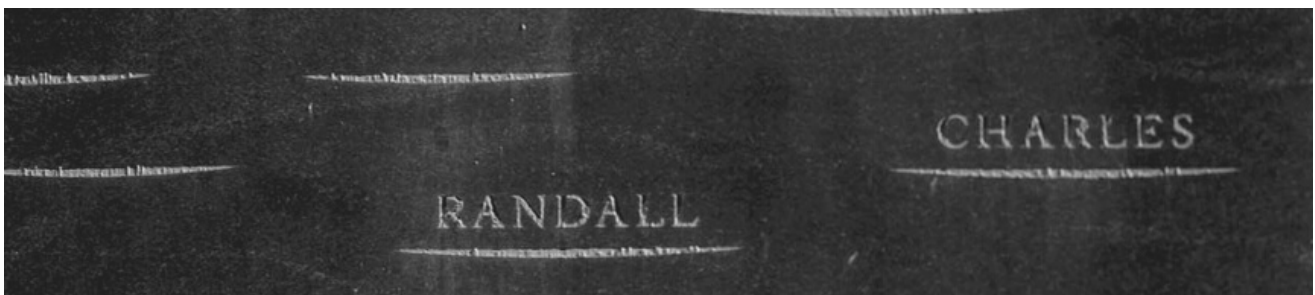
Activity 2: Understanding the Memorial: Rubbing

Learner Outcome

Time: 25-45 minutes

Students will learn that each dash on the Memorial represents one person; recognize the variety of talents and occupations represented on the Memorial; connect these occupations to their own lives.

1. Let students explore on their own or in pairs for a while. Then, gather students and ask: *What shapes and colors do you see? What do you hear? Take a deep breath, what do you smell?*
2. Then have students focus on the dashes on the walls. Ask: *What words do you see? Where are the words? What type of word is it (name, job, etc.)?*
3. Discuss how each dash represents one person but not every person's name/occupation is known. Talk about how the ongoing work of the MEL is to learn more about these people and what they did. Explain that students are honoring the people we know and don't know by learning and being thoughtful.
4. Have students rub their finger over one name or word on the wall. Tell students to rub carefully and honorably. Have students partner up-- one student rubs a name and the other rubs an occupation.
5. Ask students: *What do they feel? What letters are in the word?*
6. Have students sit across from one another. Prompt students to ask one another: *Read this name/occupation aloud.* If students have an occupation ask: *What do you know about this job? Do you know anyone who does this job?* If students have a name ask: *What do you think their life story could be?*
7. If students are stuck, orient them back to their own lives. Then, prompt students to think about the humanity of the enslaved laborers by asking: *Think about how many hobbies you have and how many activities you do in one day. How would you feel if people only thought of you as one thing? Only as a student? Only as a _ _ _ _ ?*



Activity 3: Understanding the Memorial: Comparing Landmarks

Learner Outcome

Time: 30-40 minutes

Students will practice noticing details (materials, shapes) of the MEL and Rotunda, and will investigate the use of certain elements to convey messages about history.

1. Students will now compare the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and the Rotunda using the following handouts (WS 3-1 & WS 3-2). Help students understand:
 - a. The purpose of analyzing the Rotunda is to highlight the design comparison (diameter symmetry, shape comparison, material differences).
 - b. How the Rotunda stood at the forefront of the Academical Village highlighting "education for all" when "all" only applied to wealthy, white men.
 - c. How the MEL in conversation with the Rotunda serves to bring to light the lack of recognition of the enslaved community.
2. Have students walk around the Memorial and, if possible, the Rotunda, highlighting and circling elements on the pictures provided (WS 3-1 & WS 3-2) that stand out to them in real life. Then, using the questions as guides, have students write down their thoughts in the spaces provided for each.
3. After analyzing the images of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and the Rotunda, have students examine the photos of both. Students will highlight or circle three details that are important to them. Please define "symbols" and "interpretation" if necessary. With those definitions in mind, they will fill out the tables on WS-4.
 - a. Here is an example (for the MEL) for the tables on the symbols handout:

Symbol: Circle = Shape

Interpretation: The circle has a hole where people can walk in. What does this mean to you?

For more information about the design of the MEL & the Rotunda, visit [here](#).

K-2 Simplification:

- For handouts, instead of using them as guides for individual work, use them as teacher-led class discussion prompts for students. After discussions, make teacher notes available to students.
 - For WS 3-3, you can project the images and have students come up to the board and interact (circle symbols, etc.).

3-5 Expansion:

For WS 3-3, prompt students to think about Greek and Roman architecture as a derivation and comparison activity.

Make sure to highlight the different stories different materials tell.

Perhaps discuss whom the Rotunda was made for versus the MEL (tying in race, power, and space)

WS 3-1: Explore the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers

Explore the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. Answer the following questions as you walk around.

1. What shapes do you see?



2. What words/ letters do you see?



3. How big is it? How wide and how tall?



4. What did you see first when you got there?

WS 3-2: Compare to the Rotunda

Explore the Rotunda. Answer the following questions as you walk around.

1. What shapes do you see?

2. Have you seen these shapes in buildings before?

3. How big is it? How wide and how tall?

4. What did you see first when you got there?



WS 3-3: Symbols & Interpretation

Look back at the pictures of the Memorial and the Rotunda. Choose three details you think are important. Write them down in the "SYMBOLS" boxes. Next to those details, write what they mean in the "INTERPRETATION" boxes.

MEMORIAL TO ENSLAVED LABORERS

SYMBOLS

INTERPRETATION

ROTUNDA

SYMBOLS

INTERPRETATION

Extension Activities



- Connect these activities to your local community: utilize resources on the history and stories of local enslaved people (like James Hemings and Isabella Gibbons in Charlottesville) to have students complete independent research projects on individuals that made an impact in their community.
 - *Example:* <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/vhr/afam.htm>
- Thinking back to your own community again, find out if there are any similar memorials to enslaved laborers or communities in your area/state. Compare these efforts to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at UVA.
- Share the story of Fanny Gillette Hern, comparing and contrasting her experiences as a chef with those of James Hemings. Use the link below for more information about Hern:
 - <https://classroom.monticello.org/article/frances-fanny-gillette-hern-an-enslaved-cook/>
- Connect these activities to your local community: have students work in groups or as a class to identify and address problems they see in their local community. Check out the link below for a guide created by WagiLabs:
 - <https://www.wagikids.org/kidpreneur-playbook>
- Compile images of people from your community that help others. Solicit pictures from the students as well. These images can be applied in many ways (class decor, a collage, etc.).

Activity 4: Community Engagement: Participating Locally

Learner Outcome

Students will know Isabella Gibbons' contributions to the Charlottesville community; understand why community/civic participation is important; and identify what a community is and who is in theirs.

1. Pass out WS 4-1 with various examples of ways of engaging with the community in formal and informal ways. WS 4-1 includes a **community reflection and action activity**. Students will reflect on how they informally engage with their community through their relationships.
2. Tell the students how you would respond to the first section and why. Then, introduce the four terms of formally engaging with the community.
3. Have students match terms to pictures. Students will work alone or in pairs.
4. Next, go over the correct answers and ask students what they wrote in the first and last sections.
5. **Briefly highlight** the life and contributions of Isabella Gibbons, making sure to focus on her contributions to the Charlottesville community (i.e. the Freedman's/ Jefferson School) using the link [here](#).
6. After that explanation, group students in pairs. Prompt students to think about one adult in their lives that has helped them or someone they know. Have students work through WS 4-2, focusing on the guiding questions and completing the drawing.
7. At the end of the activity, remind students that each enslaved laborer impacted their community and those around them in a special way, just like their adults impact them. Reflect on Isabella Gibbons' position as a local teacher as a means of community engagement.

K-2 Simplification:

For WS-5, you can project the handout and work through it as a class. For a deeper understanding, provide more local images of civic participation and have students identify them as a class.

3-5 Expansion:

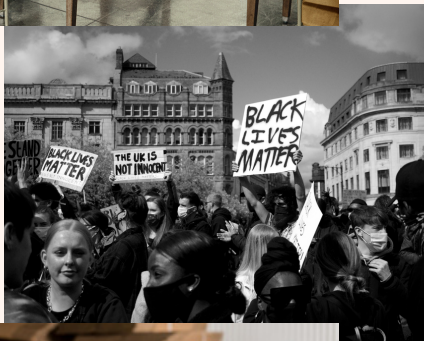
Extending beyond drawing an image of someone who positively impacts the community (*page 18*), students will interview that person (or a relative of that person) for more personalized responses.

WS 4-1: Community Activity

WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNITY?

Think about your family, your school, your friends, your neighborhood, etc.

Draw a line connecting the words to the pictures below.



SPEECHES

Talking to people about why you care.

VOTING

Telling people whom you want to lead.

VOLUNTEERING

Helping someone else.

PROTESTING

Standing, walking, and talking about something you care about.

WHAT ARE THREE OTHER WAYS YOU CAN BE A PART OF YOUR COMMUNITY?

WS 4-2: Drawing Activity

Please draw a grown-up who has helped you or someone in your community and think about the questions below.

Questions:

1. Who is the person or group of people (family member, coach, teacher, etc.)?
2. What is their name?
3. Whom did they help?
4. How did they help?
5. How do you feel about them helping you or the community?

Draw here:

Activity 5: Community Engagement: Analyzing Memorials

Learner Outcome

Students will understand the deeper meanings behind the MEL design, the purpose the Memorial serves, and how to present effectively to a class.

1. Have the students fill out the **See, Think, Wonder** handout (WS 5-1) in pairs as they explore the Memorial. Guide them to thinking about the deeper meanings behind the design choices and nudge them towards appreciating the time and effort the Memorial took to design and construct.
2. Break the students up for **small group discussions** about their notes on the worksheet.
3. After that exploratory activity, review what a memorial is and what its purpose is, providing examples and referring to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. Then prompt students to create a **draft/sketch of their own memorial**. This activity will be continued after the visit to the Memorial.
4. In the same small groups from earlier, students will brainstorm the steps they think it took to get this Memorial to be designed, approved, and built. Each small group will have a representative share out their groups' ideas with the rest of the class.
5. Then, provide basic information about the Memorial's process (i.e. who advocated for it, how long it took, etc) in real life. Prompt the students to consider how these steps might relate to the memorial they drafted in the first activity.

Teacher Hint: Refer to this website for detailed information about the design of the Memorial and the process by which it was created [here](#).



WS 5-1: Memorial to Enslaved Laborers: See, Think, Wonder

FILL IN THE BOXES WITH NOTES AS YOU EXPLORE THE MEMORIAL

SEE

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

THINK

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE MEL?

WONDER

WHAT DOES IT MAKE YOU WONDER?

Activity 5: Community Engagement: Analyzing Memorials

Learner Outcome

Students will understand that large projects require many people with diverse roles, and that the goal of the MEL is very important.

1. This is a continuation of the previous activity and guidelines can be found on Activity 5. Students will **create a hypothetical plan** for the steps it would take to build their memorial in real life with some guiding questions (WS 6-1). Help the students understand what their steps might be by reflecting on the design team for the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and the process of creating the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers ([link](#)).
2. With that thinking in mind, challenge students to consider the complexity of the process while also using the following questions as prompts if they get stuck: *Will you have other people help you? How long do you think it will take?*
3. The students will then share their plans with the class in a 2-3 minute **presentation**.

K-2 Simplification:

For handouts, instead of using them as guides for individual work, use them as teacher-led class discussion prompts for students. After discussions, make teacher notes available to students.

3-5 Expansion:

Bringing in location as a factor in the Make Your Own Memorial handout (WS 6-1), have students research the three locations considered for construction of the MEL. Then prompt students to think deeper about locating their memorial.



WS 6-1: Make Your Own Memorial Activity

QUESTIONS:

1. Is your memorial about a person or an event?
2. What is that event OR who is that person?
3. How big is your memorial? How wide? How tall?
4. What is it going to be made out of?
5. Where is your memorial going to be?
6. Are people going to visit your memorial? Is it about someone/something other people know about?
7. Who is going to help you build your memorial?

STEPS:

Write down five simple steps for how you would make your memorial real below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

In your 2-3 minute presentation:

1. Show us your first drawing.
2. Tell us what or who your memorial is about.
3. Share your answers to the questions.
4. Talk about your steps.

PRESENTATION NOTES

Glossary of Terms

page 20

- [Rotunda](#): A building located on The Lawn on the original grounds of the University of Virginia. It was designed by Thomas Jefferson to represent the "authority of nature and power of reason" and was inspired by the Pantheon in Rome.
- [Thomas Jefferson](#): "A spokesman for democracy, was an American Founding Father, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776), and the third President of the United States (1801–1809)."
- [Freedmen's School](#): "Isabella [Gibbons] received a diploma from the newly founded New England Freedmen's Aid Society's Charlottesville Normal School in 1867. The school had been founded in October of 1865 when the New England Freedmen's Aid Society sent a representative, Anna Gardner, to Charlottesville to start a school for the newly freed black residents. Shortly after Gardner's arrival, Isabella Gibbons asked if she could help teach and work at the school and she was immediately hired by Gardner as a teacher's aide and, after further instruction, as a full-fledged teacher. Gibbons (as of 1866) and Paul Lewis, another formerly enslaved individual, taught at the two primary schools, first at the old Confederate General Hospital, but later from a schoolhouse built just south of the railroad near 7th Street Southwest. The town's public school system hired Gibbons and Lewis in 1871 when the Charlottesville Freedmen's School became a public school (later the Jefferson School). It is believed Isabella taught at the school until her 1889 death. The Jefferson School remained Charlottesville's African American school through segregation and now houses the Jefferson School African-American Heritage Center."
- [Jefferson School](#): "The Jefferson School is a historic building in Charlottesville, Virginia. It was built to serve as a segregated high school for African-American students."
- [Gibbons Dorm](#): Statement from a June 15, 2015 post about the opening of Gibbons Dorm - "William and Isabella Gibbons were husband and wife, butler and cook, enslaved by different University of Virginia professors until 1865. After emancipation, Isabella became a teacher for more than 20 years. William became a well-known minister in Charlottesville and in Washington, D.C. They were honored Friday afternoon for their contributions to U.Va. and their example of perseverance and accomplishment throughout their lives at the dedication of the University's newest residence hall, Gibbons House".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- https://uvamagazine.org/articles/unearthing_slavery_at_the_university_of_virginia
- https://dei.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu511/files/inline-files/SlaveryatUVA_FAULKNER_001.pdf
- <https://mel.virginia.edu/memorial>

REACHING THE MEMORIAL

- <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/05/21/americas-first-connoisseur/>
- <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/10/03/university-consortium-addresses-history-slavery-continuing-impact/>

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- <https://mel.virginia.edu/community>

FACILITATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH KIDS

- <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>

INVESTIGATING THE MEMORIAL TO ENSLAVED LABORERS

- <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/14725-the-memorial-to-enslaved-laborers-at-the-university-of-virginia>
- Enslaved African Americans at UVA Walking Tour Map:
https://dei.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu511/files/inline-files/42425%20uva%20slavery%20walking%20tour%20map_revised%20July%202018.pdf

JEFFERSON SCHOOL, FREEDMEN'S SCHOOL, ISABELLA GIBBONS

- Jefferson School: <http://places.afrovirginia.org/items/show/226?tour=5&index=23;>
[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jefferson_School_\(Charlottesville,_Virginia\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jefferson_School_(Charlottesville,_Virginia))
- Freedmen's School: <https://blackthen.com/isabella-gibbons-pioneer-educator-established-freedmen-school-charlottesville-va/>
- Isabella Gibbons: https://dei.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu511/files/2021-09/Gibbons%20Brochure%20%238_0.pdf
- Gibbons Hall: [https://slavery.virginia.edu/gibbons-house/;](https://slavery.virginia.edu/gibbons-house/)
<https://www.news.virginia.edu/content/gibbons-house-dedication-memorializes-former-slaves-successful-free-lives>

THOMAS JEFFERSON

- <https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/brief-biography-of-jefferson/>
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/thomas-jefferson/>



The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia

An Educator's Guide: Elementary School

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