

# The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia

An Educator's Guide: Middle School



[mel.virginia.edu](http://mel.virginia.edu)



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# Introduction & Background Information

*A brief look into the inspiration,  
team, and process that went  
into creating the Memorial to  
Enslaved Laborers*

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## CONTENT

Creating Traction for the MEL

Introducing the Design Team

Understanding the MEL Today

Discussing Sensitive Topics





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** 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.

# Discussing Sensitive Topics

*Understanding the difference between sympathy and empathy and its relation to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers*



***"Brené Brown on Empathy" - RSA Shorts***

## Learner Outcomes:

Students will gain an understanding of the difference between sympathy and empathy, and practice empathy in the classroom.

### Activity Information:

Students will watch a short video on empathy to help frame the way in which they think about the lives of the enslaved and how to participate in difficult conversations. Start off in partners or small groups to discuss the questions, then transition to a larger group conversation.

Time: 10-15 minutes

Setting: Classroom

Materials: Projector

Video link: <https://brenebrown.com/videos/rsa-short-empathy/>

### Guiding Questions:

- Explain empathy in your own words.
- What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?
- Why do you think empathy "fuels connection?"
- What are the four qualities of empathy?
  - Which do you think is most powerful?
- Can you think of a time when someone's been empathetic towards you?
- Why is empathy important?
- How can we practice empathy?



# Activity 1: Grounding Exercises

*To begin...*

## Learner Outcomes:

Students will take time to experience the site on their own, focusing on both the intricate details as well as the overall space. Students will be able to point out specific features and distinguish their relevance to the overall site.

- Assign students to the various steps on the Path to Freedom behind the Memorial.
- Give the students a minute or two to just stand in that space and breathe.
- This is a quiet activity to allow students to fully engage with the space.
- Encourage them to take deep breaths and observe the Memorial from their location.
- Have them fill out the prompt sheet (WS-1)

.....

## After observing...

- Have the students bring their worksheets and gather in the middle grass area of the Memorial. Discuss what was observed and felt during this exercise. Then take some time to focus on the space in which you are occupying. Ask the students:
  - How do you feel sitting there?
  - How do you think the space should be used?

# WS 1: Grounding Exercises

*This will be used to help guide students through the activity and give the students an opportunity to capture their thoughts and feelings from their experiences.*

- Close your eyes. What do you hear?
- What do you see?
- What do you feel?
- How are others using the space?
- What is significant about where you are standing?
- How has this area changed with the creation of the Memorial?
  
- "I feel \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I am confused by \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I am frustrated by \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I wonder \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I am frustrated by \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ towards \_\_\_\_\_"
- "\_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I feel connected towards \_\_\_\_\_"
- "I empathize with \_\_\_\_\_"



## ACTIVITY 2: DRAW/PHOTOGRAPH WHAT YOU SEE

This activity is focused more on the context of the Memorial. The students will choose a particular place to stand/sit and draw or photograph what they see from that perspective. Encourage students to zoom in and focus on smaller details.

Time: ~15 minutes

Setting: Classroom and/or on-site

Materials: Pencil and Paper



# 01

### BREAKING INTO GROUPS

Students will be placed in groups depending on the class size, each group will stand from a different perspective in order to draw what they see. One group could even imagine what the Memorial would look like from above.

# 02

### THE DRAWING PROCESS

Students will have time to individually draw or photograph what they see in front of them, noticing smaller details. Some engaging questions can be: What color is it? What texture does it have? What shapes do you see? What stands out to you?

# 03

### GROUP DISCUSSION

Each group will return to the middle of the Memorial. One at a time each group will share what they have seen from their point of view.

**Note:** The Memorial's website can be useful during the discussion of what was observed as it provides specific details on the Memorial's design.

<https://mel.virginia.edu>

#### In-Class Adaptation:

Instead of visiting the Memorial, have students view various pictures of the MEL found at <https://mel.virginia.edu>. What do they notice in each of the pictures? What textures, words, or images do they notice? Have students share findings and observations with the class.

## WS 2-1: DRAW/PHOTOGRAPH WHAT YOU SEE NOTES

- .....
- What was your initial reaction from observing this space?
  - What do you feel? What do you hear? What do you see?
  - Is there anything that surprises you?
  - What are you most curious about?
  - Have you been here before?
    - If so, did you notice this specific spot the first time? If you did, what's different? If you didn't why do you think that is?



## WS 2-2: DRAW/PHOTOGRAPH WHAT YOU SEE ACTIVITY SHEET

Initial Reactions:

Observations:

Feelings:

Questions/Curiosities:

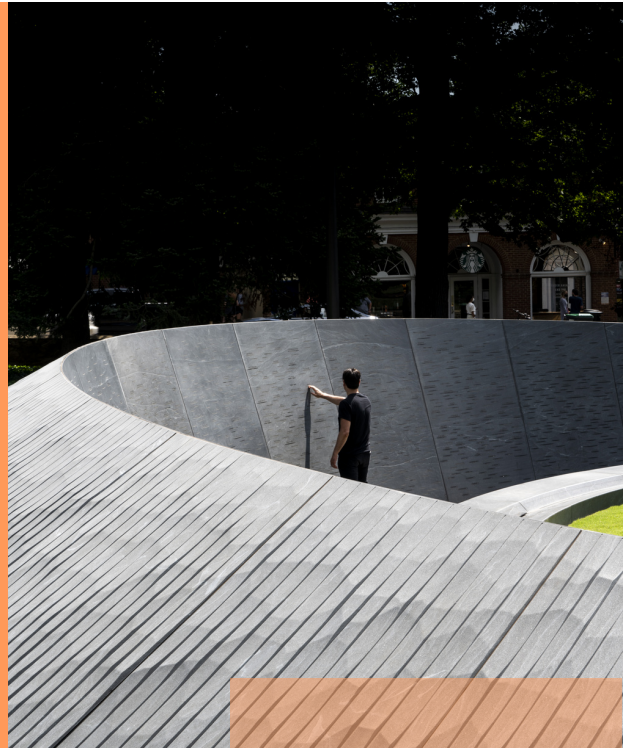
## ACTIVITY 3: CREATE YOUR OWN MEL TOUR

In small groups, students will create their own tour of the Memorial based on what they have learned from past activities, classroom instruction, and their own visit. They should conduct the tour as if they were a real tour guide and try to point out the most important aspects of the site.

Time: 30-45 minutes

Setting: On-Site- MEL

Materials: Pen and Paper



### Learner Outcomes:

Students will understand the significance of the Memorial and what it signifies, connected to the country's and community's history/present circumstance. Students will be able to analyze historical events on a timeline, and develop their own historical tour.

### BREAKING STUDENTS INTO TEAMS

Teachers will divide the students into small groups. Ideally, the teams will be small enough to give everyone the opportunity to be an active and engaged participant.

In these groups, students should discuss:

- the symbolic design of the Memorial
- important historical events and figures from the timeline
- the relevance of the Memorial today

Then, have students use these components to create a tour for their classmates. Have students write down important details and points they want to share. (See WS 3)

### THINK, PAIR, SHARE

Teachers will pair up groups and each group will give their tour to the other as if they were first time visitors. Encourage students to give respectful feedback on the tours they heard.

### DISCUSSION

After tours have been given, the entire group will gather for a discussion about the activity. Have students reflect on the process of creating the tour. Why did they choose the elements they did?

The group should also analyze any patterns they noticed between tours. For example if a specific event or person was included in the majority of the tours, why might that be the case?

### 1. DESIGN

This team member will focus on the structural design of the Memorial. Think about what elements are most important and what these elements symbolize.

### 2. HISTORICAL EVENTS

This team member will utilize the timeline from the site to pick out the events included in the tour.

### 3. IMPORTANT FIGURES

This team member will focus on the important people that will be included in the tour.

### 4. TODAY'S RELEVANCE

This team member will consider how the Memorial is still very much a part of our society today and the important role it plays.



# WS 3: Crafting Your Tour

Tour Theme:

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Teammate Role:

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Background Research:

Memorial Observations:

Other Information:

# Activity 4:

## Humanizing the Lives of the Past

*Have students understand that the enslaved were individuals who had lives, identities, skills, and intelligences that transcended their forced labor .*

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### Learner Outcomes:

Students will have the opportunity to engage with the MEL in a variety of creative ways through writing digital media, mathematics, construction, etc.

# 01

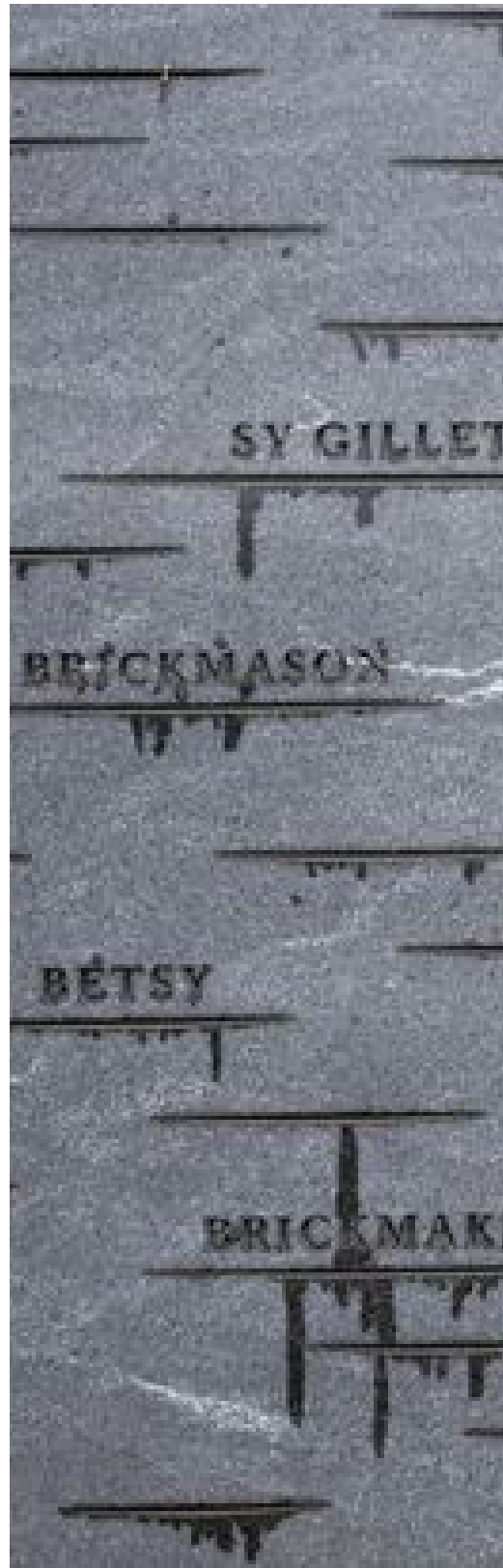
### USING THE CHOICE BOARD

Encourage students to pick one activity from WS 4 that aligns with their interests. How can they use this creative activity to share the story of the Memorial, historical events, and/or their own experience?

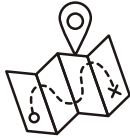
# 02

### SHARE WITH THE CLASS

Have students share their creations with the class! Encourage a thoughtful group discussion following students' presentations. What stood out to them? What was powerful about their classmates' creations?



## WS 4: Choose Your Own Adventure



### Write a Poem/Song/ Spoken Word

Think back to your initial observations/reactions/feelings of the MEL and create any type of poem, song about your own experience visiting the MEL.

### Make a Blueprint or Model

Research the building process of the MEL and create your own blueprint or model representing a part or the entire Memorial.

### Create a Photo Essay

Share what the MEL is and what it represents solely through pictures!

### News Article

Pick an event from the timeline and write an article covering the event as if you were in that time .

### Scrapbook

From your pictures, research, drawings, etc. create a scrapbook. Include details, descriptions, and as many creative elements as you desire.

### Biography

Pick a historical figure from the MEL, then research and write a biography about this person.

### Interview

Interview a family or community member about your personal family history, local history, etc.

### Create an Artifact

Create a visual or physical artifact representing some aspect of the MEL.

### Digital Media

Create a video or podcast explaining a person, place, or aspect of the MEL.

# Choose Your Own Adventure Resources

## Poem/Song/Spoken Word

Hip-Hop Architecture-Mix Tape: <https://www.hiphoparchitecture.com/mixtape>

Amanda Gorman Inaugural Poem: <https://www.npr.org/sections/inauguration-day-live-updates/2021/01/20/958743170/poet-amanda-gorman-reads-the-hill-we-climb>

"My Serpentine" performed by Jayla Hart and Salem Zelalem (FLUX Spoken Word at UVA): <https://news.virginia.edu/video/dedication-memorial-enslaved-laborers-uva> (at 46:35)

## Photo Essay

Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance):

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/student-tasks/do-something/photo-essay-exhibit>

Life Magazine: <https://www.life.com/>

## News Article

Scholastic: <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/writing-newspaper-article/>

PBS New's Hours Student Reporting Labs: <https://studentreportinglabs.org/lesson-plans>

## Interviewing

Story Corps: <https://storycorps.org/participate/storycorps-app/>

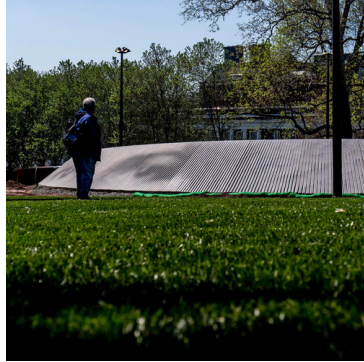
Example stories:

- <https://storycorps.org/stories/two-sisters-on-enjoying-life-instead-of-a-drama-or-a-novela-make-it-a-sitcom/>
- <https://storycorps.org/stories/lourdes-cereno-markley-and-julia-markley/>



# Activity 5:

## The Photo Essay



### Learner Outcomes:

Students will understand the power of photographs in telling stories and conveying meaning.

# 01

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Have students watch this [video](#) to learn about photo essays and see an example of how to use them to tell a story. Share this photo essay made for the Memorial [here](#).

# 02

### CREATE A PHOTO ESSAY

Next, inform them that they will be creating a photo essay with 3-5 images of the MEL. Give them the option of using a camera or drawing sketches. If students are not visiting the MEL, give them the option of making 3-5 drawings based on images that they have found online.

# 03

### SHARE IT OUT

Have students complete WS 5 to gather their images and explain how they relate to the selected theme. Encourage them to share their photo essays with the class.

**Expansion:** To offer a deeper dive, have students write an accompanying verbal essay that highlights the themes they discuss. What do their photos say about the theme? What story do these photos tell?

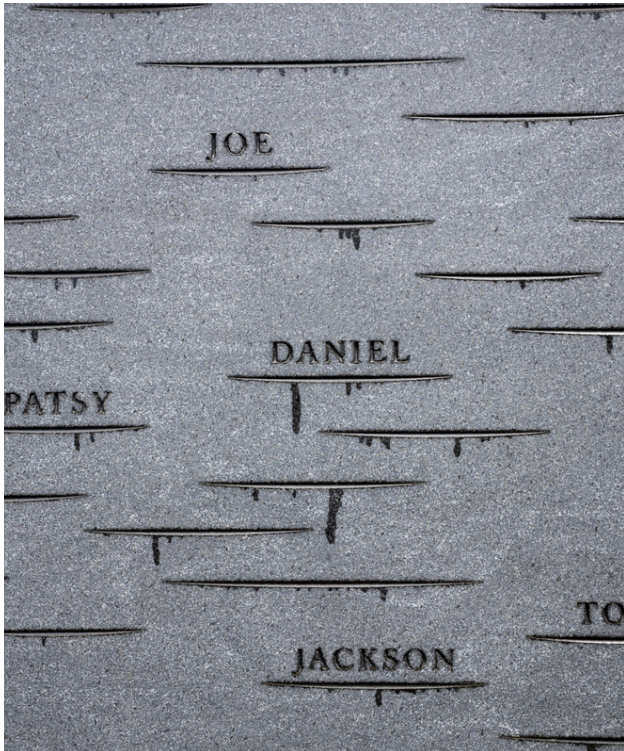
# WS 5: Photo Essay organizer

Upon viewing the MEL, pick an element you would like to examine further as it relates to your theme.

Your Element:\_\_\_\_\_

**Photos/Drawings:** Take 3-5 photos/drawings of different aspects of the MEL that represent your element. You can take photos of the Memorial as a whole, specific names, timeline events, etc. Be creative!

If you are drawing images, your creations don't need to be perfect, as you can keep working on them later. Just try to capture the element you are drawing the best you can!



## Activity 6: Journal Entry

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Using the information gathered from the visit and their own research, students will produce a journal entry. This writing will encourage students to be both creative and thoughtful in their research and analysis.

### 01

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Using the information gathered from the Memorial and online, ask students to write a brief journal entry explaining their thoughts and perspectives on what they have learned. Be sure students reflect on the design elements of the MEL; events on the timeline; names on the wall; and their personal experiences.

### 02

#### WRITE IT OUT

Encourage students to write a journal entry that highlights their reflection. How do they feel knowing more about the MEL? What about it has inspired them or impacted them? What about the MEL do they hope to learn about further?

- What I thought I knew...
- What I know now...
- Questions I still have...

## Activity 7: Wrap-Up & Reflection

*I used to think... and now I think...*

Before gathering as a large group, allow the students some time for personal reflection. Give them 10-15 minutes to reflect on what they learned, saw, felt, etc. This can be done in any way- a picture, a written piece, a word bubble, it is up to the student. This will not be collected - only aspects the student wishes to share will be known to the rest of the class. Prompt students to reflect on how their thoughts, feelings, and ideas have changed from when they first observed the Memorial to now after everything they have learned. Students will then be partnered up again and discuss among themselves for 10 minutes and then gather for a final discussion and reflection as a class on what has been learned throughout the visit/activities.

Questions to prompt students:

- How is the Memorial relevant in your community today?
- What do you think this space represents?
- Why do you think this space is important?
- How do you connect with this space?
- What does it mean for the University to have made this Memorial, years later?

Time: 30-45 minutes

Setting: Classroom

Materials: Pen and Paper



# Glossary of Terms

## Background and General Information

- **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 (page 2).
- **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)" (page 7).
- **Monticello:** "The primary plantation of Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, who began designing Monticello after inheriting land from his father at age 26. Located just outside Charlottesville, Virginia, in the Piedmont region, the plantation was originally 5,000 acres (20 km<sup>2</sup>), with Jefferson using the labor of enslaved African people for extensive cultivation of tobacco and mixed crops, later shifting from tobacco cultivation to wheat in response to changing markets. Due to its architectural and historic significance, the property has been designated a National Historic Landmark" (page 7).

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## Empathy

- the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner

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## Sympathy

- an affinity, association, or relationship between persons or things wherein whatever affects one similarly affects the other

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## Historical Fiction

- Historical Fiction: "the genre of literature, film, etc., comprising narratives that take place in the past and are characterized chiefly by an imaginative reconstruction of historical events and personages"(Dictionary).
- "The Mighty Miss Malone": A historical fiction novel written by Christopher Paul Curtis following a twelve-year-old girl living through the Great Depression in the early 1900s
- "Silent Thunder": A historical fiction novel written by Andrea Davis Pinkney that follows the life of a young girl named Summer and her life as a slave on a Virginia plantation in the late 1800s

# Annotated Bibliography

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[https://uvamagazine.org/articles/unearthing\\_slavery\\_at\\_the\\_university\\_of\\_virginia](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://dei.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu511/files/inline-files/SlaveryatUVA_FAULKNER_001.pdf)

<https://mel.virginia.edu/memorial>

[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The\\_Rotunda\\_\(University\\_of\\_Virginia\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Rotunda_(University_of_Virginia))

## OBSERVING YOUR SURROUNDINGS

<https://mel.virginia.edu>

The memorial's website can be useful during the discussion of what was observed as it provides specific details on the memorial's design.

## HUMANIZING THE LIVES OF THE PAST

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSkF2r7OhzQ>

<https://www.momadvice.com/post/9-historical-fiction-novels-for-middle-grade>

<https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/>

## DISCUSSING SENSITIVE TOPICS

<https://brenebrown.com/videos/rsa-short-empathy/>

Dare to Lead Integration Ideas: Empathy:

[https://www.google.com/url?](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiHyvO8p7PtAhXot1kKHfDtAkCQFjABegQIBRAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbrenebrown.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F08%2FIntegration-Ideas_Empathy.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0C4tZPXBG-x5wBI8qA6YUn)

[sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiHyvO8p7PtAhXot1kKHfDtAkCQFjABegQIBRAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbrenebrown.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F08%2FIntegration-Ideas\\_Empathy.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0C4tZPXBG-x5wBI8qA6YUn](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiHyvO8p7PtAhXot1kKHfDtAkCQFjABegQIBRAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fbrenebrown.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F08%2FIntegration-Ideas_Empathy.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0C4tZPXBG-x5wBI8qA6YUn)

# Additional Resources

## FACILITATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH KIDS

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

## INVESTIGATING THE MEMORIAL TO ENSLAVED LABORERS

Architectural record: <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-](https://dei.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu511/files/inline-files/42425%20uva%20slavery%20walking%20tour%20map_revised%20July%202018.pdf)

[files/42425%20uva%20slavery%20walking%20tour%20map\\_revised%20July%202018.pdf](https://dei.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu511/files/inline-files/42425%20uva%20slavery%20walking%20tour%20map_revised%20July%202018.pdf)

Historical Fiction Examples: <https://afomaumesi.com/middle-grade-historical-fiction-books/>

Virtual Tour of the MEL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol5rkxGe5vg>

# Occupations and Their Contribution

Use a pencil and paper to make a rubbing of a particular occupation. Once the occupation is chosen, research what the job is and think about how this job contributed to the overall community.

## CARPENTER



WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

WHAT SKILLS AND  
KNOWLEDGE ARE NEEDED?

WHAT OBJECTS DO YOU  
USE THAT ARE MADE  
THROUGH THIS JOB?

## BLACKSMITH



WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

WHAT SKILLS AND  
KNOWLEDGE ARE NEEDED?

WHAT OBJECTS DO YOU  
USE THAT ARE MADE  
THROUGH THIS JOB?

## WEAVER



WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

WHAT SKILLS AND  
KNOWLEDGE ARE NEEDED?

WHAT OBJECTS DO YOU  
USE THAT ARE MADE  
THROUGH THIS JOB?

# Powers of 10 Activity

\*This activity would be possible if students have access to a camera either from a phone or ipad/tablet.

- Directions:
- This activity can be done individually or in pairs/small groups (depending on the amount of cameras available)
- In the area where the drawings were taken, now capture the area with a photograph
- Chart a path to and through your selected outdoor space.
- Through a series of nine (9) photographs document your sequence that narrows in on a particular detail of the space or object (from XL to XS).
- Arrange your images in a 3x3 grid (Google Draw, Adobe Illustrator, etc.)
- Have fun

Note: A portion of each image should be visible in the photographs that precede and follow it. Also, your images should all be the same orientation (portrait, landscape, or square) Refer to the following links for examples of the Powers of Ten: <http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/> (Links to an external site.)

\*\*activity taken from Professor Comazzi's class

## Reflective Questions:

1. What detail from the main picture did you decide to focus on?
2. How does the spot change with each picture? How does it stay the same?
3. How does this exercise affect the way you experience the Memorial?
4. What details did you find as you zoomed in on the spot?
5. It is difficult to focus on specific details when we are looking at a bigger picture. How does zooming in change your perspective?
  - a. Why is it important to pay attention to the small details as well as the big picture?
6. How can this idea of bigger picture vs. smaller details be applied to our lives and the way we experience/see certain things?





# Feelings & Emotion

*Upon returning from visiting the site, have the students each write down one word that expresses their experience. The paper will be folded and placed into a container, to keep them anonymous. The teacher will later accumulate all the words into a word cloud to illustrate how students felt after their visit.*

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## To Conclude:

The teacher will accumulate all the words into a word cloud to illustrate how students felt after their visit. This can be displayed in their classroom as a reminder of everything that was learned and experienced on the visit.

This website is just one of the many that can be used to create this:  
<http://www.wordle.net/create>





# The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia

## An Educator's Guide: Middle School

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