

Who Gets to Remember?

C1 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary + Discussion | 60-75 minutes

BEFORE YOU READ

Talk with a partner. Who should decide which stories a town or country remembers in public places?

1. Match the words (1-6) with the definitions (A-F).

1. **commemorate** _____

2. **legacy** _____

3. **contested** _____

4. **omission** _____

5. **reinterpret** _____

6. **collective** _____

A. shared by a group of people

B. honour or remember a person or event publicly

C. something handed down from the past

D. disputed or argued about

E. understand or explain in a new way

F. the act of leaving something out

2. Read the article. The bold words are the vocabulary from Activity 1.

1. Street names, statues and museums do more than decorate a place. They **commemorate** particular people and events, turning some parts of the past into everyday public knowledge. Because these choices often seem permanent, it is easy to forget that they were made by people with their own values and priorities.

2. Arguments about monuments are therefore not only about stone or metal. They concern a **legacy**: what a community chooses to inherit, question or reject. A figure once presented as a national hero may later become **contested** when people examine the effects of that person's actions on others.

3. Some people worry that changing a monument erases history. Others argue that leaving it unchanged can make one version of history appear complete and unquestionable. Both positions can overlook an important fact: every public memory contains **omissions**. Not every group has had the same power to name streets, create museums or fund memorials.

4. One response is to remove a monument. Another is to add context, create new memorials or **reinterpret** an existing site through exhibitions and public discussion. The best choice may differ according to the place and the people involved. There is no neutral solution, because choosing not to act is also a choice.

5. The aim need not be to produce one perfect story. A healthy **collective** memory can include disagreement, uncertainty and multiple perspectives. Public history is most useful when it invites people to ask who is speaking, who is absent and why.

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UNDERSTAND, DISCUSS AND WRITE

3. Comprehension. Answer in complete sentences. Use the article to help you.

1. Why does the article say public memorials are not neutral?

2. Why can a figure become contested over time?

3. What does the article mean by omissions in public memory?

4. What alternatives to removal does the article give?

5. What kind of collective memory does the article support?

4. Discuss. Talk in small groups. Give reasons and examples.

- Should controversial statues be removed, explained or moved?
- What stories are missing from public places near you?
- Can changing a memorial preserve history rather than erase it?
- Who should take part in decisions about public memory?

5. Homework: Write an opinion paragraph.

Write 180-220 words proposing a way to improve one public monument, street name or local exhibition. Explain whose perspective it would add and why.

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ANSWER KEY AND TEACHING NOTE

Vocabulary matching

1. **commemorate** - B
2. **legacy** - C
3. **contested** - D
4. **omission** - F
5. **reinterpret** - E
6. **collective** - A

Comprehension answers

1. Why does the article say public memorials are not neutral?

They reflect choices made by people with particular values and priorities about which parts of the past to emphasise.

2. Why can a figure become contested over time?

Later examination may reveal how that person's actions affected groups that were previously ignored.

3. What does the article mean by omissions in public memory?

Some people and stories are left out because groups have not had equal power to create memorials or name public places.

4. What alternatives to removal does the article give?

Adding context, creating new memorials and reinterpreting a site through exhibitions or discussion.

5. What kind of collective memory does the article support?

One that includes multiple perspectives, uncertainty and disagreement rather than one perfect story.

Teaching note

Compare vocabulary answers before reading. Help learners plan a monument, street name or exhibition change: a new perspective and why it matters. Accept accurate comprehension paraphrases and supported personal responses.