

Written In Stone

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Cemetery Classrooms

Do you realize that graveyards are an excellent educational tool? They can be used for both children and adults, educating the public about ancestry, history, art, sociology and geology. It's very important to introduce a new generation to the significance of gravestones and their importance to us today.

Field trips make a cemetery 'come alive' for all of us, children and adults. Including cemeteries among the trips to museums and other cultural resources reinforces the fact that cemeteries are among some of our greatest treasures and should be treated as the outdoor museums that they are. In fact, taking the children to the cemeteries to clean off or restore the graves, sometimes helps to dispel their fears of graveyards, brought on by scary movies and ghost stories.

Think of it as a 'scavenger hunt' to see who can find, for example, the most stones with cherubs on them; or stones bearing dates before a certain time period; or if a stone tells what the person died of, such as during a Yellow Fever epidemic or Scarlet Fever, etc. An English lesson is one in which the students seek out the non-standard spellings of words common prior to the 1790's, as well as archaic words or phrases showing us evidence of the changes in our languages. Perhaps you wish to learn certain facts about history or the people themselves; and 'reading the stones' gives you a clearer idea of what was going on in that era. An Art lesson could help them identify stones; characteristics of the artwork commonly found on certain types of stones; the artist who 'drew' the stone; and in so doing, they can learn to do a rubbing of the stones themselves. Sociology lessons are where the students gather data for a certain decade, using the cemetery as the source. Perhaps you want to discover how many deaths or births were in a certain time period; or the different names used in different decades, etc. Studying Geology can teach you the different stonework that was available in the area during certain periods of time, as well as the typical characteristics of the stones.

For more information about cemetery cleaning and restoration, I'd encourage you to join us this Saturday, April 14th, at 9:30 AM at the Historical L & N Railroad Depot for a Cemetery Preservation Workshop. Admission is Free, with a brown bag lunch, and following will be hands-on demos by many individuals, such as the Office of Archaeological Resources from Moundville, VA on Ground Penetrating Radar; or Eagle Eye Masonry of Jefferson County on the correct techniques for cleaning, repairing and restoring of stones. Hope you will join us Saturday at the Depot!