

Compassion and Caring Within Our Community

A Curricular Unit for 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Students  
Based on

The Garden of Peace Memorial to Victims of Homicide in Boston, MA.

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The unit summary described herein is based on the Garden Of Peace, an urban oasis in the heart of Boston, Massachusetts. The memorial was installed in 2004 to commemorate victims of violence who were connected to Massachusetts through their lives or at the time of their deaths. A profoundly moving space, it combines natural grasses and plants with sculptures and manmade materials. Stones engraved with each victim's name and birth and death dates form a dry riverbed that flows from a large polished ebony orb to a tall sculpture of a bird taking flight called Ibis Ascending. From tragedy flows grief and pain, ending in reconciliation and hope for the future.

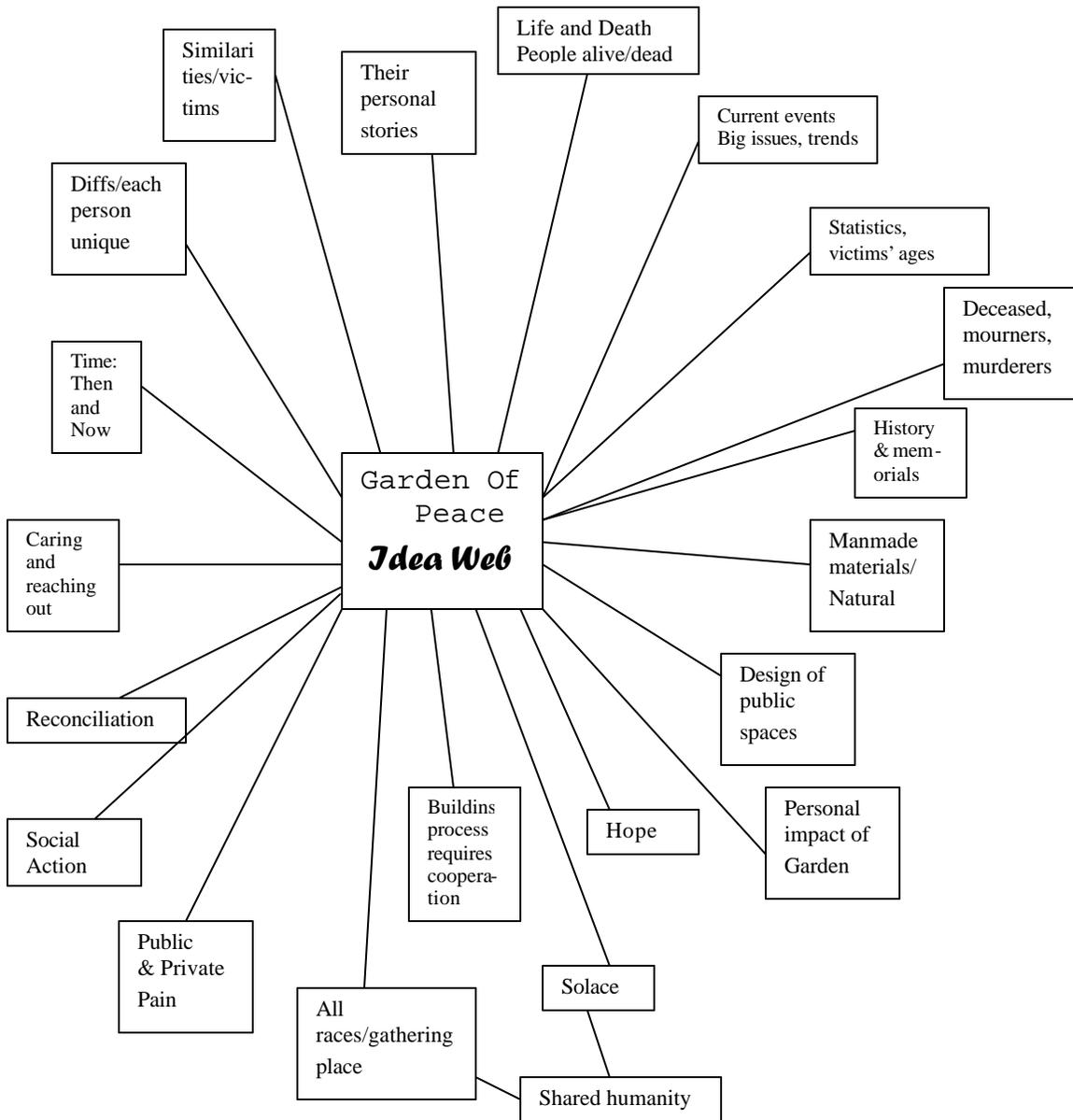
**Key Concepts:** At its core, this unit aims, over the course of several months, to help sixth-grade children to reflect, learn, and contribute through positive actions to their communities. As James Banks states in "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform," planning for a unit that "enables students to improve their thinking,...decision-making and social-action skills...requires a considerable amount of curriculum planning..." (1988). Middle childhood seems to be an appropriate stage in which to introduce this higher-level thinking and reflection, since "children begin to form representations of the kind of person they would like to be – an 'ideal self' against which they measure their 'actual self,'" and this unit aims to help children build an awareness of their own capabilities in the area of kindness and caring for others (Cole & Cole, 2001, p. 591). The lessons mean to equip children with knowledge, an awareness of consequences of violence and an understanding of alternative ways to care about others and thus to help to prevent violence. Following the Banks model of the "Levels of Integration of Ethnic Content," this unit strives to achieve Level 4, "The Social Action Approach" (Banks, J., 1988). The students will "study a social problem," in this case, 'What Actions Can We Take To Comfort Others As A Means To Create A Compassionate Community And To Prevent Future Violence.'

The students will develop their ideas after experiencing the Garden Of Peace memorial and then interviewing community members who help others in physical and emotional pain. The sixth-grade students will experience the Garden Of Peace analytically and emotionally. By experiencing the memorial in person, the children will realize that it provides an essential space for people of all races and ages to gather for solace while at the same time it honors victims of all ages and races. After interviewing community members who help others, the students then will devise their own ways to contribute with compassion.

**Rationale:** My children and my husband and I visited the Garden Of Peace in November, 2005. The site was deeply moving. My six-year-old boy repeatedly asked the ages of each victim. From the birth and death dates on each stone, we could see each person's age. It was sad to read the names, and to realize the ages of fathers and sons, matched next to each other with the same last names. Scott wanted to write notes to the young ones and leave them there. My 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders caressed the stones, astounded by the numbers. The concrete representation helped to underscore the terrible reality of violence. Some dates were recent, since the Garden Of Peace actively encourages survivors to send in their loved ones' information.

Yet, the site did not leave us despondent. The beautiful birds reaching skyward helped us to see that hope and reconciliation were possible. In essence, the legacy of the memorial and each victim is to look forward, to care genuinely about other human beings. The intent for this outline of a curricular unit is to build on past units the students will have experienced, units on neighborhood, community and the larger world.

The Garden of Peace will provide students with a tactile, visual representation of the impact of a lack of caring for others. Several adults need to accompany the students, with the aim of moving them through the space and helping the children to see all aspects, the accessibility to people with wheelchairs, the nook between tall buildings, the beauty of the combination of tall grass rushes and the sculpture and the stones, the seat walls. While the children should experience the emotional impact of the Garden, this unit outline will focus on the positive aspect of helping others who might be grieving or in pain.



### Sampling of Questions that arose from the Idea Web activity:

How does the Garden Of Peace affect each child?

What does each student see as its meaning?

How do we keep the legacy of the homicide victims alive?

How do we learn about the individuals, their unique stories and multicultural backgrounds?

Should we link the memorial to other memorials and tragedies?

Do we compare memorial designs and compare the historic and ongoing need for memorials by examining other current events and placing them on a timeline, perhaps graphing data and statistics?

Should we focus on current events and the print media and take note of the amount of information/number of photographs of victims as compared with their accused killers?

What natural and materials were used in making the memorial and why?

### Reflection

From this self-questioning activity, which originally was experienced during a class exercise in Multicultural Education Through the Arts, the idea of a curricular unit for sixth graders emerged, one that focused on the future, and the reconciliation and message of hope that the Garden of Peace embodies. According to Banks's Level 4 Social Action Approach, by looking for ways to help develop positive, supportive relationships, the class could "take actions to help solve" the problem of violence through compassion for others (1988). Their violence prevention efforts thus might fulfill some hopes of the designers and families associated with the Garden Of Peace. In this way, sixth graders would honor victims' legacies yet avoid a possibly morbid fixation on the victims' deaths or on current violence in our society. Furthermore, social action could be brought to a realm that the children would recognize, and in which they could devise their own immediate and meaningful ways to contribute.

### Result

The idea web and the subsequent questions and reflection led to the following overarching question: What kinds of lessons might differentiate between the purpose of the Memorial, which is to provide a place for grieving family members and friends to gather and reflect, and the message of the Memorial, which is "hope for peace and renewal in our lives, our community and the world" ([www.gardenofpeacememorial.org](http://www.gardenofpeacememorial.org))? In response, I chose to focus on 1) the personal impact of the Garden Of Peace on each student, and 2) concrete ways in which each child could further its positive message.

**Goals of the Unit:** The sixth-grade students will deepen their understanding of what a memorial is, and its purpose. They will come to appreciate how the Garden Of Peace unites people of different races and backgrounds after their death and how it provides a uniting space for reflection for survivors and strangers of all races. They will meet and interview contributing members of their community and develop and enact concrete ways to support people in emotional pain.

They will also appreciate the design and layout of a memorial, and will communicate their impressions of the Garden Of Peace through written expression. They will practice their public speaking skills. They will work individually, in pairs and in groups and reflect

on the process. Each child will devise ideas for compassionate contribution within her/his community and enact them. The students will meet and come to know several adults in their community who help people who need comfort, thus enhancing the children's own sense of community.

**Pre-Planning**: Several weeks before the following unit begins, the teacher gives caregivers information about the upcoming field trip to the Garden Of Peace in the weekly newsletter sent home with the sixth-grade students. Family discussions may ensue, which is partly the intent. Teacher states the date and requests four parent volunteers for the sixth-grade trip, with its 24 students. Teacher also sets up the bus plan.

**Overall Materials**: Large pad, easel, dark marker, tri-fold poetry board materials: colored construction paper, scissors, cardboard sheets, wood blocks, thin foam sheets for cutting out stamps, wood glue, pencils for tracing designs onto the foam. Also, clipboards and paper and pencil for each pair of students on the field trip. Camera.

**Overall Skills**: Activate prior knowledge, prediction, higher order thinking, observations skills, ideation, fine motor skills, cooperation, teamwork, notetaking, writing and editing, organization skills, typing/computer, brainstorming, individual and paired-work, public speaking.

### **Introductory Lesson for the Unit**

**Teacher-led Class Discussion**: What is a memorial? For whose benefit is it? (the deceased, survivors, the public). What might be the purpose of a memorial? (legacy of the deceased, commemorate an event, solace for survivors and the public, a gathering spot and place of reconciliation). Class shares memories of different memorials they may have visited.

**Teacher then introduces the Garden Of Peace**. Has anyone visited it or heard about it? Discussion ensues about the unique emphasis on victims of homicides. Who might the victims be – what ages, races, sexes? Why and who might initiate the building of a memorial - a family member or friend of a murdered person, a motivated observer, a person in government, and others. What might be some steps to take while creating a memorial? On a screen in the classroom, the teacher opens up the Garden Of Peace website on a computer, or she uses an overhead projector with slides made beforehand. The website holds many useful pages, such as “About Us,” “Garden Design,” and “Personal Stories.”

By using an overhead or a large computer screen, the teacher introduces the technology to the class yet controls the resource, which is the express intent. The personal stories are extremely touching, and it is a concern that middle schoolers might fixate on them. Two personal stories of Louis David Brown and Anne Elizabeth Borghesani are attached. Their photographs are exhibited as part of their stories, and one can see that Louis was 15; he planned to become the youngest, and the first African American, to be President of the U.S.. Anne was Caucasian, and she was on her way to her 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday party when she was murdered. As the teacher touches on the stories and images, the students will visualize and comprehend that death by violence is a killer across all races. The students also will realize that each victim leaves mourners, and that mourners deserve equal compassion and solace.

**Trip Board:** A day or two before the field trip to the Garden Of Peace, students brainstorm questions. The teacher writes the questions on an easel pad, labeled “Pre-Trip Questions,” or asks students if they would like to write on the pad. Teacher then types up Trip Sheets. The Trip Sheets include questions about the design and materials of the Garden, as well as questions about the meaning and message of the memorial. The teacher explains that the students will be in pairs.

The teacher contacts the parent volunteers and discusses the trip with them. Parents should mingle with the children and ensure that children are talking and observing. Volunteers should also be aware of the need for some children to talk about their emotions while in the space. The pre-planned pairing of students will enable them to help and scaffold each other’s learning, and will allow them to experience the impact of the memorial with another person who may share the same feelings or experience the memorial differently.

### **Field Trip to Garden Of Peace**

**At The Garden Of Peace:** The teacher hands the Trip Sheets on clipboards to the pairs of students. Teacher points out that all thoughtful answers are welcome – there are no wrong answers about each person’s interpretation of the Garden of Peace.

The children can choose to enter the Garden at either of two openings. The allotted time should be sufficient for the children to wander in and out of the Garden several times, so as to experience the memorial from different angles. The visual and tactile experience will appeal to different learning styles.

**Post-Trip Classroom Discussion:** In a group, the class shares their reactions to the Garden Of Peace memorial. The teacher might poll the children to learn their predominant emotion during the experience. Students then share the written responses from their Trip Boards with the class. The teacher ensures that each child is called upon to respond and participate.

Answers are written on a large sheet labeled “Post-Trip Answers” placed on the wall next to the Pre-Trip Questions Sheet. There is a guided discussion about the mix of natural and manmade materials, the serenity and peaceful interaction between viewer and memorial. The soft, curving layout also is discussed, as is the accessibility. How might people in wheelchairs or blind or deaf people experience the space? The teacher can assess what the students learned from the field trip by hearing their responses to the Pre-Trip Questions.

The teacher helps to guide the discussion to a realization that all people are honored equally in death at this memorial, and that the Garden also provides a place for people of all races, ages and sexes to gather and share stories and find solace together.

It is essential here for the teacher to guide the discussion so that it does not center on the violence behind the deaths. What do the children think the memorial intends to say with the stones and the Ibis Ascending sculpture?

**Impressions Poem:** Teacher begins by modeling a poem. She reads aloud the poem “Lincoln Monument: Washington” from The Dream Keeper and other poems by Langston Hughes. (Please see attached). The teacher gives information and context about Langston Hughes, an African-American poet who wrote in the 1930s. At about their age, sixth-grade students likely will be learning about Abraham Lincoln. The students are asked to write

their own poems about the Garden Of Peace, free form, no rhyming necessary. They are encouraged to refer to their Trip Boards for ideas.

The following structure can be given: the first lines of the poem can begin with “Let’s go see...,” and the second part of the poem can begin with “And yet...” in the same way that Langston Hughes structured his poem. Students who have difficulty with idea creation and structure may find the guidance and the suggestion to refer to the Trip Boards for details to be useful. I found the modeling and structure given to us with Momma, Where Are You From? by Marie Bradby for the childhood memories poem in the Multicultural Education Through The Arts course to be particularly helpful.

**Students Write Poems:** Students write their poems in class. Some children with fine motor skill issues may benefit from typing directly onto a classroom computer, if one is available. Students are asked to edit and finalize their poems for homework. The teacher can assess the students’ writing and ideation abilities.

**Students Present Their Poems Aloud:** Students share their impressions of the Garden Of Peace. The teacher posts Langston Hughes’s poem and those of the students on the walls outside the classroom.

**Art Activity:** Students make tri-fold poetry boards and paste their typed poems, which have been cut to fit, to the center piece of the tri-folds. After a period of displaying the poem boards in the classroom, the students take the boards home to share with their caregivers.



An alternative art activity would be for the students to use paper art tiles to create 2D versions of their own memorials. The idea originated from Art From Many Hands by Jo Miles Schuman (2002). Beforehand, the teacher might divide the class into small groups of three students, with the goal to decide on an event to memorialize and then to decide on the design and purpose of the memorial. The students then would reflect on the process; they would realize the cooperation, compromise and negotiation skills required to achieve an emotional goal. Their efforts might be compared to current events and the endeavors of the 9/11 site survivors and architects and politicians, all with their different goals. The resulting discussion might help the students to realize that compassion and consideration extend to listening to and hearing the viewpoints of others.

### **Class Interviews Community Members**

**Pre-Planning:** In advance, the teacher has invited a racially-diverse group of guests from the community to the classroom, such as a social worker, a funny person and a parent, and has asked each one to speak for five minutes about how he/she helps people who are sad, and then to take questions from the students.

Based on the class discussion after the field trip to the Garden Of Peace, the students come to discover and realize the essential solace provided to survivors of victims of violence. The students and the teacher together brainstorm other concrete ways to help those in pain. The teacher suggests that students think of their immediate communities, their homes, school and places of worship. How might a person be in pain? How might we help? Questions brainstormed by the class in advance might include “What do you do?,” “Who do you help?,” “Why do you do it?,” and “How did you get started?” The teacher revisits “closed” questions which have only one answer and “open” questions which elicit longer responses (Winston, L., 1997, p. 20).

**Community Members Visit:** One person might talk about how he tells jokes and stories to elderly people who are sad. A social worker might discuss how she listens to people who want to talk about sad things that have happened to them. A parent might describe making meals or babysitting for a neighbor whose wife is sick.

**Notetaking:** The students work on their notetaking skills as the guests speak.

**Essays:** The students each select a guest on whom to write a report. Each essay on that person and his/her caring efforts for other people is edited and revised and then posted in the hallway next to a photograph of that speaker (taken by the teacher during the visit to the school). Other students, parents and staff thus can see who was interviewed, and recognize the racially-diverse composition of people who care for others in the community. The teacher can evaluate the students’ listening comprehension, notetaking and synthesizing skills from the essays. The students could also write thank you letters to the visitors whom they interviewed.

**Discussion:** In small groups, the students discuss what they have learned from the guests. The purpose of their group discussions is to create their own ways to help others in their immediate community who may be in need of comfort. Each group will then share five

ideas with the whole class. For example, one action might be to ask someone who has tripped and fallen if she is okay. Another might be to help an acquaintance pick up books he has dropped on the floor. Still others might include giving a flower to a person who is sad because his gerbil died, or telling a story to an older person in a nursing home. Students might also be directed to create specific ways to help classmates and other children in the school. The teacher could assess students' learning and the impact of the exercise by observing the actions of the students afterwards.

Literacy: Teacher models a poem, students write a poem, notetaking, essay writing.

History: Memorials through time, compare and contrast; historical causes for memorials.

Math: Trip Board could include questions about estimating the number of victims, and the youngest and oldest ages each student can calculate from the engraved stones. From the list on the Garden Of Peace website, students could graph the ages of the victims. Students could place dates of historical memorials on a timeline on the classroom wall.

Geography: Students might analyze how the climate and geography of a location could impact the design of a memorial and the materials used.

Social Studies: Students in small groups could research ways in which different cultural groups honor those who have died (e.g., tablets, pyramids). The groups might also be asked to design a memorial or a monuments to an event, with one member designated a town government official, another a landowner, another a local business owner (as an example). The groups then would reflect on the decision making and design processes and issues that may have arisen. How might this reflect a real process?

Science: The study of genetics and possible link to violence. Is compassion learned or inherited?

Drama: Students could enact their planned ways to care for others through short plays they write and perform.

### **Follow-Up**

The students could mail their poems or the results of their small-group discussions to Garden Of Peace administrators, who might then pass them on to survivors in a newsletter. Thus, survivors would witness an important positive impact of the Garden Of Peace. They might feel hopeful that their loved ones' deaths contributed to an effort by children to work together to forge a more peaceful and compassionate community.

Lincoln Monument: Washington  
By Langston Hughes

Let's go see old Abe  
Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,  
Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,  
Quiet for ten thousand years, old Abe.  
Quiet for a million, million years.

Quiet—

And yet a voice forever  
Against the  
Timeless walls  
Of time—  
Old Abe.

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[www.gardenofpeacememorial.org](http://www.gardenofpeacememorial.org)