



LESSON PLAN

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER AND NATIONAL COMMUNITY

Middle School

OVERVIEW:

Students explore efforts to define and unite the American national community in 1921 and today by reading and discussing primary source documents related to the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1921. Students will be asked to cite evidence from the documents as well as reflect on their own experiences.

The lesson begins with a general discussion about what it means to be part of a national community. Then the teacher presents a short lecture on the origins of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and its purpose. Students then read a collection of primary source documents and participate in a class discussion.

Estimated time: 2 class periods; 20-30 minute introduction, at-home reading of documents, 30-40 minute in-class discussion

STANDARDS:

Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.4.6-8: Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- NCSS.D2.His.5.6-8: Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.
- NCSS.D2.His.16.6-8: Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.

Common Core Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6: Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will describe historical opinions of the American national community by citing primary source texts.
- Students will relate historical opinions of the American national community to their experiences and opinions today.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- America's Unknown Soldier PowerPoint presentation
- Student worksheet with the following primary source excerpts (1 per student):
 - President Warren G. Harding's Address at the Burial of the Unknown Soldier, November 11, 1921
 - "At the Shrine of an Unknown Soldier," New York Tribune, November 6, 1921

LESSON ACTIVITIES:

- Introductory discussion: 10 minutes
 - **Ask:** What is a community? What communities are you part of?
Answers may include: people who live close together, people who participate in similar activities, people who share similar values and ways of life. Students may also describe their neighborhood, sports team, religious group and other communities they are part of.
 - **Ask:** What are some things people do to make their community stronger?
Answers may include: participate in group events, share good news, help other people, create symbols and mascots
 - Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson was a prominent scholar on the emergence of nations, which he defined as "imagined communities" – imagined because members of a nation will never all meet each other, but still form a community because they feel connected to each other and separate from other nations.
 - **Ask:** What are some things governments do to create a national community or make it stronger?
Answers may include: writing founding documents to establish the laws of the land, writing laws that define who is and is not part of the nation (citizenship laws), emphasizing certain values in the language of policies and public speeches, establishing national symbols and the ways they are used (such as flags, emblems and national holidays)
 - **Ask:** When was the last time you participated in something that made you feel like part of your national community? Describe the experience – what did you do? What did you feel?
Note: The purpose of this discussion is to reflect on the types of experiences that connect individuals to their national communities, such as patriotic displays, sporting events, visiting memorials and monuments, or private cultural practices at home. While the focus of the lesson is on the American national community, depending on the makeup of your class, you may also encourage students to share experiences that connected them to national communities outside the United States.



- PowerPoint presentation: 10 minutes

Slide	Notes for Presentation
<p>Slide 1</p> 	<p>Today we're going to talk about a place where many Americans go to feel connected to their national community – the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Though the Tomb was built in 1921, millions of Americans continue to visit it each year and it is widely recognized as a revered historic site.</p> <p>In this lesson, you will be introduced to the history of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and then you will read a collection of documents related to the burial of the first Unknown Soldier. We will then have a class discussion about the documents you read, what they reflect about the United States in 1921 and how they relate to American society today.</p>
<p>Slide 2</p> 	<p>Both during and after World War I, many Americans united in remembering service members killed during the war.</p> <p>During World War I, families with loved ones in the military displayed “service flags” in their windows. These flags (usually white with a red border) included a blue star for each family member serving in the military. If a family member was killed, the blue star was replaced with a gold one. This practice originated when Mrs. Louise D. Bowen, leader of a prominent women’s organization, proposed it as a replacement for the traditional black mourning clothes. The “glory of the death should be emphasized rather than its sadness,” she believed.</p> <p>During and after the war, women joined organizations like the American Gold Star Mothers and the American War Mothers as a way to honor their children who served, remember the war dead, and continue to support the nation. Women, and particularly mothers, became prominent voices in the commemoration of the war and those who fought.</p> <p>Across the country, individual towns, veterans’ organizations, civic societies and universities built monuments and memorial buildings that honored those killed in World War I. Many monuments were statues that depicted average soldiers. Living memorial buildings with community spaces were also popular. Many veterans and civic organizations aimed to unify American society by celebrating the experiences of common people, instead of remembering only famous military and political leaders.</p>
<p>Slide 3</p>	<p>After World War I, many Americans began observing two different holidays that honored the sacrifices of American service members:</p>




	<p>Unknown Soldier's remains. The remains of four unknown American service members were removed from four different American cemeteries in France. They were then placed in four identical caskets, and Sgt. Edward Younger, a World War I veteran, selected a casket to serve as America's Unknown Soldier. The remaining three caskets were reburied in France, alongside other American service members – known and unknown.</p>
<p>Slide 5</p> <div data-bbox="110 604 524 835"> <p>HONORING THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90,000 people paid their respects on November 9-10 while Unknown Soldier lay in state in U.S. Capitol Burial ceremony on November 11, 1921 attended by thousands of people, including American political and military leaders, foreign dignitaries, veterans' groups, civic societies, and religious organizations Ceremony was broadcast over long-distance telephone lines to locations across the country Nationwide two minutes of silence to remember all those who had died  <p><small>The casket in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda before the Unknown Soldier on November 09, 1921 (JFK)</small></p> </div>	



TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

- Three men buried at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier have come to represent all unknown and missing American service members
- Tomb is a place for individual and collective mourning and a place to pay respects to the American military



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who have fought for the United States. For families and friends of service members whose remains have not been identified, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a place of personal mourning. For the millions of people from around the world who visit the Tomb each year, it is a place to pay respects to American military service in general.

Ask: Have you ever visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier? What did you think of the experience? What impression did it leave on you?

Slide 8

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER AND NATIONAL COMMUNITY

Excerpts:

- President Warren G. Harding's Address at the Burial of the Unknown Soldier, November 11, 1921
- "At the Shrine of an Unknown Soldier," New York Tribune, November 6, 1921

Be prepared to discuss:

- How the Unknown Soldier, Americans and American society were described
- How these descriptions relate to the American national community in 1921 and today

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When people in the past and today write about the Unknown Soldier, they often reveal their ideas about what it means to be an American through their imagined descriptions of him. You are going to read excerpts from documents related to the World War I Unknown Soldier to try to understand how people in the 1920s thought about American society and the Unknown Soldier. As you read these excerpts, use the worksheet to guide your note-taking. Be prepared to discuss how the documents described the Unknown Soldier, Americans and American society, and how these descriptions relate to the American national community at the time and today.

- In-Class Discussion: 30-40 minutes
 - After students have had time to read all the excerpts (it is recommended they do this at home to allow enough time), lead a discussion about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and how it relates to the American national community. During the discussion, students should point to specific words or phrases within the documents to support their claims. Depending on time and the direction students end up going, you may use some or all of the questions below.

Discussion Questions:

Values and Ideals

- In the documents you read, how did the authors imagine the Unknown Soldier? What assumptions were made about him? How do those assumptions about the Unknown Soldier reflect ideas about American society?
- What ideals were described? How did these reflect American values at the time? Which of these values do you still think of as "American?"

National Community

- In the documents you read, where did you see efforts to unite Americans?



- How do public events like the burial of the Unknown Soldier strengthen a national community? What aspects of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier do you think are particularly unifying?
- How was the American national community described in the excerpts similar to the American national community today? How was it different?
- What other places or events unify Americans today? How are they similar to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier? How are they different?

Paying Tribute

These questions are not directly related to the documents, but students may use them to consider these questions and draw conclusions.

- Why do you think so much effort was made to honor an unidentified soldier, instead of a high-ranking officer or highly decorated service member?
- Why do you think the U.S. government wanted to pay tribute to the Unknown Soldier at that time (1921)?
- Why do you think so many civilians wanted to pay tribute to the Unknown Soldier at that time (1921)?
- What else was happening in this time period that may have made the U.S. government concerned about strengthening the American national community?
- Why do you think the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier still receives so much respect in American society today?

Extension Questions:

These questions are not directly related to the idea of the American national community but may be interesting for your students to explore.

- How does learning more about the origins of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier affect your feelings about it?
- What does the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier or honoring the military mean to you today?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

- Learn more about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on the Arlington National Cemetery Education website.
- While we do not know anything about the life of the World War I Unknown Soldier, diaries and memoirs written by other World War I veterans can give insight into what he may have experienced. The Library of Congress has compiled a collection of these materials here: <https://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/wwi-diaries-memoirs.html>



PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?

Millions of people visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier each year to pay their respects to America's war dead. If you visit with your class, please prepare your students to maintain an attitude of silence and respect at the Tomb. You may also be interested in:

- A walking tour with information about unknown soldiers, how the United States military cares for those killed in battle, the Tomb and those who were involved in its construction
- Visiting the Memorial Amphitheater Display Room, at the top of the steps in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which has exhibits and displays related to the Tomb
- Participating in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which you may request here: <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Visit/Events-and-Ceremonies/Request-a-Ceremony>

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PRIMARY SOURCE EXCERPTS

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<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1921-11-06/ed-1/seq-55/>



IMAGES

Slide 2: Mother of four soldiers, who marched in parade in Boston, Massachusetts, carrying service flag containing two blue and two gold stars, January 21, 1919, National Archives.

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/31480764>

Slide 3: S.C. Coombs, Decoration Day at Arlington Cemetery, Troop 31 of the Boy Scouts, strewing graves of the unknown dead with flowers, May 30, 1919, National Archives.

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/86712944>

Slide 4: L'Agence Meurisse, Les honneurs militaires rendus au soldat inconnu dans la chapelle ardente, place de l'Hôtel de ville à Châlon sur Marne, October 24, 1921, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9053283k/f1.item.r=D%C3%A9part%20du%20Soldat%20inconnu%20am%C3%A9ricain%20pour%20les%20%C3%89tats-Unis>

Slide 5: Crowd at burial ceremony of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery, November 11, 1921, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/91730747/>

Slide 6: Elizabeth Fraser, Fall Foliage 2018, November 2, 2018, Arlington National Cemetery.

<https://flic.kr/p/NV7UkF>

Slide 7: Harris & Ewing, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, 1922, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016891822/>