



**The value and role of cemeteries:  
Designing a possible methodology for  
teaching heritage to History learners**

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# 1. Introduction

- When I considered a topic for this conference, I thought of something of a more hands-on approach for teachers to use in their classrooms
- Teachers tell me they want to know more of the “how” of “doing” heritage -without spending a lot of money on expensive excursions
- This was confirmed in a National Survey in 2006: Grade 10 History teachers asked for more training in *oral history, to teach heritage and assessment, heritage assignments and heritage site visiting*
- Heritage is an important part of History teaching: It links History learners to the reality of the world around them and the influence of the past on the present
- Through heritage teaching learners discover their uniqueness as well as their common ground and in this manner it promotes social cohesion, mutual understanding and unity

## 2. Aim of Presentation

- To investigate the role and value that cemeteries can play in designing a possible step by step methodology for History teachers to teach heritage
- Many publications investigate heritage as a phenomenon but scant attention is paid to the range of methods that can be utilised to investigate the varied dimensions of heritage, and how interpretations can be constructed from the scope and nature of the available data.

### 3. Heritage conceptualised

- Heritage is a broad, multi- and interdisciplinary field of study that can be used in different contexts
- Roots of the word “heritage”: it originates from the Greek word *klerosomos*, meaning to *obtain by inheritance*
- Heritage can thus be seen as “something valued” that is transmitted or handed down from one generation to the next for safekeeping
- Tangible sites (monuments, buildings landscapes, etc.)
- Intangible (language, values, customs , spiritual practices, etc.)

### 3. Heritage conceptualised

- Heritage can also be constructed when the past is interpreted for the creation and reinforcement of “new” group identities on which future expectations can be built
- Thus then concept of heritage values the past and is concerned with the manner through which the past is constructed in the present for the future
- When “doing” heritage learners will develop important skills that will aid them to remake the past and enable them to (re)define and identify future heritage. In this way on-site heritage studies is a dynamic process with future implications for lifelong learning
- David Uzzell (2009): *We construct meanings from the heritage and we construct ourselves from it as well*

## 4. Heritage and the NCS

- Heritage is embedded in the NCS and is part and parcel of History teaching
- Foundation Phase (R-3) as part of SS:
  - ✓ expected from learners to tell tell stories about their own lives and the lives of their families
  - ✓ to share their social experiences, which are peculiar to their particular culture group's food, clothing, games, toys, music, dance and works of art
  - ✓ knowledge must also be demonstrated regarding national symbols, places of historical interest and stories about different historical events that are being celebrated
  - ✓ Learners are also afforded the opportunity to do narratives on topics and personal possessions that they cherish

## 4. Heritage and the NCS

- Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-9) as part of SS:
  - ✓ The emphasis is placed on the history of the province, the district and local area
  - ✓ Concepts “heritage and identity” as such are also specified for Grade 5
  - ✓ Learners are encouraged to construct a school or community archive and to complete a project that is based on oral history
- Senior Phase (Grades 7-9) as part of SS:
  - ✓ Heritage is, amongst others, reflected in the early hominid discoveries in South Africa, the development of man in Southern Africa and rock art as a communication medium of the hunter-gatherers.
- FET Phase (Grades 10-12):
  - ✓ ‘Grave sites’ are referred to as a heritage memorial
  - ✓ Heritage as an independent 4<sup>th</sup> LO
  - ✓ A heritage investigation as part of CASS assignments



## 5. The value of local cemeteries as heritage sites

- It reveals the public face of the people of a community or local area
- It provides important personal information on earlier inhabitants: Names and surnames, dates of birth and death, the reason of death, the trade and occupation and country of birth, infant and child mortality rates, the size of families, the effects of epidemics and the impact of war, the name of the stonecutter, the types of stone used in the head and footstones, the nature of the epitaph, etc.
- It combines the concrete outside world and the inside classrooms to a more personal experience with the learning material
- It is activity-based and learner-centred and creates numerous opportunities for group and enquiry-based activities – in accordance with the OBE approach

## 5. The value of local cemeteries as heritage sites

- Learners will acquire and demonstrate valuable historical skills when analysing, interpreting, synthesising and evaluating the relevant data - learners become apprentice historians
- The value of “doing” heritage in local cemeteries helps learners to become more aware of the contribution that each culture group made in the inception and development of their community
- This awareness helps learners to develop a more inclusive and common sense of belonging with regard to the people in his/her particular community or local area
- “Doing “ heritage in cemeteries exposes learners to history’s interrelationship with oral history and other subject disciplines such as geology, geography, archaeology, genealogy and tourism

## 6. The planning and preparation for a visit to a local cemetery

- Administrative and logistical
  - ✓ Obtaining the necessary permission from the principal and the cemetery authorities (some cemetery grounds are closed for day visitors)
  - ✓ Keep an accurate register of all the learners that will partake in the visit
  - ✓ Date and time of departure and arrival
  - ✓ The signing of indemnity forms by the parents
  - ✓ Appropriate provision and support for learners with special needs
  - ✓ Stationary and other equipment (including a first aid kit)
  - ✓ Enough staff to accompany the learners during the visit (student teachers )

## 4. The planning and preparation for a visit to a local cemetery

### Teacher –learner planning

- ✓ Visit to a cemetery must not be seen as a pleasure trip where no
- ✓ “work” will be done. Well planned structured activities are essential, which must be designed by the teacher and the learners before the time
- ✓ As a first step : Teacher should make certain of the history of the particular region in which the local community sorts
- ✓ This knowledge will provide the teacher with a total picture of the most important events, and enable him/her to distinguish what was peculiar or unique to the particular community and which events are shared with other communities on national level
- ✓ The knowledge on the region can then be used to orientate the learners prior to the visit in respect of the place and role cemeteries played in the history of their community

## 6.The planning and preparation for a visit to a local cemetery

- ✓ A next step will be to formulate the LO's en AS's that need to be attained with the visit to the cemetery
- ✓ Co-involved learners in the design and writing of the assessment criteria and decisions on who the assessment agents will be

## 7. A possible methodology

- Instead of the learners reporting to school at the beginning of the school day, it can be arranged that all the learners meet at the particular cemetery (this will minimise the financial expenses as well as the administrative and logistical arrangements)
- Where practically possible and if time permits, an additional cemetery close by can also be visited; one that is older or which represents another culture group
- A method that could be followed is to design a cemetery worksheet. Both the teacher and the learners can be instrumental in the development thereof
- Groups consisting of four learners each can then complete the worksheet after each group has been allocated a particular section of the cemetery

## 7. A possible methodology

- For time not unnecessarily wasted during the visit, it is essential that the teacher, and where possible also the other staff members that might act as facilitators, visit the particular cemetery before the time to demarcate each group's area
- Before the excursion takes place, it is also important that the teacher should discuss the worksheet with the learners and facilitators so that everyone knows exactly what is expected

## 7. A possible methodology

- The worksheet should make provision for:
  - ✓ Activities that are aimed at the attainment of the formulated LO's
  - ✓ A systematic and clear layout with a high degree of technical care
  - ✓ Design a variety of activities that takes into consideration the level of development of the particular learners
  - ✓ Open and close ended questions that will allow the learners to develop different historical skills
  - ✓ Activities that make provision for the integration of the different subject disciplines
  - ✓ The assessment instrument together with the assessment criteria that are going to be applied
  - ✓ An opportunity for reflection at the end of the visit
  - ✓ Follow-up activities



## 7. A possible methodology

- An example of what a worksheet for Grade 5 learners can look like for a visit to a cemetery
- Can be adapted depending on the age and level of development of the learners

Our group consists of the following learners:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. A possible methodology

### A. General information regarding the cemetery that is being visited

1. What is the name of the cemetery that is being visited?
2. How many graves are in the area that has been allocated to your group?
3. Which gravestone is the oldest and which is the most recent one?

### B. People buried in the cemetery

1. How many gravestones bear the same surname?
2. Can your group identify family plots?
3. If so, explain how you would go about identifying family plots

## 7. A possible methodology

4. Where available, write down information from gravestones that reveal the cause of death
5. Look at gravestones with men's names and those with women's names on it. Why does your group think the gravestones of women in some instances say: "Cecilia, wife of (her husband's name)"? What might this tell you about the role and status of men and women over time?
6. Calculate the average age of death for each decade. Make use of the following table (chart) to help you with the calculations

## 7. A possible methodology

Decade					
AGE	NUMBER OF FEMALES	NUMBER OF MALES	AGE	NUMBER OF FEMALES	NUMBER OF MALES
0-6			51-55		
6-10			56-60		
11-15			61-65		
16-20			66-70		
21-25			71-75		
26-30			76-80		
31-35			81-85		
36-40			86-90		
41-45			91-95		
46-50			96-100		

## 7. A possible methodology

7. Now use the information that you have written down on the chart and answer the following questions:

- 7.1 From the age of 21, who died the most over the decades? Give possible reasons for your answer
- 7.2 At what age did most people die? Give a possible reason for this.
- 7.3 Has the number of children who died when they were under the age of five changed over the decades? If so, what might a reason be for this?

### C. Residents from other countries

1. Complete the following table that deals with residents from other countries that are buried in this cemetery

## 7. A possible methodology

FULL NAME OF INDIVIDUAL	COUNTRY OF DESCENT

Which country did most of these people come from?

Why might this be so?







## 7. A possible methodology

### D. Materials used to build gravestones

TYPE OF STONE	NUMBER OF GRAVESTONES
Granite	
Marble	
Limestone	
Concrete	
Metal	
Wood	
Bricks	
Other	

1. Which materials for gravestones were used most and least?  
Can you think of a possible reason why some types of stone were use more often than others?

## 7. A possible methodology

SYMBOLS USED FOR DEATH		
	Hourglass	
	Flowers	
	Wings	
	Weeping willow	
	Cross	
	Bible	

### E. Symbols of death

The following are examples of few symbols that appear on gravestones



## 7. A possible methodology

1. Make a  $\checkmark$  every time you see one of these symbols on the gravestones. In the spaces at the bottom of the chart, draw the other death symbols that you encounter but which do not appear on this list
2. Which symbol is used most? What might the reason be for this?

### F. Epitaphs

1. What does your group think an epitaph is?
2. Find an epitaph that you feel discloses most about the character of the deceased
3. Locate four gravestones representing different centuries. How did the use and what is said on epitaphs change over the centuries?
4. Write down the wording of two epitaphs that depicts humour and religious belief respectively

## 7. A possible methodology

### G. Symbolism and inscriptions

1. Look at the different exterior shapes of the gravestones. Choose any three shapes and say what you think each one symbolises (eg, a gravestone in the shape of a cross represents the traditional Christian symbol)
2. Give any two reasons why the type of lettering on the tombstones differs from time to time

### H. Reflection

1. What did your group enjoy most and also least during your visit to the cemetery? Give a reason for your answer each time.

## 7. A possible methodology

- The follow-up period

For the reinforcement and consolidation of the skills

Three stages:

Immediate stage:

- Learners discuss with their classmates what they have experienced and seek answers to the problems they might have encountered
- Teacher summarises the main findings of the different groups and rectify any misunderstandings that might exist
- In this stage it is also important to apply the assessment criteria for group assessment which were designed prior to the excursion to assess whether the formulated LO's were attained

## 7. A possible methodology

### Intermediate stage

- Can be an opportunity for creative self-expression were learners can put together a general display of graphs, photographs and sketches accompanied by written texts, which will contribute to a total picture of the heritage visit
- These efforts can be exhibited at a place in the school for all the learners to see

### The long-term stage

- The follow-up work can consist of further follow-up research projects, which will arise from the information already gathered and through which new knowledge will be generated

## 8. Conclusion

- The value of a visit to a heritage site like a local cemetery cannot be overstated. A well planned trip with proper instruction prior to the occurrence, followed by a methodology where learners are actively busy “to do” heritage, offer them insights and perspectives, which is not possible in the traditional setting of a classroom
- When locally rooted, “heritage grows from the bottom up” It helps learners to remake their past by broadening and deepening their understanding not only of their own heritage, but also of that of other distinctive ethnical cultures.
- Research evidence proves that people first identify almost solely with their own heritage before identifying on a much larger scale with a broader multi heritage
- A shared past will in the end contribute to a sense of pride that will eventually cherish the ideal of a common South African heritage and identity
- Only then heritage will no longer be abused as a vehicle to strengthen the position of a dominant community or ruling party