



VIRTUAL  
FIELD TRIP

## The City of U.S.: A Virtual Field Trip to Washington, D.C. Educator Companion Guide

### Overview

The City of U.S.: A Virtual Field Trip to Washington, D.C., was created to help upper elementary and middle school students discover, explore, celebrate, and learn more about the history, culture, artifacts, and significance of the U.S. capital city. During this Virtual Field Trip, you and your students will explore:

- The White House
- The U.S. Capitol Building
- The Supreme Court
- The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
- Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

This guide will help you foster discussion with your students before, during, and after you watch. After viewing, student teams will draw upon information from the Virtual Field Trip to draft a proposal for a new monument, memorial, or museum for the National Mall that reflects important themes, both past and present.

### Educator Background

Washington, D.C. has a complex, rich, and symbolic history. As it is today, Washington, D.C. became the site of the nation's capital as a result of a compromise between Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson all the way back in 1790. Since then, the current site has been the permanent location for the federal government and was personally selected by George Washington. At the time, the location was intended to unify northern and southern states.

Washington asked Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who had moved to America to fight in the Revolutionary War, to help design the new capital city. L'Enfant's design for the nation's capital was intended to reflect American democratic principles. Examples include how the U.S. Capitol Building, not the home of the President, is a prominent point on top of a large hill overlooking the Potomac River. The new Capitol Building would become the focal point of the entire city. L'Enfant also included a large open walking area that was accessible to all citizens. This space became the National Mall, the site of milestone civic events—including the 1963 March on Washington—as well as national celebrations such as Inauguration Day and Independence Day.<sup>1</sup>

Free and enslaved African Americans were also instrumental in the planning and construction of the new capital city. Maryland's Benjamin Banneker, a brilliant surveyor, inventor, scientist, and farmer, served on the team of surveyors that laid down forty stones marking the boundaries of the federal district.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-brief-history-of-pierre-lenfant-and-washington-dc-39487784/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/places/sw-9-intermediate-boundary-stone-of-the-district-of-columbia.htm/index.htm>



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EDUCATION

## Key Learning Objectives

- Understand how and why places have a special meaning.
- Analyze democratic ideals and their relationship to sites and symbolism in Washington, D.C.
- Explain how key sites in Washington, D.C. help tell the story of the American people.

## Compelling Questions

- Why do countries have capital cities?
- How does Washington, D.C. reflect the story of all Americans?
- How is the United States still working toward a “more perfect Union”?

## Materials

- Pen/Pencils
- Handout 1: The Capital City
- Handout 2: Washington, D.C. Tour Notes and Reflection
- Handout 3: Proposing a New Monument, Memorial, or Museum

## Before the Virtual Field Trip Activity

### Overview

Students will prepare for the Virtual Field Trip by building their understanding of Washington, D.C. and reflecting on why it has such an important meaning to the American story.

### Procedure

1. Ask students to name places in their communities where they could visit to gather information or learn about the past. Ask students to cite examples of information they can learn by visiting the places they mentioned. After listing examples, ask students to consider why Washington, D.C. might be a good place to learn about the history of the United States.
2. Explain that nearly all of the world's countries and each of the 50 U.S. states have capital cities, and Washington, D.C. is the capital city of the United States. Challenge students by asking the question: What makes a capital city different than other cities?
3. Drawing upon students' prior knowledge, use Handout 1: The Capital City to identify important buildings, monuments, memorials, or artifacts that are located in Washington, D.C. Next, ask students to brainstorm important events and activities that occur in Washington, D.C. because it is the nation's capital.
4. Invite students to share out some of their ideas and encourage students to collect examples based on shared responses.



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5. Ask students, either in think-pair-share or in full class discussion, the questions below.
  - This can be an opportunity to establish that important decisions are made in Washington, D.C. that impact the history and current state of the country. These might include passing laws that give people rights, going to war, etc. Students may also mention that Washington, D.C. is a place where citizens go to try to influence decisions that the government makes by using rights granted to them in the Constitution.
  - Why do you think a capital city such as Washington, D.C. might be a good place to learn about the past?
  - How might the landmarks in Washington, D.C. reflect a shared American story and identity?
6. Share with students that they are about to build on their understanding by watching and learning from *The City of U.S.: A Virtual Field Trip to Washington, D.C.*

## During the Virtual Field Trip Activity

### Overview

As students view the Virtual Field Trip, they will record notes about each stop on their journey through the nation's capital and reflect on how the places they visit contribute to a shared national narrative and identity.

### Procedure

1. Before viewing, distribute Handout 2: Washington, D.C. Tour Notes and Reflection. Direct students to complete the notetaking organizer for documenting information about each site on the trip. Encourage students to review the questions before watching and remind them that they should be prepared to share a few things that were important to them as they watched.
2. By completing the organizer, students will answer two questions about each stop: "Why do people visit this place?" and "How does this site reflect the story of America?"
3. After viewing, allow students time to complete the reflection portion of the handout; this will help with the next activity.

## After the Virtual Field Trip Activity

### Overview

Students will reflect on the Virtual Field Trip and work together to consider what new monument, memorial, or museum should be created to sit on the National Mall.





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## Procedure

1. Invite students to share responses as a class or in small groups. Encourage students to listen carefully to their classmates' responses and consider what additions they can make to their own notes.
2. Share with students that since they have toured several important places in and around Washington, D.C. and discussed the symbolism and meaning that make them special, they will now have a chance to suggest their own additions to the National Mall.
3. Instruct students that they will be working in small groups (of 2-3) to propose a new monument, memorial, or museum to sit on the National Mall.
  - The proposal should represent a person, group, or event that has made an important and positive contribution to the shared American story.
  - When they design it, the site should be rich in symbolism and reflect the person, group, or event's importance.
  - Keep in mind that a monument is built to honor a person, group, or special event. A memorial is built to remember someone or a group that has passed.
4. Distribute Handout 3: Proposing a New Monument, Memorial, or Museum. Encourage students to share ideas and to listen carefully to other group members' ideas. It may be helpful to provide breaks between the three phases of design for students to ask questions or share ideas.
5. When students have completed all three phases of the activity, and if time allows, encourage students to share their proposals with their classmates. This could be a fun and engaging way to reflect on the shared American story and tap into students' creativity.

## Frameworks

### The College, Career, and Civic Life Framework

As students view the Virtual Field Trip, they will record notes about each stop on their journey through the nation's capital and reflect on how the places they visit contribute to a shared national narrative and identity.

- D2.Civ. 1.3-5 Distinguish the responsibilities and powers of government officials at various levels and branches of government and in different times and places.
- D2.Civ. 14.3-5 Illustrate historical and contemporary means of changing society.
- D.3.3-5 Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling evidence.

### Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy

Theme #2: We the People

- What does U.S. history reveal about the aspirations and tensions captured by the motto E pluribus unum?

Theme #3: The Changing Landscape

- How has the geographic, social, economic, and political landscape of the U.S. changed over time?



## Handout 1: The Capital City

<p>What buildings, monuments, memorials, or artifacts can you find in Washington, D.C.?</p>	<p>What important and symbolic activities or events have taken place in Washington, D.C.?</p>
<p>Why do you think a capital city such as Washington, D.C. might be a good place to learn about the past?</p>	
<p>How might landmarks in Washington, D.C. reflect a shared American story and identity?</p>	



## Handout 2: Washington, D.C. Tour Notes and Reflection

Location	Why do people visit this site?	How does it reflect a part of the story of America?
The White House		
The U.S. Capitol Building		
The Supreme Court		
The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial		
Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier		
The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum		

### Reflection:

What common symbols or themes were visible as you watched? How might these add to your understanding of the American story?



## Handout 3: Proposing a New Monument, Memorial, or Museum

### Phase 1

With your group, brainstorm potential people, groups, or events that you think deserve to be honored with a site on the National Mall. Remember to keep in mind that they should represent an important and positive contribution to the American story.





## Phase 2

As you finalize your selection, provide a few reasons why this person, group, or event was chosen. Be sure to highlight contributions, impact, and significance.

**Why does this person, group, or event deserve this recognition?**

**Reason # 1**

**Reason # 2**

**Reason # 3**





### Phase 3

Use the following space to design a rough sketch of what your site will look like. As you design your site, consider the important contributions the person, group, or event made. Remember that the monuments, memorials, and museums are designed with attention to symbols and meaning.

A large, empty rectangular area outlined with a blue dotted line, intended for a rough sketch of a site design.

### Reflection:

What important symbols are present in your design? How does your design reflect the positive impact of the person, group, or event?