

The Monuments Men of World War II Were a Long Time Ago. Why Does This Matter?

The Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Division was created during a war that occurred nearly 70 years ago. Why do the actions of the Monuments Men remain important today? What can we learn from the Monuments Men as the world's cultural heritage continues to be threatened because of armed conflict? What other kinds of challenges threaten the survival of cultural heritage?

OBJECTIVE: Students will develop an understanding of how meaning is attached to objects by considering the importance of objects in their families and communities. From there, they will make connections to the setting of WWII and the actions of the Monuments Men to protect and safeguard cultural heritage. They will then apply the learning to current and future settings.

GRADE LEVEL: 7-12

COMMON CORE STANDARDS:

ELA Anchor Standards for Reading:

CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Anchor Standards in Speaking and Listening:

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Literacy in History/Social Studies:

This lesson is aimed at meeting the Key Ideas and Details component and the Integration of Knowledge and Ideas component and is accessible for students in grades 7-12.

TIME REQUIREMENT: One class period for discussion.
Extra time for conducting research exercise, shares, written reflections, and enrichment activities.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Ask students what is most important to them. Put responses on the board. Typical answers include family, friends, money, clothes, social networking sites, music, cars, their electronic devices, and sports. Keep generating the list until responses include the United States, a country of heritage, religious beliefs, and community affiliations. Review the range of responses. Students might spontaneously rank-order the list or draw distinctions about importance, but don't impose any framework that values one response over another.

New responses may emerge from the conversation. If students provide responses such as freedoms of speech and religion, duty to country, or protecting the earth's resources, point out how these attachments are fundamentally different from attachments to money, clothes, etc. Otherwise, introduce these ideas and discuss.

To further spark discussion, ask students to select objects from their lives that they would like to pass on to their own families some day. Are there heirlooms that their families value? Photographs? Stories? Ask students to imagine what refugee families might wish to take, if possible, when forced to leave their homeland countries. Ask students what they know about the items their families brought with them when they came to live in the U.S.

Ask students to look at the collaborative class list and think about their answers in terms of the following questions:

What do you want to protect?

Are there objects you want to safeguard?

Would you fight for these things? To what extent? Why?

Are objects worth protecting? Are ideas worth protecting?

Which monuments and other cultural landmarks in the United States deserve safeguards and protections?

Responses to questions may be written or oral, per classroom needs.

2. Assign the short overview about the Monuments Men for homework the night before or to start off this part of the lesson.

Introduce the Monuments Men. Show one or more of the newsreels available on [The Monuments Men Education Site](#). You can also link to them here, via YouTube.

<i>Goering, Art, & Neuschwanstein</i>	http://youtu.be/koA4a5TyDPw
<i>Berlin, Berchtesgaden, Buchenwald</i>	http://youtu.be/2T2iTZqaB4
<i>Merkers Salt Mine (British)</i>	http://youtu.be/9hISLhZyzWg
<i>James Rorimer Receives a Medal</i>	http://youtu.be/-rJlq1IKUz0

Review and discuss the significance of their work during and in the years immediately following WWII. What were the motivations of the Monuments Men in protecting landmarks and objects? Were they protecting these works because they were expensive and represented the interests of the rich and powerful? Who was to benefit from the protections and subsequent actions of the Monuments Men? (Share the fact that by the time the last Monuments Men departed Europe in 1951, they had overseen the return of more than five million stolen items.)

Ask students to reflect on the importance of protecting cultural artifacts, great and small. Guide a conversation framed around the need to protect the cultural heritage of all people.

3. Ask students to consider how the example of the Monuments Men can be applied to the present. Push them to make connections to their knowledge of current world events. What recent conflicts can they recall where actions similar to those in World War II might be applied today? (Responses may include the Arab Spring, plus related subsequent clashes in the region involving Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Mali, as well as other countries in the Middle East and North Africa.)

Introduce Major (Ret.) Corine Wegener, Arts, Monuments, and Archives Officer, 352d Civil Affairs Command. Wegener was deployed to Baghdad during the 2003 Iraq War. As a modern-day Monuments

Woman, Wegener discusses the MFAA Monuments Men and the lesson their example teaches us in a short clip available here: <http://youtu.be/JQgLnnPN1hc>.

(Provide background information about the Iraq conflict as needed for classroom goals.)

Get student reaction to the clip and discuss.

Note: The MFAA was always a small subset of the Civil Affairs and Military Government Division and it remains the case today. When the US ratified the 1954 Hague Convention in September 2008 (see part 4 exercise) it was with the understanding that Civil Affairs retains responsibility for Chapter 1, Article 7. Modern day Monuments Men still fall squarely within the Army Civil Affairs branch.

4. Introduce an assignment to research current threats to cultural heritage. Divide the class into two groups. Both groups will begin at the UNESCO website. <http://en.unesco.org/>

Direct the first group to research the Hague Convention of 1954. Its full text can be read on the UNESCO website. The group should also research the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) using the UNESCO website as the starting point.

Secondary websites can support student investigations.

Direct the second group to read about the World Heritage Convention. In addition to general learning about the convention, instruct students to explore the World Heritage List.

After allowing time for research, bring the two groups together and have them share their findings with the class. What is the primary focus of the conventions? Discuss similarities and differences. Is armed conflict the only threat to cultural heritage? What steps can be taken to protect cultural heritage?

ENRICHMENT:

These questions and exercises extend the learning.
Use for in-class discussion or assign as written work.

Why do we need to protect cultural heritage? Is it our obligation?
Is the obligation to the past, the future, or both?

“The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross.”
Comment on this statement.

Review the U.S. entries on the World Heritage List. Also study the
Criteria for Selection. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>
Imagine the loss of any of these U.S. sites and discuss the impact.

Select a World Heritage site that is not in the United States and
reflect on its importance.

Also see Heritage in Danger. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/158/> Two World Heritage sites have lost their
designations. Direct students to research the identities of these former World Heritage properties and the
reasons for revoked status.

Direct students to research the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan; reflect on the significance of the
loss.



Major (Ret.) Corine Wegener, Arts, Monuments, and Archives Officer, 352d Civil Affairs Command, in a 2003 recovery mission for the Iraqi Jewish Archive. Photo used with permission of Corine Wegener.

Direct students to select a current hot spot in the world and research the associated cultural heritage challenges and responses.

How do we meet the needs of the future without sacrificing the importance of the past and safeguarding history? How do students interpret the struggle to preserve the past and simultaneously meet the needs of the future? Is balance a goal? Is it possible?

Does an emphasis on a painting, building, ritual object, or some other object stolen or destroyed during conflict somehow diminish the deaths, the annihilation of communities, the loss of families, and the destruction of towns and cities? Why or why not? Explain.

Ask students to read and reflect on this quote:

“At UNESCO, we believe there is no choice to make between saving lives and saving cultural heritage. Protecting heritage is inseparable from protecting populations, because heritage enshrines people’s identities. Heritage gives people strength and confidence to look to the future—it is a force for social cohesion and recovery. This is why protection of heritage must be an integral part of all humanitarian efforts.”

Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO
September 25, 2013

http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/emergency_red_list_of_syrian_antiquities_at_risk_is_launched_in_new_york/back/9597/#.Ulkh7NLOnQp

ASSESSMENT:

Group discussion, essays or reports (if assigned); students can also be instructed to write short reflections that address the central questions raised in the classroom. Invite students to make final observations about safeguarding the legacy of the past that align with classroom teaching goals.

The Monuments Men Education Site has an interactive feature, *Become a Monuments Man or Woman*.

Enrich classroom learning and honor the heroic efforts of the Monuments Men by participating in a national conversation about our country’s cultural treasures. Invite students to select one cultural, artistic, or architectural treasure from your hometown that represents your community. This treasure should be significant for members of your community and exemplify a specific story, cultural trait, or historical event. How you choose it is up to you. Submit an image of that treasure plus a brief explanation of its importance. Descriptions should be between 50 and 75 words. Remember to include its location!

This lesson was prepared by the Monuments Men Foundation educators.

<http://www.monumentsmenfoundation.org>

Brief Overview of the Monuments Men

At the outbreak of WWII in Europe, museum curators and scholars on both sides of the Atlantic began to take steps to safeguard their most prized collections. In addition to potential danger from air raids and ground combat, these significant cultural landmarks and artworks were also threatened by Adolf Hitler's aggressive looting policy. Hitler coveted many of Europe's greatest masterpieces for his future Führermuseum in Linz, Austria. It was to be the largest and most magnificent art museum in the world, filled with what Hitler believed to be the finest art of Europe. Hermann Goering, the pompous and ostentatious military leader who was Hitler's second-in-command for most of the war, was also on the hunt to amass treasures for his private art collection.



U.S. GIs recover stolen art hidden in Neuschwanstein Castle in Schwangau, Germany. Monuments Man Captain James Rorimer supervises. In addition to art, furniture, and other valuable objects, the Monuments Men also found Nazi card catalogues and documents detailing the items they seized from prominent French Jewish collectors such as the Rothschild family. Nazi records helped the MFAA officers in their efforts to return stolen works to their rightful owners. Source: NARA: RG 239-RC-14-5.

Through the duration of the war, Rembrandts, Raphaels, Vermeers, Da Vincis and millions of other valuable pieces were plundered and hidden, as they awaited their eventual arrival at the Führermuseum. Other stolen pieces were on display at Goering's residences, and in holdings earmarked for his massive personal cache.

Responding to this impending crisis, the American Council of Learned Societies drew up lists and prepared maps displaying the most culturally significant and important monuments and artifacts across Europe. These pieces were priorities to be protected from destruction, if military necessity allowed, and safeguarded from looters.

The Council, along with a group of Harvard professors and faculty, began to devise protection plans as the United States military planned an invasion of Europe. The proposal received approval from President Roosevelt in June of 1943, and the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (aka the Roberts Commission) was officially established in August.

The commission was charged to work as closely as possible with the US military, and special Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) officers – a new kind of military personnel -- began training for the front lines. Well over the age of most military men and women, these primarily American and British art experts were eager to begin their work, keenly aware that each passing day brought further destruction to the world's cultural heritage.

As the Monuments Men arrived in Italy and France, understaffed and with minimal budgets, they began to survey the damage to monuments and historic buildings. Their goal, as MFAA officer Frederick Hartt outlined, was "to reach all important artistic objects as rapidly as the progress of military options permitted, make a complete survey of the condition of the monuments and collections...and report at once on their findings."¹ Monuments Men needed to be resourceful and quick-thinking. Upon arriving at their various destinations, Monuments Men officers coordinated initial repairs to ensure no further damage would occur to these culturally important structures and to prevent complete destruction.

MFAA officers also embarked upon an extraordinary treasure hunt to recover countless stolen works of art. The Nazi plunder of art was a meticulous and organized endeavor. The Monuments Men were set with the task of retracing Nazi footsteps in order to recover prized and priceless collections. In Paris, the Nazis used the Jeu de Paume, a small museum adjacent to the Louvre as the primary clearinghouse for art stolen from French private collections owned by Jewish families. Rose Valland, a quiet Jeu de Paume employee, was allowed to stay at her post after the museum was taken over. Throughout the French occupation, she secretly documented stolen works of art as they were processed and shipped out to the Reich. She later supplied these lists and her intimate knowledge of Nazi looting to MFAA officers after they arrived in Paris.



MFAA officers discuss how to remove the large Ghent Altarpiece from the mine at Altaussee. Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

These lists aided the Monuments Men in tracking down the stolen art. As they moved with the advancing Allied forces across Germany, the Monuments Men discovered much of this cultural material carefully hidden in remote repositories, such as castles, countryside villas, and salt mines. One of the largest caches was discovered deep underground in a mine in Altaussee, Austria, where over 6,000 works were concealed until the end of the war. Upon their arrival, Monuments Men officers discovered the entrances to the mine had been blasted, and they feared the works secreted there might have been destroyed. They later found that only the entryways were damaged. Artwork and other objects stored deep below the ground were unharmed, but destruction from the blasts greatly hindered the process of removing objects from the mine. Maneuvering these rescued pieces through narrow passageways and out the mine shaft without sustaining additional damage proved to be one of the most daunting and challenging tasks faced by the MFAA.

Under the supervision of the MFAA officers, many of these artworks were returned to their rightful homes in the years following the war's end, both to museums and still-living private collectors. Damaged cultural landmarks, including Monte Cassino, the Campo Santo, and the Aachen Cathedral, were rebuilt. Thousands of artifacts were never claimed, however, and thousands of pieces could not be traced back to their original owners. Many Jewish art patrons and other collectors perished in the Holocaust, and the task of locating rightful heirs became – and remains – a complicated challenge.

Today, nearly seventy years later, many pieces with unclear provenance due to the events of WWII are in museum collections around the world. Although some museums and other organizations are taking steps to investigate rightful ownership and provide an open-access database of these materials to the public, more work needs to be done. And there are still missing artworks. Some great artistic treasures remain unaccounted for, and are perhaps still hidden in secret locations. The story of art during World War II is not yet over.

The heroic role the Monuments Men played during WWII also has great value for understanding the importance of taking protective actions during present and future armed conflicts around the world. For more information about the Monuments Men and their efforts to safeguard cultural heritage, visit www.monumentsmen.org.

¹ Hartt, Frederick. *Florentine Art Under Fire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, page 6.