

Historical Markers

How and why do we remember famous people who once lived in Chicago? How could my home be remembered someday?

Theme

This lesson is an introduction to studying the homes of significant individuals in our city. Using the home of one person from the *Chicago Tribute Markers of Distinction* map as a starting point, students will write creatively about the home of a famous Chicagoan.

Student Objectives

- describe in their own words how a home or other structure can be a “container of memories”
- identify the Marker of Distinction site nearest to their school on the map provided and summarize the honoree’s biographical information

Activities

- write creatively about the home of one famous Chicagoan and / or write creatively about their own home
- conduct independent research about the life of one famous Chicagoan
- *optional*: conduct a visual survey of the home of one famous Chicagoan

Type

- indoor, desktop activities
- opportunities for field studies / site visits

Timeframe

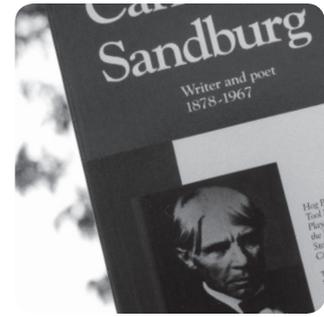
flexible - varies from one class session of 40 minutes to several sessions

Materials

- one copy of the map / brochure *Chicago Tribute Markers of Distinction* (available online: www.chicagotribute.org)
- **Handout A** - Conducting a Visual Survey of a Building
- research materials such as library books, encyclopedias, etc.
- *helpful, but not required*: internet access

Teacher Prep

- using the *Chicago Tribute Markers of Distinction* map / brochure, scope out a few historical markers close to your school or to student neighborhoods
- use **Handout A** either for your own reference or to distribute to students
- note the precautions and alternatives listed in the Background Information



Vocabulary

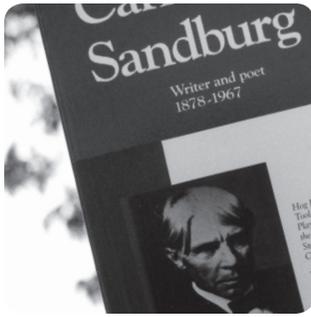
tribute public praise or honor

distinction recognizing a special quality

plaque / historical marker a public display that tells about a place

Discussion Points

- Why should we remember these people?
- What did they do or contribute to society? What made them significant?
- How do your students think these people were chosen to have plaques made for them?
- Do people who have done extraordinary things live in ordinary homes? What can we learn from their homes?
- What if homes could talk and tell us what they remember?



Interdisciplinary Connections

Social Sciences

Students can create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast their home with the home of a famous Chicagoan from the *Markers of Distinction* map.

Geography

Pair up students with copies of the *Markers of Distinction* map and have them give directions to each other from one site to another. Use map reading skills and cardinal directions such as north, south, east, and west. Example: Start at Benny Goodman's home, travel south on Kedzie, and then turn east on 79th Street to State Street. Where are you? (home of Mahalia Jackson)

Mathematics

Who is the oldest person shown in the *Markers of Distinction*? Who is the youngest person?

Fine Arts

Students can create a word and picture collage about their own home or the home of one famous Chicagoan.

Background Information for Teacher

The City of Chicago program called *Chicago Tribute Markers of Distinction* honors significant historical residents with a marker in their own neighborhoods. Most markers are placed in front of their home, but some are placed at their job site. These notable individuals were not necessarily born or buried in Chicago, but all lived here at some point in their lives. The individuals range from the famous such as guitarist McKinley “Muddy Waters” Morganfield to the lesser known such as librarian Vivian Harsh. The list of honorees is updated every few years, and a new map is printed.

The addresses of the commemorative plaques are shown on the easy-to-read map in the *Markers of Distinction* brochure. Photographs, dates of birth and death, and some biographical information appear for each honoree. The exact text of the plaques can be viewed online at www.chicagotribute.org.

This lesson goes beyond a standard biographical study of famous people of Chicago. It encourages students to look carefully at where the honorees lived, what type of structure they lived in, what the neighborhood is / was like, and what conclusions can be drawn from such information. (See the Visual Survey questions on **Handout A.**)

Ordinary structures become extraordinary because of the role they have played in the lives of people and in the changing ideas about architecture. These buildings act as “containers of memories” just as the homes of your students do.

Any building can teach us about a neighborhood, the lifestyle and needs of the residents, the construction methods, the economy, the values of a society, ethnic and cultural connections, and technology. This is a valuable lesson for students who may not recognize that their own home (however humble or grand) has something to teach them. Similarly, the sites highlighted in the *Markers of Distinction* map may not be architecturally significant, but we remember the structures because they were tied to a special individual. People who have done great things may have lived in ordinary buildings.

Choose the site or person to study that complements your curriculum. Are you focusing on a time period? On a specific group for Women's History Month or Black History Month? On a theme such as inventors, writers, architects, or musicians? Which sites are located near your school?

The word “home” (and not “house”) is used throughout the lesson on purpose. “Home” helps to encompass all different types of dwellings where students may live and indicates a relationship between the people and the building.

Important: Before sending your students out to study a particular site, please scope it out ahead of time. Although there is a plaque with text and a photo of the person at each Chicago site, in some cases the original building they lived or worked in has been demolished.

It is also important to note that most of the plaques are located in front of a current-day residence that is not open to the public. If your students visit these sites, please be respectful of those residents.

If your entire class is unable to visit the site you have chosen, travel there yourself and take several photographs of the building and the plaque. Copy these photographs onto transparencies or enlarge them on the copy machine to share with your class.

If your school is located outside Chicago, many possibilities still are open to you and your class. Contact your local historical society or museum for suggestions about residents who have made a significant contribution to your community. Keep an open eye for any historical markers that exist. The same visual survey questions and writing activities can be used to study any building.

Activity Procedures

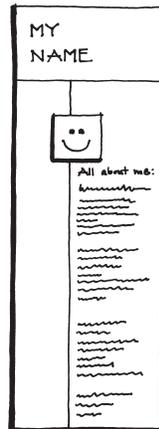
- 1 Display or project the *Chicago Tribute Markers of Distinction* map in your classroom and encourage your students to spend some time looking at the places and people noted. Talk about the people who lived in or near your neighborhood.
- 2 Choose (either you choose or the students choose) a person from the *Chicago Tribute Markers of Distinction* map.
- 3 Read about their accomplishments on the map or read the plaque text online at www.chicagotribute.org.
- 4 Have the students make a list of what else they may want to know about that person's life. Use library books, encyclopedias, the internet, etc. to find out more.
- 5 If at all possible, visit the site with your class and conduct a visual survey by using the questions provided on **Handout A**. Alternatively, conduct the visual survey from the display or projection of the photographs you have made of the site.
- 6 Use one or more of the Language Arts activity suggestions listed below.



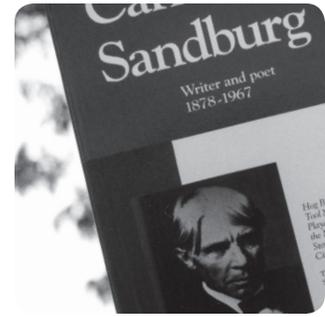
LEFT Former home of Carl Sandburg, 4646 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago. (CAF, 2002)



MIDDLE Marker of Distinction in front of the former home of Carl Sandburg, 4646 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago. (CAF, 2002)



RIGHT Sample of a student's own Marker of Distinction.



Resources

Streetwise Chicago: A History of Chicago Street Names, Don Hayner and Tom McNamee. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988.

Free additional updated copies of the *Markers of Distinction* map can be obtained from the Chicago Architecture Foundation or the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. More information about these organizations can be found on their websites.

Chicago Architecture Foundation
Education Department
224 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago IL 60604
312.922.3432

www.architecture.org

Chicago Department of
Cultural Affairs
78 East Washington Street
Chicago, IL 60602
312.744.6630

www.chicagotribute.org

Illinois Learning Standards and Benchmarks

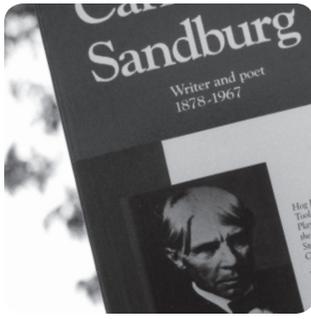
1A Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.

1.A.2b Clarify word meaning using context clues and a variety of resources including glossaries, dictionaries and thesauruses.

1B Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.

1.B.2c Continuously check and clarify for understanding (e.g., in addition to previous skills, clarify terminology, seek additional information).

3A Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and structure.



Illinois Learning Standards and Benchmarks (continued)

3.A.2 Write paragraphs that include a variety of sentence types; appropriate use of the eight parts of speech; and accurate spelling, capitalization and punctuation.

3B Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.

3.B.2b Establish central idea, organization, elaboration and unity in relation to purpose and audience.

3C Communicate ideas in writing to accomplish a variety of purposes.

3.C.2a Write for a variety of purposes and for specified audiences in a variety of forms including narrative, expository and persuasive writings.

4B Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

4.B.2a Present oral reports to audiences using correct language and nonverbal expressions for the intended purpose and message within a suggested organization format.

5C Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

5.C.2a Create a variety of print and nonprint documents to communicate acquired information for specific audiences and purposes.

16A Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.

16.A.2b Compare different stories about a historical figure or event and analyze differences in the portrayals and perspectives they present.

Suggestions for Language Arts activities in reading, writing, researching, and presenting

- Ask the students to imagine that in 100 years, a “marker of distinction” plaque will be placed in front of their home. Have them write the text that would answer questions such as: When were they born? When did they move into this home? What are the special characteristics about this home? What are the most important achievements in their lives? Why are they being remembered? In what ways have they helped their neighborhood or their city? Have them design the plaque and write the text. Students should include an illustration of themselves and their home to go along with text.
- Many of the people noted in the *Markers of Distinction* map moved to Chicago later in life. Have the students write a newspaper headline and article announcing that one of them has chosen to make Chicago their new home. Design and illustrate the front page of the newspaper. Answer questions such as: Why did they choose to move here? What talents did they bring to the city? Where did they move from?
- Have students imagine that the home of one of these famous Chicagoans could talk. What would it say? What memories would it have of that person living there? (Example: Does the home remember the warm summer evening that Muddy Waters sat out on the back porch and played his guitar for the neighborhood?) Have students write a descriptive essay or write an interview with the home about one of these memories.
- Have students imagine that their own home could talk. What would it say? What memories would it have of the student and the family living there? Have them write about this. Remind students that their own home is a “container of memories.”
- Have students read through several real estate ads in the newspapers, then write an ad either for their home or for the home of the famous Chicagoan they are studying. What are the special features about this home? Why would someone else want to live there?
- Have students write an imaginary interview with one of these famous Chicagoans about the specific features they like about their home, why they moved to Chicago, and why they like (or don't like) living here.

Extensions

- Draw the outline of the home on a large sheet of paper. Fill the inside of the home with one-sentence memories that the home has about the years when the famous Chicagoan lived there.
- Another type of “container of memories” is a time capsule. Have students imagine that they are making (or actually make) a time capsule to place inside the walls, foundation, or attic of their home to be opened in 50 years when another child is living there. Students can collect newspaper articles of the day, write about their favorite things, and include pictures and memories of their home.

Handout A

Conducting a visual survey of a building (also known as “reading” a building)

Observation

How many windows are located at the front of the building? Draw one example.

Is the main entrance to the building marked in a special way? How? Draw it.

How many stories tall is the building?

What kind of materials is the building made from? (wood, brick, concrete, steel?)

What is located on either side of this building?

Are any other structures attached to this building or does it stand by itself?

Does the building sit close to the street or is it set back?

Is the street busy and noisy or is it a quiet street?

Does the building have special ornamentation - none, some, a lot? Draw one example.

Does the home have any unique details? If so, draw one example.

Draw a sketch of the entire front side of the building.

What are some clues (such as a sign or cornerstone) to tell you what year it was built? When was it built?

Interpretation

What do you think was (or is) the function of this building?

Does this building look very similar or very different from those around it? How?

Do you think many families live in this building or just one family?

Is there a stoop or a porch? How do you think the people who lived here might have used it?

Are there any clues (besides the plaque) to let you know that a famous person lived or worked here?

Analysis

Why do you think the famous person you are studying chose to live here?

What would happen if the house could talk? What would it say?

What special memories about the famous person do you think this house contains?

If you could ask the house one question, what would you like to know?

What other information would you like to know about this person or their home?

Where could you go to locate information about this person or their home?

Who could you talk with to find out more information?

How could you let other people in the neighborhood know about this building and the person who lived or worked here?

