The Wall of Names

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Question of the Week
Why is freedom of expression important?

Key Comprehension Skill
Graphic Sources

Concept Words
memorial veterans designs
architects sculptors granite
ceremony moving reflected

Learning Goals
• Many soldiers have died to defend our freedoms.
• The Vietnam Veterans Memorial honors soldiers.
• Maya Lin designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
From 1965 to 1975, the United States sent American soldiers to Vietnam, a country in Asia. The soldiers went to Vietnam to fight in a war in that country. Many American and Vietnamese soldiers died in that war.

When the Vietnam War ended, people in the United States wanted to build a memorial. They wanted to remember the American soldiers who died in the war. **Veterans** of the Vietnam War began to collect money to build the memorial.

On July 1, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed a new law. The law would support the creation of a memorial. The law said that two acres of land in an area called the National Mall could be used for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

A group of veterans held a contest to decide what kind of memorial to build. All across the United States, artists, **architects**, and **sculptors** created **designs** for the memorial.

**veterans**: people who were in the military
**memorial**: something that honors, or remembers, people or events

**architects**: people who design buildings
**sculptors**: artists who make statues
**designs**: plans showing how something will be built
More than 1,400 designs were sent in to the contest! Some designs were from famous artists and architects. Others were from students.

The designs were displayed with numbers rather than names. This was so the judges couldn’t tell who created each design.

The judges spent four days looking at hundreds of good designs. They all agreed on one: number 1,026.

The winner of the contest was a young student. She was not a famous artist or architect. She was a 21-year-old architecture student named Maya Lin.

Maya’s design was simple and beautiful. It was a long, black wall shaped like the letter V. It was made of shiny granite. The names of the American soldiers who died or were missing in the war would be carved into the granite.

granite: hard rock used for buildings and monuments
The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was opened to the public on November 13, 1982. There were 150,000 people at the ceremony. Among them were many Vietnam War veterans.

Speakers at the ceremony thanked the veterans for their service to the country. Then, a fence guarding the wall was taken down. People moved closer to touch the names on the granite panels.

People stood silently looking at the wall. It was powerful and moving. The more people looked at it, they more they noticed. The shiny black granite reflected their faces. It reflected the grass and trees behind them. It reflected the blue sky and the white clouds.

reflected: gave back an image, like a mirror
moving: causing feelings or emotions

Each year, millions of people visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
Millions of people have visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. They stand together in silence, just as people did many years ago. Some leave gifts like flowers, flags, and photos as an expression of their feelings.

The memorial is a place to think and remember. Most of all, it is a place to honor and support the soldiers who served in the Vietnam War.

People leave letters, photos, and gifts at the wall.

### Talk About It

1. Why was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial built?

2. Why do you think people were surprised that Maya Lin won the design contest?

### Write About It

3. Write a paragraph or two about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Describe the memorial and explain what it means. Use the pictures in this book to help you.

### Extend Language

The suffix *-ful* means “full of.” For example, the word *joyful* means “full of joy.” What do the words *meaningful*, *powerful* and *thoughtful* mean?