

Title: Funerals and Burial Rites
Author/School: Kenneth Lacy, South High School
Course: Mathematics
Grade level: 9th
Standards met:

Introduction:

After examining these next five lessons, the students will be able to; use basic mathematical operations and computations; find percents; use graphs; plot points; and produce a written product.

Three (3) classes of 80 minutes each and a lunch makes a day. At the end of the unit, the learner will (TLW) be able to chronologically state and/or write several comparisons and differences between burial practices which migrated from West Africa to the South Carolina plantations; the South plantations to Charleston, South Carolina; and from South Carolina to Cleveland, Ohio.

This unit is done to give an understanding one's curiosity about deaths between West Africans and the Island people of South Carolina. We have wondered for years how our ancestors have dealt with it and what actually went on in that time.

Following is information researched by the Great Migration Project class of 2003. This information was obtained from books, interviews, oral histories, and pictures taken of experts in the know.

Our West African ancestors were a people of limited resources but were strong in their beliefs and spirits. The key terms listed should be discussed first as it will make the discussions easier and interesting. Examine with me some of the myths our ancestors had or believed concerning spirits of their deceased. They passed small children across the coffin or grave as to keep spirits from haunting or inhabiting the child. When the Hearst carrying the dead, family members would trot beside it rocking the hearse to set the spirit free. As we toured the Gullah historical trail of Charleston, we were told that colors red on rooftops and borders to windows blue were significant in warding off spirits. Some family members even buried a loved one's personal belongings in the grave with the deceased. It's been told that when a person died after being sick, loved ones would place their medicine in the coffin with the corpse or poured the medicine onto the grave to stress much continued wellness for the deceased.

Embalming came later but until then, our ancestors used coffee and turpentine to treat and preserve the corpse. While a few practices from the African slaves are still in existence today, even fewer can be traced to Cleveland, Ohio. If a death occurred on one of the sea islands, embalmers from Charleston would pack an overnight bag and carry everything needed to embalm with him and have the hearse sent to the home the next day. One mortician from Charleston said that he buried approximately 400 persons a year. The average cost is \$6000.00. Their Cleveland counterparts bury about 1000 persons per year at an average cost of \$7000.00. Cooling boards are still used today in the Cleveland area. That's a practice used by our ancestors and migrated to Charleston. On the plantation, if a person died at home, it remained there until the next

day. If the night was cool, it was placed on the porch under the watchful eye of a loved one. Those kept in the house were kept cool by fans. An autopsy was seldom ordered by African Americans. Usually when an autopsy was done, either it was due to a suspicious or sudden death. A license pathologist performs the autopsy. The dissecting usually takes about an hour to an hour and a half. The corpse can remain in the morgue for 3 months. Through this procedure a lot of new medicines have been discovered. It is determined that a cause of death is not always possible. As the examination is in progress, much care is given to properly label and store the various organs for further research and use. Once the coroner has issued a release of the corpse, it is placed in a cooler at 42^{0F} for short term storage. The corpses and organs stored for long term research are stored at 0^o F. This procedure is performed on both infants and adults. There are plastic containers used to store the organs. These containers when filled with organs are called “a man in a can”. The cost of an autopsy at the turn of the century was approximately \$250-\$300. Today in Cleveland an autopsy cost about \$1500.

Question For The Day

1. What is the difference between the minimum cost of an autopsy in Charleston and The ones performed in Cleveland?
2. What is the percentage increase in the number of annual burials done in Cleveland over Charleston?
3. Use the average minimum cost of a funeral in Charleston to calculate the annual
4. income.
5. Calculate the percentage increase of a funeral in Cleveland over Charleston.
6. Determine the average income a mortician makes in Charleston.
7. Culminating Activity: A comprehensive test will be administered to challenge

8. The mastery of this unit. Students will be expected to answer a variety of
9. questions (i.e. t/f, fill in the blank, multiple choice, etc.). Scoring on this test will be weighed by percents to total 100%.

Key Terms

Burial	Funeral customs	Praise House
Burial Parade	Going Home	Sea inlands
Burial Preparations	Gullah	Seeing Spirits
Cooling Board	Mourning	Setting up
Death Customs	Low Country	Rigor Mortis
Dignified	Embalm	Spread
Wreath	Wake	

10.

R A B U R I A L P R E P A R A T I O N S
S E E I N G S P I R I T S E D A R A P A
D B C C D G S M O T S U C L A R E N U F
E H I E I B O M Z F A M I L I E S E J I E S
A G O S P E L P U G N I T T I S A M B E
T F K N E T M Q R N A C I R F A F O U D
H O W O K I L P S O M E O N E U H R B U
C A B F P Q Y O H T A E D F O S N G I S
U T L O H Z L R N I D N O G C D E N A O
S T O L F O I H U B A Y L D M I R I L D
T R V K U R M I X B Y A X E W G A O P A
O A E S F G A E G A I T D T C N L G A W
M C Q T O W F T V R N R H A Q I A A R A
S K L S V X A S U C O B S E P F K O A T
T S O C Y D O B J M Z X U R D I B E D E
I E S U O H E S I A R P I C U E Z V E R
R E I N C A R N A T I O N E J D A K S L
I D S Z A T H B U R H A L P A R A D E S
O U S I E B O D J P T E P A D G R W X M
D B W E H G Y O I A C R E R H K Q V S T
E M B A L L M T E N K F T S E I L I A M A
G O F R K N L O R T S W L Q A Z X S W E
P D A G X E M W F H M W N U L J Y F V C

Bibliography

1. The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts. John Mitchell Vlach
2. The Last Miles of the Way: African American Homegoing Tradition 1890 to Present
3. Senator Herbert U. Fielding, Mortuary Director, Fielding Funeral Home, Interviewee who provided information concerning practices and burial rite customs of the Sea Islands and Charleston, South Carolina.
4. Slave Religion. Albert J. Raboteau