

MONUMENTS, MASCOTS & NAMING: TALKING ABOUT COMMUNITY & MEMORY

About this Guide

Monuments for individuals and events, the honorary names of schools, streets, or buildings, and the selection of team mascots have long been the focus of controversy and conflict. Even monuments that have been in parks for longer than anyone can remember, the ones we hardly notice at all, have become a source of sometimes contentious public discussion.

All of these choices ask important questions about the values that a community holds, how we remember the story of our past, and who we want to become together.

Every generation must confront these questions anew, as each brings their own perspectives. Not only that, but their views on an earlier generation's choices may shift as well.

Today this process raises many other contentious issues, such as race, class, and gender as well as regional identities and family histories. It can touch upon a person's own experiences and sense of self. Part of the issue is who gets to decide and whose voice is included.

Drawn from real-world cases, the dialogues outlined in this guide are designed to help you explore all these interconnected issues through conversations that bring you into greater mutual understanding and a renewed sense of belonging.

Sometimes, these dialogues lead directly to collective decisions about the statue, mascot, or building in question. Other times, they are one step in a much longer process of discernment and discussion. Always, they make it possible for a community to live into the complexity and messiness of its diverse identities and viewpoints.

For information about training or consultation, or to find more resources like this, visit the EP website, **whatisessential.org**



Using Communication Agreements

A hope for this guide is that it will help you disrupt any unproductive, harmful, or dysfunctional patterns of communication that have emerged organically in your community. One way we do that is to invite everyone in the conversation to commit themselves to communication agreements.

Communication agreements are guidelines and intentions that provide some common guardrails for a hard conversation. They can be used in large and small groups, at public meetings or in private. While we encourage you to create your own agreements, below are five agreements we use frequently in community conversations:

- I will respect time limits and share air time
- I will speak only for myself and avoid speaking in generalizations
- I will not interrupt others while they're speaking
- I will respect requests for confidentiality
- I have the option to pass on my turn, or to pass for now

Structures to Support Speaking and Listening

Using simple structures can have a big effect on the quality of a conversation, whether in an institution, a classroom, or a community. Structures help people find the right words, listen more closely, and build connections across differences.

Below are four conversation structures that we use frequently in community conversations:

- Read each question aloud twice. Pause for two breaths before reading it the second time. Share the question in writing too.
- Give your participants a moment to reflect on the question and encourage them to take notes about what they want to share when it's their turn.
- Provide each person the same amount of time to respond to the question.
- Be clear about the speaking order. If in person, go one-by-one around a circle. If online, say who is next and who's after them (i.e. "Donald, then Mirabel, followed by Sam ... Mirabel, then Sam, followed by Natasha...").

We sometimes call this model Think, Write, Speak. It helps people let go of worrying about what they're going to say and focus on listening deeply to one another.

Preparing Students for These Conversations

Some students may come to a conversation about monuments or mascots well-versed in the issues and well prepared to speak about their own experiences and values. They might have a sense of the context and some awareness of their own views. Other students, however, will need some scaffolding to help identify and articulate their own convictions.

In preparing students for conversations about issues at the intersection of history and community memory, many teachers have found it helpful for their students to spend time reflecting on their own values and stories, the people they admire, and where they feel pulled in different directions.

The following preparation assignment may be useful to your students in advance of a dialogue on the topic.



Reflection Exercise 1

Think back on all of the people you have studied in history and all you have learned about them. Choose one person from history you admire enough to advocate for a monument for them.

Who is this person and what do you admire about them?

What values do you share with them?

Where in your own life did you learn those values? How did you learn that those values were important to you? What person in your life taught you those values? What experience would help others understand how you came to hold those values?

Reflection Exercise 2

Think of another person from history that you feel conflicted about, someone that you would be torn about making (or keeping) a monument for.

What do you admire about this person?

What gives you pause or leaves you feeling conflicted?

What people or experiences in your life are informing your perspective on this?



QUESTION SET 1

Questions for a Discussion of Statues, Monuments, and Memorials

When we choose to remember a person or event with a public statue, monument, or memorial, we are making a statement about more than the facts of history. We are also telling a story about our current values and hopes for the future.

The purpose of the following questions is to prompt reflection about what values, relationships, and experiences are raised by a particular statue, monument, or memorial. By reflecting on our own perspective and the places where we feel tension, we can be better prepared to have a difficult conversation with those who might have a different point of view. It prepares us to listen with resilience, lean into curiosity, and speak with the goal of being better understood.

- Think of a story that gets told in your family—something that the family celebrates, laments, honors, or has helped build a sense of identity. What does the story tell you about the values that are important to your own family?
- As you think about the events or people that are depicted by this monument, which of your own values are reflected or clash with what you perceive as the values at the heart of this monument?
- You might feel strongly about the monument, one way or the other. As you think about this specific monument in this specific place and time, can you speak about any ways in which your thinking is more complex than others may think? What do you want someone who disagrees with your views about the monument to know about you, your values, and your viewpoint?



QUESTION SET 2

Questions to Talk About the Name of a Building, School, or Institution

As with statues and monuments, the naming of a building or institution raises questions about the values and hopes that lie behind a choice to remember a person or event.

Again, the purpose here is to ground yourself by reflecting on your own experiences, relationships, and values, as well as points of internal tension. This can prepare us to listen with resilience, lean into curiosity, and speak with the goal of being better understood.

- Can you share an experience from your time in this [community, school, organization, neighborhood] that would help someone else understand what about this matters most deeply to you?
- As you think about the future of this [community, school, organization, neighborhood], what values are you most interested in highlighting and promoting? How are those values reflected in your decision about adopting a new name or keeping the existing one?
- As you think about whether to keep the existing name of this [community, school, organization, neighborhood] or adopt a new one, are there any ways in which you find yourself pulled in different directions? Do you find that one thing you care about bumps up against another?

Or, if the decision to change the name has already been made, you might ask:

- What is one hope you hold for the [community, school, organization, neighborhood] now that a decision has been made? What is one concern you have? How do those each reflect the deeper values that you hold regarding the future of the [community, school, organization, neighborhood]?



QUESTION SET 3

Questions to Discuss Mascots and Logos

Mascots and logos are symbols. They represent sports teams, schools, institutions, municipalities, and products, as well as memories, relationships, and experiences.

The following questions are intended to help people think through their own values, perspectives, and points of internal tension so they can talk about the issue with honesty, empathy, and curiosity.

- Can you share an experience that would help others understand what this mascot or logo means to you?
- As you think about the decision as to what to do with this mascot or logo, which of your core values is most important to you?
- It is often the case with decisions like this that even if people feel strongly, they have other competing values too. Can you speak about any ways in which you feel pulled in different directions about this decision?



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Essential Partners
186 Alewife Brook Pkwy, Suite 212
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 923-1216
whatisessential.org