

Assessment

Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

Name _____

Read the following reflection written by an 8th grade girl at age 13 after she visited the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, DC.

The Power of a Name

by Valerie The Castilleja School Palo Alto, CA

I never really imagined that a name could have so much meaning. Walking along the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial I was faced with thousands of names belonging to thousands of people who had each given their lives for our country. I stood there, surrounded by spectators, all quiet in respect and honor, but the personal meaning didn't reach any deeper than the engraved letters on the wall. To me they were just labels, not the true souls that they represented. I had never known the soldiers who had lost their lives; I hadn't even been alive to experience the war.

I slowly made my way deeper into the list, passing flowers and small gifts left in remembrance. I saw a wreath left by Boy Scout Troop #471, and a letter left by a little girl for her "grampa." For some reason it surprised me that people would come to the memorial to pay their respects to their loved ones. Wasn't this just a place for tourists to come take pictures of a very historical monument? Besides, they were, after all, just names.

Soon I began to become tired of the repetitive carvings in stone. Row after row, it became harder and harder for me to imagine that each identity listed had a true character and personality. I began to walk on the less crowded side of the path that was farther away from the wall. After snapping a few pictures with my disposable camera, I thought I had experienced the essence of the memorial.

Then I saw something that made my heart fall silent and my feet freeze in their place. There, standing in front of Section 34 on the right half of the wall, was a woman. Her royal blue outfit and white gloves highlighted her dark chocolate skin, making her stand out from the crowd as it rushed past her. It was as if she were in a completely different world, surrounded by nothing except her thoughts. I watched as she reached her gentle hand up and lightly touched the wall in front of her. Slowly, she traced her fingers over the name "Frederick Holeburg."* She stroked it with such softness and purity, it was as if she had never felt anything more precious in her life. Closing her eyes, she took a breath, and I could see her imagine him standing there in front of her. She didn't move, as

if afraid to lose her husband all over again Her breathing became so deep and relaxed, she seemed to be in a state of complete solitude. I tried not to make any noise, even though I knew she wouldn't notice. I didn't want to disturb what seemed to be such a placid and tranquil moment.

By looking at the way she held her hand against the stone, I felt I could see back into the many years they spent in each other's arms. I could see her smiling at him and touching his face; not just his name. I saw them taking long walks and falling more in love with each other every minute they were together. I could see him holding her hand as long as he could as he had to leave to go and fight in the war. I could see her sitting at home, barely being able to sit still, as she waited to hear news of him. I could see her crying when she found out he had died.

Then, as if she had suddenly awoken from her dream, a tear quickly ran down her cheek. She opened her eyes and looked at the name of the one who had meant more than anything else in the world to her. She began to cry as she leaned her head against the wall. **"I love you,"** she said. **"I will always love you."**

With that she stood up and wiped her eyes. She pressed her lips against her hand, making sure that her kiss would be felt, and then she touched her husband's name one last time. Slowly her arm retreated down to her side, and after standing in peace for a minute, she reached into her purse and pulled something out. She placed it on the ground, glanced at the wall once more, and slowly turned and walked away.

I moved closer towards Fred Holeburg's name. Beneath me I saw a white rose with a maroon red bow tied around it. Next to it lay a white card with calligraphy writing. I leaned over to read what had been written;

"In honor of the best husband, chef, and friend I have ever met: I love you, Fred."

I smiled as a tear rolled down the side of my face. I never guessed that a complete stranger could have such an effect on me without even knowing. In those twenty minutes I learned more about life and about myself than I could have ever aspired to learn in months. I learned what it means to truly love someone. I discovered that some people are cherished so much in life and death that the sight of their name can cause great emotion in those they have touched.

Fred Holeburg had made an impact that went deeper than the engraved letters of his name. Fred Holeburg affected the fate of his country; Fred Holeburg affected the soul of his wife; and unintentionally, Fred Holeburg affected my heart. To me he was no longer just a name on the side of the wall. Even though I had never met him, I knew he was a hero, and that he deserved so much more recognition than he received, as did the other thousands of names that stood in front of me. Looking around, I no longer saw thousands of words; I saw thousands of brothers, grandparents, husbands and sons. I saw inspiring people who each had been adored by their loved ones. Only then did I realize the essence of the Vietnam Memorial. It is not a name that needs to be remembered, it is a person.

I then quickly began frantically reading the names on the wall, trying not to miss one of the remarkable soldiers that undoubtedly deserved so much more than just a glance. I wanted to understand and learn about each man who had lost his life, but then I became aware of the amazing magnitude of the memorial.

As it was time to leave, I thought of the countless soldiers' names that I did not even have time to read, let alone get to know. Even though I couldn't get to know each soldier in the war, my eyes had been opened to a new world of perspective.

I walked away from the wall, the names growing smaller with every step I took. Finally they were no longer visible, and I said goodbye to the names I had read, and the heroes I had respected.

* Name used is fictional.

The task: What are your reactions to this article Valeria has written? Describe your emotions after reading the article. There is no "correct answer to this prompt. Simply record your responses in a journal entry.