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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
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Richmond's Divisive Monuments: A Look into One City's Debate over Public Art, Memory, and History

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“This is an issue that touches the soul of a city.”

One hundred and fifty years later, the South's connection to the Civil War still divides the nation. Since the massacre at Episcopal AME which claimed the lives of nine black parishioners, Americans once again heatedly debate the meaning imbued in the South's myriad Confederate monuments and icons. In a publication titled “Art, Scale, and the Memory of Tragedy: A Consideration of Public Art in Pleasant Hill, Missouri,” historiographer Chris Post writes that “public art presents the views of a commissioner or artist to a wide audience, presumably an entire community. By doing so, art becomes a forum for discourse over essential cultural and political activities, their history, and their representation.” During this unit, students will delve into this discourse through exploring the divisive debates surrounding Richmond's most historic boulevard which honors five Confederate leaders and, most recently, the renowned, black athlete and humanitarian, Arthur Ashe. Through analyzing this real-world issue over Richmond's cultural narrative, students will develop an understanding of the many nuances surrounding one city's quest to answer a question that is anything but simple: *Whose story do we tell?*

(Developed for English 11, grades IB 10 and Standard Level 11; recommended for Language Arts, grades 8-12, and Civics and History, grades 9-12)

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