

Heroes

One person's national hero can be another's menace. Over time, people once punished as instigators of change may be celebrated for their courage. Many of the figures memorialized in public art are considered heroes. Do the following people, judged by those of us with the benefit of hindsight and the distinct perspective of contemporary society, seem like heroes or villains....or both?

As you consider these public artworks, ask yourself to define the term 'hero.' How do our world views influence our opinions of these historically renowned personalities?

- **Phillis Wheatley** (#5), featured in the *Women's Memorial*, was kidnapped from Senegal as a child, enslaved, auctioned and sent on a slavership to Boston where she was legally considered property. However, today we honor her literary accomplishments as the first published African-American poet.
- **Samuel Eliot Morrison** (#6) wrote respected books about Columbus and other naval adventures, but he also wrote textbooks justifying slavery.
- **William H. Carney** (#53), a soldier in the *54th Regiment Memorial*, was the first African-American to earn the Medal of Honor for his valor carrying the flag at Fort Wagner, even after being shot several times. Enslaved from birth and having to have his freedom bought by his father who had escaped via the Underground Railroad, Carney wanted to be a minister but decided he "could best serve [his] God [by] serving [his] country and [his] oppressed brothers."

He was not awarded the medal until decades after his achievement, having gone on to a career as a letter carrier and later a messenger at the Massachusetts State House.

- **Samuel Adams** (#85) is known today as an American patriot and a leader of the revolution, but according to his contemporaries in Britain, Sam Adams committed treason against the British government of which he was a subject.
- **Christopher Columbus** (#94) is celebrated for discovering a new world, though it was already inhabited by people and other Europeans had made the journey before him. Irrefutably, Columbus was an accomplished man in his time and changed global history through his efforts leading to the European conquest of the Americas, but today he is accused of instituting slavery and committing genocide.

Sketch

Choose a sculpture from the Public Art Walk and redesign the piece so that the subject is portrayed differently than they are commonly seen.

Think

How does the artist's role as an interpreter of history affect the experience of viewers? Consider the importance of the chosen hero as well as that of those chosen to be omitted? What about the role of the person commissioning or paying for the artwork? How do their requests affect the artist's work?

Print this guide, using both sides of a sheet of paper, and fold in three, accordion style.



Artists, Poets and Radicals in Boston Public Art

Mayor's Office of Arts, Tourism and Special Events
Mayor Thomas M. Menino



Artists, Poets and Radicals

The following guide for the Public Art Walk requires you to think critically about public art and ask yourself how and why these artworks came to exist. It also asks you to take on the role of artist by creating your own sketches.

In much of conventional North American public sculpture, women are portrayed as elegant allegories and men as one-dimensional champions, yet people of color are largely unseen or depicted as secondary to their white counterparts. Today, artists and community members work with the Mayor's Office and the Boston Art Commission to create a more representative and balanced assortment of figurative and abstract sculptures to be exhibited throughout the city.

Once they've made it to cold bronze, the models of the artwork tend to lose their humanity. It takes some effort to remember that the abolitionists, educators and statesmen featured in Boston's public art collection were once as real as you are.

Who were they? What does their inclusion in our public art say about us? As you consider the artwork on your walk, ask yourself: Who do you want future generations to remember?

Choose one of the two exercises, *Changes in Culture* or *Heroes*, to do on the Public Art Walk.

Remember: **Bring a sketch pad and map!**

Changes in Culture

Below you will find two examples of people associated with public art in Boston who were not always well understood in their own time. As you read about them, keep in mind the artist's role in interpreting history.

Subject: Mary Dyer (#60)

Today, we view freedom of religion as a fundamental human right. During the Colonial period, however, people were not free to practice the religion of their choice. Some Massachusetts colonists were executed for their 'heretical' beliefs, including Mary Dyer, a Quaker. Dyer supported the Puritan minister Anne Hutchinson, whose revolutionary ideas included Bible study groups for women and the belief that individuals do not need the help of clergy members to communicate directly with God. Both Hutchinson and Dyer were banished from the colony, but Dyer repeatedly returned to challenge the unjust laws against her beliefs. She was finally hanged in the Boston Common on June 1, 1660, along with three other Quakers—a group known as the Four Martyrs. Now a sculpture reminding us of her life sits on the State House ground overlooking the site where she was killed. This figure's lack of adornment and reserved pose echo the value Quakers place on simplicity in speech, dress, and other aspects of everyday life.

Artist: Anne Whitney (#1, #85)

An accomplished sculptor, Anne Whitney created artworks featured on the Art Walk in honor of Leif Erickson and Sam Adams. In a time when most women married early, Whitney chose to live with her female partner. She also created a bust of her friend and fellow feminist Lucy Stone (who is

featured in the Women's Memorial), which is at the Boston Public Library. Though she was very successful, Whitney also faced many challenges. When a national competition was held for the creation of a statue honoring Charles Sumner, Whitney entered. She admired Sumner for his work as an abolitionist. Whitney won the honor of creating the piece; however, the commission was taken away from her because of her gender, as it was "publicly decreed that a woman could not accurately portray a man's legs." The sculpture was instead created by Thomas Ball and sits in the Public Garden (#33). At first, Whitney was discouraged by the rejection, but she persisted and two decades later, she decided to finish her statue. It is now found in Harvard Square.

Sketch

Examine the poses of the statues on your walk. Sketch the sculptures you find most interesting. What do the poses chosen by the artists express about the subjects? With a friend, try holding yourself in different positions as your partner sketches you. How does your pose affect the sketch?

Think

Which artists, poets and radicals from our time do you think will be revered or simply better appreciated in the future? If you were to create a sculpture honoring someone you don't think is appreciated, who would you choose? Why?

Please check the website, www.publicartboston.com, for classroom exercises and ties to the Mass. Curriculum Frameworks!