

MAYA LIN

ARCHITECT OF MEMORY

Comprehension

Genre

A **Nonfiction Article** in a newspaper or magazine presents facts and information.



Summarize

Main Idea and Details

The main idea of an article is what the article is mostly about. Details give more information about the main idea.



How did one architect create two of the most powerful memorials in the United States?

Maya Lin

As is her habit, architect Maya Lin stayed away from the crowds—and the limelight. She stood behind the tinted windows of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama. Outside, hundreds of visitors arrived at the **site** for the opening of the Civil Rights Memorial, which Lin designed. “I like standing back quietly,” Lin said. “You create your message, and then it is out there on its own.”

Lin’s message can be found in the memorial’s **exhibits**. This memorial honors those who died fighting for **equality** during the Civil Rights Movement. Some visitors reached out to touch the names of loved ones carved into a black granite disk. Their faces were wet with tears. “I’m so thankful,” said Sarah Salter, whose husband, Willie Edwards, Jr., was killed in Montgomery in 1957. “At last he’s being recognized.”



The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, with the Washington Monument in the distance

Remembering Vietnam Veterans

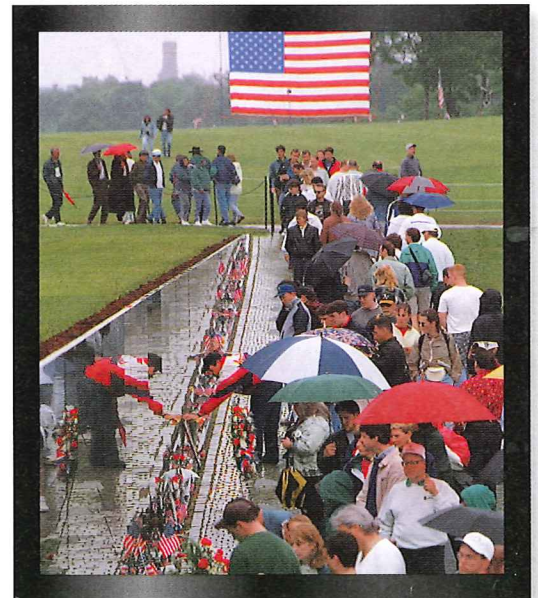
Nine years before the opening of the Civil Rights Memorial, Lin had been a senior at Yale University. She sent in the winning design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. After it was **dedicated**, angry veterans at first called the stark, V-shaped granite wall a “black gash of shame.” Yet the memorial soon became the most visited monument in the capital. Millions of Americans touched—and were touched by—the more than 58,000 names carved into the stone. They are the names of Americans who died in Vietnam.

Lin’s Vietnam Memorial does not present any **artifacts** of the Vietnam era. It is just a wall. This simple wall, however, helped the United States begin the long process of healing after years of bad feelings over the war. The memorial made it possible for the country to come together and honor those who had served.

A Different Way of Looking

“I’m an architect, I’m an artist, I make things,” Lin said. “I just love the fact that I can make a work and put it out there and walk away from it and then look at it like everyone else.”

As Lin grew up in her hometown of Athens, Ohio, one of the subjects she did well in was mathematics. That skill first led her toward architecture and now shapes her outlook on work. “If you present me with a problem, and if I like it and think I can work with it, I’ll do it.” In fact, Lin finds herself driven to solve a problem immediately.



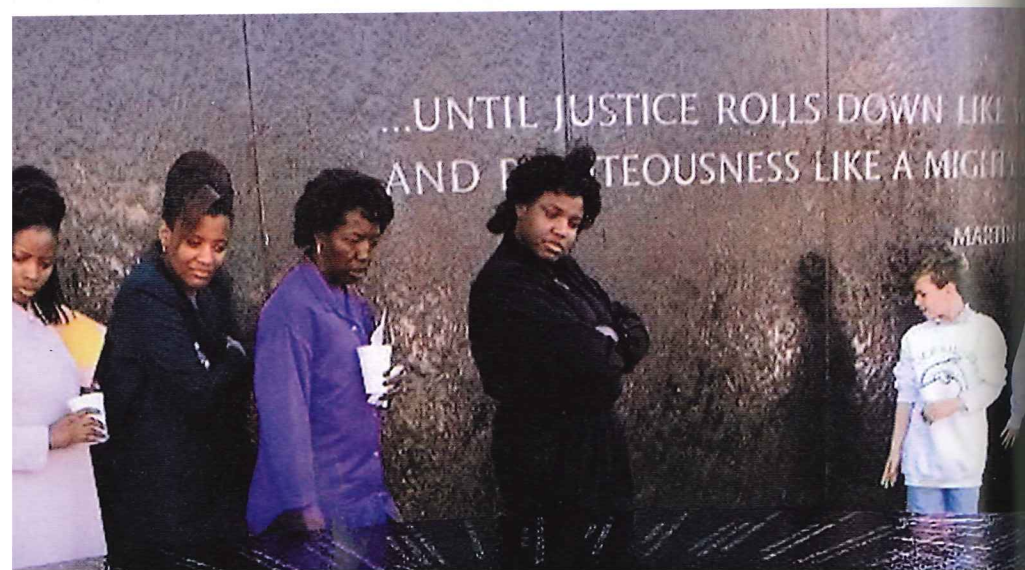
Paying respects on a rainy day

out Lin's career, she has shown her range as an architect. Other projects include the design of a stage set for a play; an open-air gathering place at Juniata College; a "playful park" outside the Charlotte Coliseum in North Carolina (with trees shaped like spheres); and a 38-foot-tall sculpture in New York City train station that has moving rays of light and a series of hands.

Lin's work shows a thoughtful approach to building design. "It's a challenge," Lin said, "that requires patience, awareness, and creativity."

Inspiration from a Great Leader

To remember the Civil Rights Movement firsthand, Lin spent time for months while working on the design for the Civil Rights Memorial. She was struck by a line from Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. That line said, "We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Lin thought the calm, soothing quality of water





At the Civil Rights Memorial, Sarah Salter touches the name of her husband, who was killed during the Civil Rights Movement.

and its quiet, constant sound would be perfect for the area in front of the center. This is a place “to appreciate how far the country has come in its quest for equality and to consider how far it has to go.”

Using King’s quote as her theme, Lin designed a granite disk that is 12 feet in diameter. Inscribed on it are the names of 40 freedom fighters and landmark events of the Civil Rights Movement. Behind it she designed a black granite wall nearly 9 feet high and 39 feet long, also covered by water. King’s words were carved into the rock of this wall. “I’m trying to make people become involved with the piece on all levels,” Lin said, “with the touch and sound of the water, with the words, with the memories.”

Memories of the past are very important to Lin. After all, she asked, “If you don’t remember history accurately, how can you learn?”

Think and Compare



1. What does Maya Lin love about her work?
2. What is the main idea of this article?
3. What people and events are honored with statues and monuments in your city or town?
4. What are some things the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Civil Rights Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial all have in common?