

## EPISODE 4 WOMEN IN WAR

Elizabeth “Elsie” MacGill Queen of the Hurricanes

 Designing a monument to commemorate a person of historical significance

## MISSION



Monuments to events or individuals can be complex in design.

**Your mission is to answer questions such as:**

- What symbols/images are most appropriate?
- What should be emphasized on the monument?
- Should the monument be designed with a single specific message, or does the monument require several interpretive messages?
- Should the monument have text connected to its symbols/images? If so, how do you decide what should be written?
- For a monument to an individual, what criteria should be used to determine where the monument should be placed?
- What materials are most appropriate for the monument?
- You will also plan a ceremony for the official unveiling of your monument to Elsie MacGill.

## KEY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



**What key knowledge and skills will student acquire as a result of this activity?**

- Research the accomplishments of Elizabeth “Elsie” MacGill to understand the depth and breadth of her life achievements.
- **Assess** and **Evaluate** which elements of MacGill’s life are deemed **significant** for use as symbols/images on a monument to her.
- **Analyze** and prioritize events to determine what should be emphasized.
- **Communicate**, in a blueprint design, the concepts (symbols/images/text) to be incorporated in the monument.

## HISTORICAL CONCEPTS



**Historical Perspective:** who we decide to commemorate, and how, tells us something about the mindset/worldview of those doing the commemorating.

**Ethical Dimension:** monuments are often criticized by groups or individuals, who question the reasons for creating a monument. Who might object to a given monument? Why?



**This biographical sketch of Elizabeth “Elsie” MacGill is incomplete. Through your independent research, please complete the summary of her accomplishments.**

**Background:** Elizabeth Muriel “Elsie” Gregory MacGill is well established as a Canadian of historical significance. Born in 1905 in Vancouver, British Columbia, she attended the University of Toronto’s School of Practical Science (now the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering) in 1923, completing her Bachelor of Applied Science in Electrical Engineering in 1927. She was the first woman admitted to the engineering program, and was the first female graduate in the field of aeronautical engineering. After earning her Master’s degree in 1929 from the University of Michigan, she became the world’s first female aeronautical engineer. She also overcame polio in 1925, prior to earning her first degree.

In 1938, Elsie MacGill became the Chief Aeronautical Engineer at the Canadian Car and Foundry Co. Ltd. (“Can Car”) in Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Ontario — then one of the largest makers of rail cars in Canada. During her time as Chief Engineer, she helped redesign the Hawker Hurricane (Mark X, XI, XII). Under her careful guidance, Can Car built more than 1,450 aircraft, or approximately 10 per cent of all Hurricanes produced during the Second World War. Can Car employed more than 4,500 workers in Fort William, nearly half of whom were women. By 1944, Can Car had 15,000 aircraft-making employees.

Throughout the 1960s, MacGill committed more and more of her time to women’s rights, following in the footsteps of her mother, Judge Helen Gregory MacGill. From 1962 to 1964, Elsie MacGill was president of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, and later a Commissioner on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1967–1970).

Her accomplishments are extensive, spanning several decades. Her pioneering work in aeronautical engineering has been recognized in books, academic journals, and even comic strips. She has received numerous awards for her work, including the Gzowski Medal from the Engineering Institute of Canada (1941), the Canadian Centennial Medal from the Government of Canada (1967), and the Amelia Earhart Medal from the International Association of Women Airline Pilots (1975), along with numerous other awards and honorary doctorates. She was also made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1971.

For more information on Elizabeth “Elsie” MacGill:  
[www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/030001-1409-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/030001-1409-e.html)



Courtesy of the CBC:  
[www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSEIEP14CH3PA2LE.html](http://www.cbc.ca/history/EPISCONTENTSEIEP14CH3PA2LE.html)

## ACTIVITY



Students will be working in groups of four. Each group has been hired by the fictional Elsie MacGill Society to research and design a monument celebrating her achievements. Each group must be prepared to outline all decisions behind the design and construction of their monument. Monuments in public spaces are important, because they provide a place for contemporary society to reflect upon those who helped shape society. Monuments also allow the living to remember a person from a different time, within a different context.

1. Brainstorm monuments that the whole class can identify—locally, nationally, or internationally. Students can discuss the symbols/images and text used on these monuments, as well as where the monuments are located. Students should consider questions such as: Why was the monument designed in this way? Why did the designers locate the monument in that spot?

2. Elsie MacGill was born in Vancouver, went to university in Toronto, and worked in Fort William (now Thunder Bay), as well as in Toronto. She spent considerable time in Ottawa, and was killed in a car accident in Massachusetts, U.S.A. Her work and her accomplishments had an impact around the world. Where is the most appropriate location to erect the monument? Justify your answer. How big will the monument be in your chosen spot?
3. As they research the life and accomplishments of Elizabeth “Elsie” MacGill, each group will acquire considerable background knowledge. Each group should create a prioritized list of her accomplishments. For each prioritized accomplishment, connect a symbol/image or text for possible incorporation in the monument. What symbol(s)/image(s)/text is (are) most appropriate? Will one symbol/image be emphasized on the monument more than others? What message do you want the public to receive? How do you want people to interact with the monument?
4. Text is often connected to a monument to explain the symbols used, the life lived, the accomplishments achieved. The text can be a part of the monument, or displayed on a plaque near the monument. Space is at a premium on any monument. If a group decides to include text, what will it say? Where will it be placed on the monument?
5. Monuments are built using a variety of material(s), depending on the desired look and feel, which is often determined in consultation with an artist. Other considerations, such as longevity of the chosen materials when exposed to various weather conditions should be taken into account. Each group must determine what material is most appropriate for their monument, given their selected location.
6. Each group must create a design for the monument, which will be shared with the other groups. Each group must present and explain its concept for the monument, symbols/images used, text to be inscribed, material to be used, and location for the monument.
7. Each group must plan a launch event. Whenever a monument has been completed, an unveiling is held to mark the occasion. In planning the unveiling ceremony, students should consider questions such as: Who will preside? Who will speak? When will the monument be unveiled? It is also important to consider who will be invited. Consider VIPs and guests. Music, choir, or other? Will you have a ribbon-cutting or another unveiling method? If so, who will have that honour? Write a formal request letter to this selected person, your VIP and VVIPs, requesting their attendance. Write a press release to promote and advise the media.
8. Securing adequate funding for monuments is important. Students who want to pursue potential outside funding should begin by identifying potential governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), organizations within the Canadian aerospace industry, potential grants, and donations from philanthropists and special interest groups. Is crowdfunding an option? If students are considering crowdfunding, they should determine the best ways of reaching a wider audience. Posters? Webpage? Crowdfunding video? YouTube channel outlining their cause? Students are not required to develop these additional tools, but should be able to describe the options they’ve chosen, and why.

**Additional Activity:** To help students to understand how monuments can be deemed unacceptable for some, while strongly defended by others, they may want to look at the sources below.

Monuments can be controversial as society’s values and beliefs change. Monuments that were once acceptable may later be rejected, and ultimately removed from public display. Although it is important to give careful consideration to each decision-making stage in monument design, changing historical tastes cannot always be foreseen.

The following are examples of monuments that were once accepted by the public, but are now seen as unacceptable to some.

**Cornwallis statue removal from park should be considered, says premier**

By Jean Laroche, CBC News: Posted December 11, 2015

[www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cornwallis-name-debate-1.3360725](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cornwallis-name-debate-1.3360725)

### Human-rights lawyer opposes honour for right-to-vote pioneer Nellie McClung

PATRICK WHITE (Winnipeg) — *The Globe and Mail*

Published Friday, Apr. 23, 2010

[www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/human-rights-lawyer-opposes-honour-for-right-to-vote-pioneer-nellie-mcclung/article1241485/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/human-rights-lawyer-opposes-honour-for-right-to-vote-pioneer-nellie-mcclung/article1241485/)

### L'Éclaireur Anishinabe tapi dans les buissons / Lurking in ... - Erudit.org by S. Hart: 2005

[www.erudit.org/en/journals/espace/2005-n72.../10268ac.pdf](http://www.erudit.org/en/journals/espace/2005-n72.../10268ac.pdf)

### New Orleans Takes Down Statue of Robert E. Lee by Richard Gonzales: May 19, 2017

[www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/05/19/529130606/new-orleans-prepares-to-take-down-statue-of-gen-robert-e-lee](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/05/19/529130606/new-orleans-prepares-to-take-down-statue-of-gen-robert-e-lee)

#### Additional Questions:

1. What has changed to make each of these monuments unacceptable to members of today's society? What values and beliefs are expressed in the monument that have now made it controversial?
2. As a class, can students identify other monuments that might be considered controversial? If so, which monuments, and why might they be controversial today?
3. Students can explore their own community to identify local monuments. What do they believe is the intent of the monument? During what time period was the monument erected? What values and beliefs are being expressed through the monument? Are those values and beliefs still valid today?



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