



Maya Lin

HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

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Maya Lin is an architect, designer, environmentalist, and artist best known for designing the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C.

Maya Lin was born in Athens, Ohio and grew up in a beautiful little house surrounded by trees. Her love for the outdoors began in her childhood. She'd spend her days exploring the woods and its inhabitants—deer, rabbits and raccoons.

Maya is the daughter of Chinese immigrants. Her father, Henry, was a ceramicist and her mother, Julia, was a poet. They passed their love of art down to Maya.

The Lin's were the only Chinese family in all of Athens, Ohio. While Maya did experience some bullying because of this, her parents were always very encouraging of her and her brother growing up. They motivated them to follow their pursuits and do what they loved doing. It made Maya believe she could do anything, as long as she was passionate about it.

Maya attended Yale University, one of the top colleges in the United States, where she began her study of architecture. An architect is someone who designs buildings, structures and spaces. She brought her love of nature and art to her architectural projects.

While she was at Yale, she saw a poster to enter a competition where participants were called to design a [Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington D.C.](#) The memorial was going to be built in honor of the many American soldiers who had lost their lives in the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War was a conflict that happened from 1955-1975 in a country called Vietnam in the continent of Asia.. The United States of America fought in that war for 20 years. Many people were lost, including over 58,000 U.S. soldiers.

Maya submitted her design to the contest, and, at the young age of 21, her design was chosen. It was built and now stands in Washington D.C.

The Veterans War Memorial is a 493-foot-long wall in the shape of a V. The wall is made of black granite. You can see your reflection as you walk up to it. Engraved all along the wall are the names of each U.S. soldier who was lost in the war. To this day, it is one of the most visited memorials in the United States of America.





Maya designed a memorial that brings quiet and calm. It allows for anyone who walks up to it to have a peaceful moment to reflect.

After that great achievement, Maya went back to Yale and one of her professors told her, “Maya, you have to make a choice. You can’t do both art and architecture. You have to choose one.” She didn’t listen to that advice and chose to pursue both and more.

After getting her master’s degree, she started her own studio where she designed many other projects. Some were memorials in honor of historical events and others to mark important milestones.

One project was the [Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama](#). The Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968 is where people came together to speak out about how everyone, regardless of their skin color, deserves equal rights.

The Civil Rights memorial Maya designed is a black granite table that has water flowing over it. There are engravings on it, including the important events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement in America, and a list of 40 people who lost their lives during that time.

Maya also designed the [Women’s Table at Yale University](#) to honor women in America who didn’t always have the same access to a college education as men did. It’s a large circular shape made of bronze. On the big circle, there’s a line of numbers that go around like a spiral. It shows how many women went to Yale University each year, starting from when they weren’t allowed to enroll all the way up to when Maya designed the piece.

Beyond designing memorials, Maya uses her art as a way to express her love and concern for nature. She started science-based art projects like [Ghost Forest](#) and [What is Missing?](#) to spread the word about the changing climate. Climate change is what happens when our planet’s temperature gets hotter and this causes problems for people, plants, and animals. There’s a lot of reasons why this happens, but one of the most concerning is pollution.

Maya Lin takes really big ideas, issues and feelings and puts them into her art in a beautiful and simple way. She makes important social and environmental issues more accessible, helps us reflect on our history, and inspires the cultivation of our own strength and creativity.

Glossary

Architect: A person who designs buildings and structures.

Ceramicist: An artist who makes ceramic objects.

Immigrant: A person who moves to another country to live permanently.

Memorial: A structure established to remember and honor people or events.

Granite: A very hard rock used in building and sculpture.

Climate Change: Long-term changes in temperature and weather patterns, mainly due to human activities.

Pollution: Harmful substances introduced into the environment, causing damage to living organisms and the planet.

Civil Rights Movement: A struggle for social justice in the 1950s and 1960s to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans.

Environmental Art: Art that addresses and interacts with ecological and environmental issues.

Give it Some Thought

- How did Maya Lin's childhood and family influence her career as an architect and artist?
- What emotions do you think the Vietnam Veterans Memorial brings up, and why is it designed for calm and reflection?
- Why is it important to create memorials for historical events and people? How do they help us remember and learn?
- How do Maya Lin's environmental projects raise awareness about climate change and pollution?
- What qualities do you think helped Maya Lin succeed in her career despite challenges and discouragement?

Use Your Imagination

Here are some activities you can do that are inspired by the story of Maya Lin:

Design Your Own Memorial

Think about how to represent your ideas and emotions visually by creating a memorial for something or someone important to you using materials like paper, clay, or cardboard.

Nature Walk and Art Project

Take a walk outside to collect natural materials like leaves and rocks. Use these to create your own art that shows your appreciation for nature.

Environmental Awareness Poster

Create a poster about an environmental issue that interests you, including facts, pictures, and actions people can take to help.

