Teaching history from
DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

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8th Grade Lesson Plan on

Monuments, Memory, and Global Diplomacy in Local Communities: The Brookhaven Comfort Women Statue

Georgia Social Studies Standards

SS8H12 Explain the importance of developments in Georgia since the late 20th century,
d. Analyze Georgia's role in the national and global economy [and political landscape] of the 21st century.

During World War II, the Japanese Imperial Army forcibly recruited, abducted, or deceived an estimated 200,000 women and girls from occupied territories, including Korea, China, the Philippines, and Indonesia, into military sexual slavery. These women were referred to as "comfort women" by Japanese authorities. After the war, many survivors remained silent for decades because of trauma, shame, and social stigma. In the 1990s, survivors such as South Korean activist Kim Hak-sun publicly shared their experiences and demanded recognition, apologies, and compensation.



To preserve this history, South Korean artists Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung created the **Statue of a Girl of Peace**, a memorial first installed in Seoul in 2011. Each element carries symbolic meaning: the teenage girl represents the young age of many victims, her clenched fists represent the fight for justice, the raised heels symbolize survivors' instability after returning home, the bird represents a connection between living survivors and those who died, and the empty chair honors victims while inviting reflection and remembrance.

Comfort women memorials have since been built in several countries, including the United States, as symbols of human rights and opposition to wartime sexual violence. However, the Japanese government has opposed many of these monuments, arguing that they encourage anti-Japanese sentiment and damage international relations. Japan points to agreements such as the 1965 Japan-South Korea Claims Settlement Agreement and the 2015 bilateral agreement as evidence that compensation issues were resolved. Japanese officials also dispute the term "sex slaves" and question the estimated number of victims, while acknowledging that women were recruited against their will in the 1993 Kono Statement.



The debate reached Georgia in 2017 when the **Atlanta Comfort Women Memorial Task Force** sought to install a replica of the Statue of a Girl of Peace. After the National Center for Civil and Human Rights withdrew from hosting the monument following opposition from Japanese officials and business groups, the **City of Brookhaven** approved its placement in Blackburn Park.

On June 30, 2017, Brookhaven dedicated the monument, making it the first comfort women statue on public land in the **American Deep South** and only the second on public land in the United States. Supporters viewed it as a symbol of human rights and awareness of modern human trafficking, while opponents argued it could harm diplomatic and economic relationships.



The controversy demonstrates how a **local decision in Georgia** became part of a global debate about history, memory, justice, and international relations. Georgia's growing Asian American communities and global connections have made the state increasingly involved in worldwide conversations.

Complete Article and Lesson Plan

Photo Credit:
(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. Private Charles H. Hatfield of the U.S. Army's 164th Signal Photo Company (Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, RG 111, Entry SC, Box 356 / Seoul Metropolitan Archives).
2. Dyana Bagby, Statue of Peace in Blackburn Park, Brookhaven, GA

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History is the context of "**now**", "**why**", and "**how**".

Teach interwoven history.



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