

Analyzing Gravestone Motifs:  
*American's Changing Attitude  
Towards Death*

Gravestone Timeline Presentation

# Plain Style Motif

- Time Period: 1640-1710
- Attitude: “resignation”
- Characteristics: name, date, little or no decoration
- Reason: Colonists had few tools, skills or money



# Death's Head Motif



- Time Period: 1670-1770
- Attitude: “fear” and “religious reverence”
- Characteristics: human skull, wings, name, dates
- Reason: In New England the Puritan religion was popular and emphasized a fear of death that focused on the deceased’s chances of getting into heaven

# Cherub Motif

- Time Period: 1740-1820
- Attitude: “confidence”
- Characteristics: human face, wings, name, dates
- Reason: Between c. 1735-1750 the Great Awakening (a religious revival) changed attitudes towards death from the grim Death's Head to the more optimistic, angelic cherub





# Urn and Willow Motif



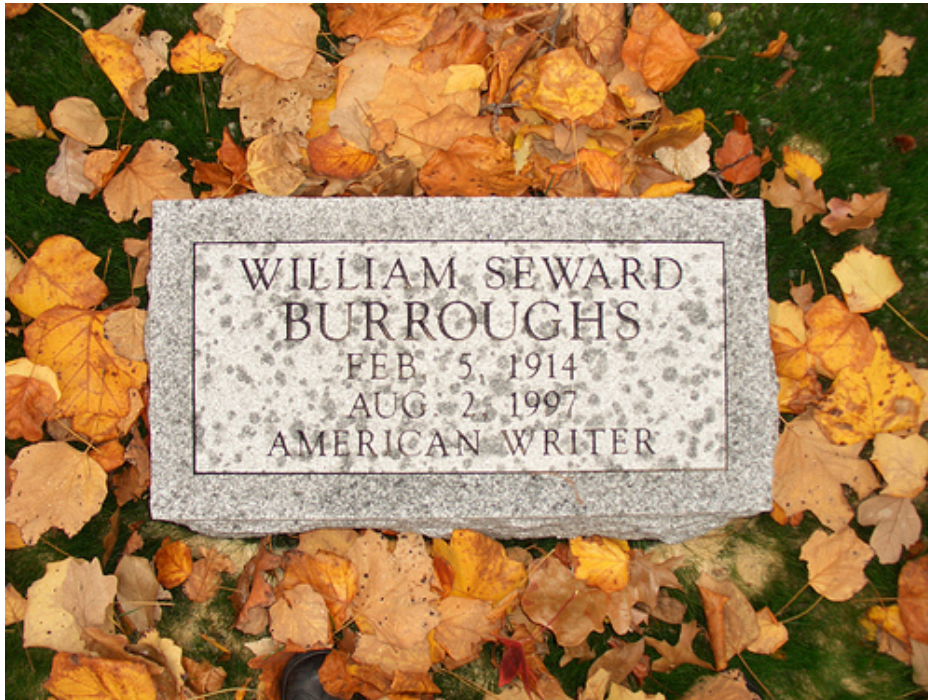
- Time Period: 1780-1850
- Attitude: “mourning”
- Characteristics:  
drooping tree, urn,  
name, dates
- Reason: Sorrow for the  
death of a person

# Monuments

- Time Period: 1840-1920
- Attitude: “defiance” and “wealth”
- Characteristics: large shapes, statues, sculptures, columns or crosses, accomplishments, names, dates
- Reason: To remind us, not of a person’s death, but of their past life



# Garden Style Markers



- Time Period: 1900-Present
- Attitude: “denial”
- Characteristics: small, flat, name, dates, little or no decoration
- Reason: Does not draw attention to the dead; cemeteries resemble gardens or parks, not burial grounds