

Maya Lin: Thinking With Her Hands

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The book “Maya Lin: Thinking With Her Hands” talks about the famous architect Maya Lin and how she designed many memorials and structures, especially the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Growing up, Maya Lin loved to spend time outside and build houses out of paper. She also loved to watch her father use clay, and she later learned how to use it to make things. These things contributed to her interest in architecture. Lin was also a very smart student, and she was accepted into Yale University. At Yale, she originally had decided to become a field zoologist, but she learned that she would have to dissect animals. As a result, she decided to change her mind and become an architect. In her senior year at Yale, she learned about a competition related to designing a Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. In her class, she and her classmates were making a design for the competition as practice. Although she was not familiar with the Vietnam War, she learned about how other memorials had put the names of the victims of the war and showed the negative effects of war and remembering those who were part of the war. Her idea was to put the names of those who died in the war on two walls shaped as the letter V. However, she changed this design to a structure that would show the names begin and end at the apex of the structure. She also planned on having the walls made out of black granite. Finally, she decided that one wall would face the Lincoln Memorial and the other wall would face the Washington Monument. After submitting her project, she was later shocked to hear that she had won the competition. However, after becoming a specialist for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Lin was criticized for many things, such as her choice to make the walls with black granite (since it was inappropriate to others), her Asian heritage, and her choice to make the walls shaped like a V. Lin, stressed out because of all the criticism, decided to move to Boston to study at Harvard and work for an architecture firm. However, when she came back to Washington D.C. for the dedication, she was shocked to learn that her idea of using black granite for the walls was implemented. Later, three statues of Vietnam soldiers were added somewhat far from the memorial. Today, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is still visited, and people still come to look for the names of their loved ones who had served in the war and died. Ever since the creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1981, Lin has made many other monuments. Another very important monument that Lin has made is the Civil Rights Memorial, which was made 7 years after the making of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. She decided to learn about the Civil Rights Movement in order to share this information with people who were not familiar with the event. She was inspired by a specific part of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech to make the structure of the memorial like a curved wall where water would spill down the wall. This was included in the memorial along with a flat table that would show the events of the Civil Rights Memorial and names of some of the victims of the event. She also decided to make the structure in a way that would express meaning related to the Civil Right Movement; for example, she purposely decided to put a space after the marking of the 1968 event of Dr. King’s assassination to show how racism still exists today.

After the making of the Civil Right Movement, she has made monuments of different kinds of subjects. One type of project that she has worked on is land sculpture. A project series that she has worked on related to this is The Wave Field. One project in the series is a project having to do with a Stokes wave. She used grass to show the movement of waves. Although she ran into a few problems having to do with the structure, she was able to make a soil mix that would help keep the structure of the sculpture. In 2007, she started the creation of the Storm King Wavefield, which was a project having to do with rows of grassy waves that are very similar to normal waves. It was finished in 2008 and was given many positive feedback by people. Another type of project in architecture that Lin has worked on is history, such as history on the works of African Americans and the history of Chinese-Americans. In 1998, Lin decided to use a barn to make a structure called the Langston Hughes Library, which features works that were made by African Americans. She used recyclable materials to make the library, along with a large window to provide natural light. 1 year later, the project was finished, and the dedication ceremony occurred in March of 1999. Unfortunately, 2 years later, on September 11, 2001, the 9/11 attacks occurred, which caused Lin to lose hope. However, she recovered by building the Riggio-Lynch Chapel, which was meant to give people hope again. In addition to African American works, Lin also made structured related to Chinese-American history (since it was so important to her since she was Chinese-American). After learning about her family history and information about her family when she was in her twenties, she decided to help the Museum of Chinese in America expand their museum. Using many photos and pictures, newspapers, history of Chinese culture and events, and more, Lin and others were able to include many aspects of Chinese history in the museum. An example is how many Chinese were held in San Francisco before being able to enter the United States. Many people who stayed at San Francisco wrote poems to show how miserable they were at the island. These poems were put and shown in the museum. Another example is a grocery store from the 1800's. Many artifacts from the store, such as tea, spices, canned goods, and galleries were put in the museum. Finally, there are bronze tiles that are dedicated to many Chinese families. Another example of historical architectural projects that Lin made was the Confluence Project, which involved the history of the expedition of Lewis and Clark and the location of Cape Disappointment. Lin tried to express how Cape Disappointment would reflect on the journey of Lewis and Clark. It also included a project based on the history of the Chinook tribe and how it started, and that Chinook people would fish at the Columbian River for salmon long ago. Although Lin usually says no to requests for designing a house, in 2006, she decided to make a house called "The Box House" for Charles Price and his wife. The Box House consists of two separate "boxes" connected by a very large deck. The box house actually has hidden panels and doors that can slide open. This house was actually a reminder of Asian toy puzzle boxes. The final type of projects that Lin has made in architecture are projects that have to do with awareness for restoring nature. The *What Is Missing?* project is an example. One part of the project is The Listening Cone. The Listening Cone allows for visitors to crawl inside to watch videos of species that are in danger of endangerment or extinction to hear what they sound like. There is also a website and many traveling exhibits as part of the memorial. The project is still currently being worked on today, including new features such as Sound Ring and Greenprint for the Future.

There were many things that I liked about this book. One thing that I liked was how the book gave more information about one of the more important things that Maya Lin was famous for, or the creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Before reading this book, I didn't know about many related to the creation of the memorial, such as how Lin's original design of the memorial was criticized greatly and that Lin was a student at Yale University when she came up with the idea of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I also liked how the book talked about the story of Maya Lin and her motivation to create many different memorials and structures that are famous today, such as the *What Is Missing?* project and the Civil Rights Memorial. However, I didn't like how the book continuously changed time periods as it talked about the structures and memorials that Lin created (For example, at one point in the book talked about the creation of the Civil Rights Memorial in 1988, followed by the creation of the Wave Field Project from 1993 to 2008. Then, it talked about the creation of the Langston Hughes Library in 1994.). I would recommend this book to ages 11 and up because of how informative this book is about the story of Maya Lin and many of the structures that she has created. I would definitely recommend this book to someone else.

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Mary Anning: The Girl Who Cracked Open The World

Clara Barton: Spirit of the American Red Cross by Patricia Lakin