

Epitaph Plan Sheet

Main Entry: **ep·i·taph**

Pronunciation: ' e - p & - " t a f

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English *epitaphe*, from Middle French & Medieval Latin; Middle French, from Medieval Latin *epitaphium*, from Latin, funeral oration, from Greek *epitaphion*, from *epi-* + *taphos* tomb

1 : an inscription on or at a tomb or a grave in memory of the one buried there

2 : a brief statement commemorating or epitomizing a deceased person or something past

In *Spoon River Anthology*, Edgar Lee Masters presents a series of poetic monologues as they appear on the gravestones in a Midwestern cemetery in the early 1900s. The characters speak their own epitaphs, often confessing the true motivations of their lives and uncovering many of the mysteries and secrets of the town. These epitaphs often appear in clusters that present all sides of a story that would otherwise be unclear or incomplete. Choose two characters from the literature we are currently studying and develop an epitaph for each. These epitaphs should portray the relationship between the characters. Use the outline below to get started.

Name of character		
Occupation or how majority of character's time was spent		
Details about character's death		
Significant life events		
Character's outlook on life or advice to those still living		
Hobbies and leisure time activities		
Describe the relationship between the two characters		
Feelings about the other character		
Other details: Physical characteristics, opinions, ideas, etc.		

How to Write an Epitaph

- Fill out the Epitaph Plan Sheet.
- Write the name of the character at the top of the page (i.e., the top of the “gravestone”).
- Pretend that you are that character and are speaking from the great beyond. This is called writing in first person. You will use the pronoun I.
- Choose one of the details from your plan sheet that you (as the character) feel strongly about, and write a sentence about it. You might choose some feeling about someone with whom you had a relationship. Or you might write a sentence about how you died. You could also choose an event that was important as the subject of your first line of the epitaph. It’s up to you.
- Once you have begun, continue letting the thoughts and strong emotions of the character come out. Remember in this type of epitaph you are telling only those thoughts and feelings that are so strong as to have you “speaking from your grave.”
- Once you believe you are done, read over the epitaph (aloud, if possible). Make changes where necessary.
- Now go back and look for the poetic devices you were required to include. If they are there great! Identify them. If not discover what you need to add and look where you can fit these elements in or change your words to meet the requirements.
- Now make decisions about the physical arrangement of the words in lines. Do you want each sentence to be on one line? Do you want some words to be on a line by themselves for emphasis? Make conscious choices about where line breaks occur.
- Now create a final copy following the format requested by your teacher.

Sample:

Captain Beatty

I spent my life pretending to be the opposite of what I was:
A poet who burned Whitman on Wednesday,
A philosopher who incinerated Plato with grim pleasure,
A playwright who shunned Shakespeare.
Kerosene was my lifeblood, or so the others thought...if you call it thinking.
They never noticed how much I knew about the books we burned, thoughtless fools.
Then Montag did the favor of burning *me*: a final fitting irony, unless you know the truth.
I wanted to die.
A life of deception—ignoring the war while the world flung itself to pieces, smiling
while the charred books died like slaughtered birds, lecturing in simple platitudes that
sounded so fresh to the ignorant and uninformed—left me in despair.
For where can hope be found in a world that burns all responsibility?
The Happiness Boys, we called ourselves.
They never suspected a thing.
No one knew me.