

Questions for Colin Rafferty's *Hallow This Ground*

1. What monuments and memorials have been built in your town? What do they commemorate? How are they supposed to function, and how often do you notice them?
2. Rafferty begins the first essay by telling the reader that he has come to see Columbine High School not long after the massacre there despite the fact that he has no personal connection to the site. Why do you think he and other humans are drawn to visit places where terrible things have occurred?
3. "The prescription is to erase," writes Rafferty about sites of trauma. Why do you think we are more comfortable with a memorial instead of the evidence of what happened on a site? What does a memorial offer us that the evidence and remnants wouldn't?
4. If monuments are meant to be experienced both as pieces of art and symbols of history, which one should be prioritized? Why?
5. In "Surfacing," Rafferty tries to find a connection between himself and the steward of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, who shares a last name with him. Why is Rafferty looking for this kind of connection? What does it have to do with the girlfriend whose presence is revealed halfway through the essay?
6. In "The Path," Rafferty looks for the memorial for a walkway collapse in his hometown, but can't find anything. Do we have an obligation to commemorate all loss of life? Why do we choose to memorialize some incidents and not others?
7. "Notes Towards Building the Memorial in Somerset County, Pennsylvania" is about a visit to the site where Flight 93 crashed before the official memorial had been built. Rafferty notes many of the items left behind at the temporary fencing at the site; why do you think we feel a need to participate in a site by leaving items there?
8. In "The Yellow Flowers," each section is introduced by testimony from people associated with the Treblinka extermination camp; the text is designed so that a break runs through the middle of each one. What do you think those breaks symbolize?
9. How does his religious and cultural identities as a Catholic affect Rafferty's understanding of the Holocaust memorials he visits?
10. In "Undrawn Lines," Rafferty discusses how a group against Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe opposed it because they felt that building the memorial would draw a final line under the Holocaust and allow Germans to forget it. Do you think memorials exist to provoke us to remember or to allow us to forget? Are there monuments and memorials in your town where this has happened?
11. Rafferty describes the relationships between memorial and visitor to the relationships between stripper and club patron in "The Definite Article." What kind of authenticity do we expect from a memorial? Is a temporary connection enough to understand a place?
12. "This Day In History" is laid out in a nonstandard way, with boxes (both empty and full) throughout the text. What's the effect created by the interruptions of these spaces? What's different about the empty boxes, and why are they there?
13. In "Doors," Rafferty looks at the act of registration, and how what once was a symbolic gesture done in person has become another online process. How could the shift to doing more things online change the way we commemorate historical events?
14. The three days forming the basis of "What I Was Doing There" involve many of the grand narratives of human life—love and death and family—and at the essay's

conclusion, Rafferty states, “I don’t have to chase this moment down the way I have with dozens of other places and memories.” Why do you think that is?

15. The essay “Hallow This Ground” takes its title from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. In the address, Lincoln says that it is the dead and not the living who make a place sacred; however, it is the living who build memorials and monuments in order to commemorate what happened there. Why do you think the living feel the need to do this?
16. “Hallow This Ground” also features a walk around the National Mall and Tidal Basin in Washington, DC, exploring sites like the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The most recent addition to that site was the Martin Luther King, Jr, Memorial, dedicated in 2011. Who or what do you think should be commemorated there next?
17. In the final essay, Rafferty says that “enough things have happened to me that I don’t think my original motivations for seeking out these monuments and memorials applies any longer.” Why do you think he has reached this point, and if he doesn’t need to go to memorials any more, then why is he at the Shiloh Battlefield?
18. What do you think the most successful monuments and memorials do? What do they have in common?