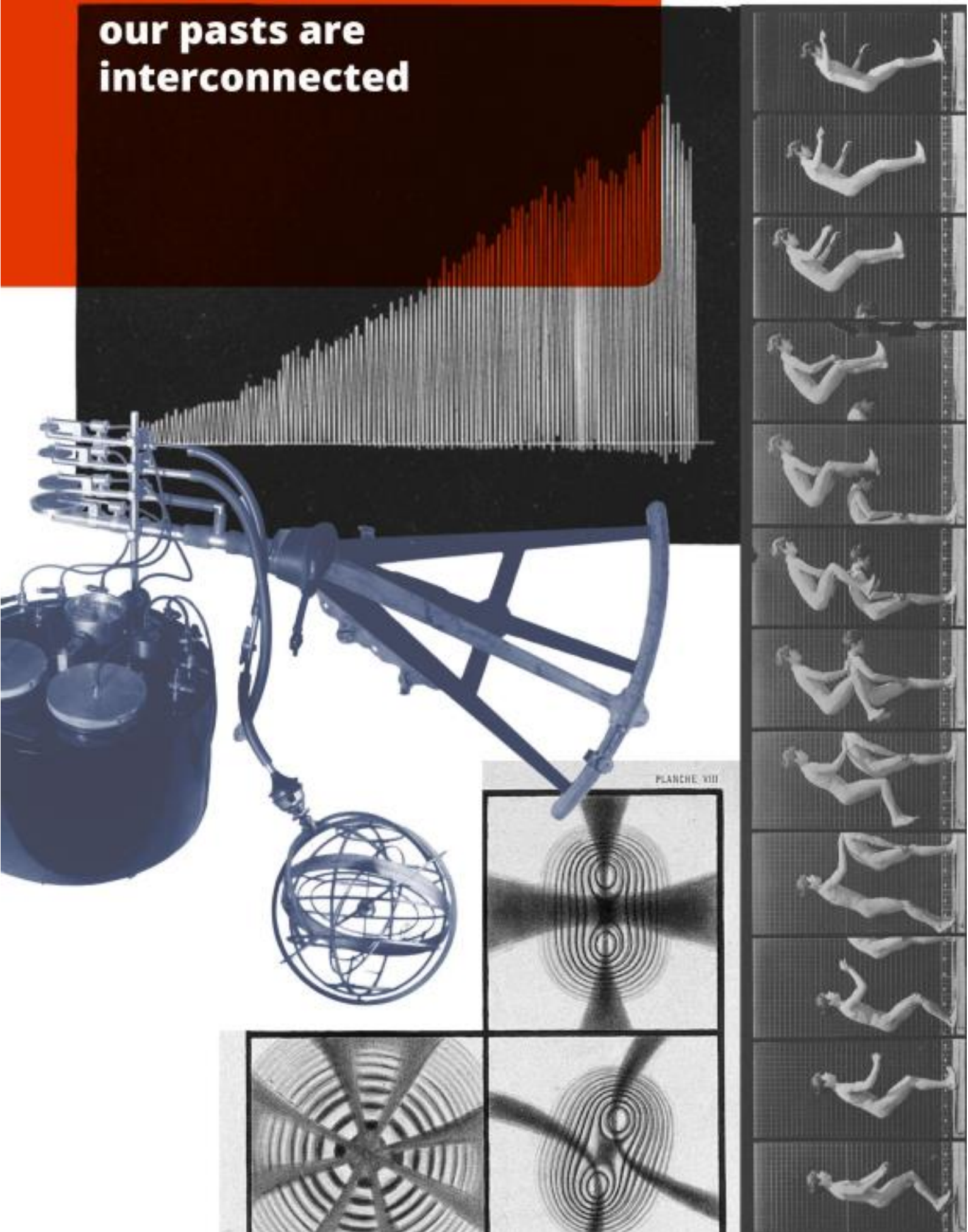


**Using object biographies
to reveal how
our pasts are
interconnected**



Sharing European Histories

Self-Guided Course

Using Object Biographies to Reveal How our Pasts are Interconnected

Ildikó Hegedűs

**Evens
Foundation**



Using Object Biographies to Reveal How our Pasts are Interconnected

Example Lesson Plan: Pannon Phónix

By Ildikó Hegedűs

This example lesson plan of the Using Object Biographies to Reveal How our Pasts are Interconnected is part of the Sharing European Histories Self-Guided Course, developed by Ildiko Hegedus. Its aim is to demonstrate how the Teaching Strategy can be adapted into the local context and classroom setting.

Time needed: 45 min

Approximate age: 14 and above

Number of students: 10

Learning objectives:

- Students will have a better understanding of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.
- Students will understand how an artwork (a statue) can convey various messages. They will also learn how to “read” a public monument.
- By the end of the lesson, students will understand what this specific statue means.

Materials and equipment needed:

1. A laptop with a projector (Internet connection is optional).
2. Printed photos and worksheets (*The photos are Mr Lengyel's and my own photos*).

Preparation:

1. A PowerPoint presentation is needed to show the photos for frontal discussion.
2. Print the photos needed for group work.
3. Print the worksheets (jumbled paragraphs + parts of the interview).

Lesson Plan

45 min

1. Warming-up (5 min)

- Q: In today's lesson we are going to cover our city, Dunakeszi. Can you recognise the person in the picture?

A: István Lengyel, a former Art teacher.

Q: What else does he do?

A: He is an artist, a sculptor.



István's Lengyel's photos

- **Brainstorming:** As you know, there are several of Mr Lengyel's works in Dunakeszi. Try to list as many artworks as you can.

- **Q:** What can you not see in this picture? What is missing?



István Lengyel's photos

A: the Stork



Ildikó Hegedűs's photo

2. Exploring the historical background (10 min)

(Remark: Most students above the age 14 have learnt about the Revolution - my students, however, have not, that is why I started the lesson with a short introduction).

- **Q:** Which event does the monument refer to?

A: The revolution that broke out on 23 October, 1956

- **A short introduction**

- After the 2nd World War, Hungary became part of the Soviet sphere of interest, and, in a few years' time, turned into a communist country.
- Stalinism (a very strict type of communism) made the lives of Hungarian citizens very difficult between 1949 and 1953. The cult of Lenin, Stalin and Mátyás Rákosi pervaded everything.
- With Stalin's death in 1953 the situation seemed to change: Imre Nagy, who wanted to make Hungary more democratic, came into power.

- **Q:** What do you know about the events that took place on 23 October? Put the paragraphs into the correct order.

(Remark: Students work in pairs or small groups - the following text is the solution, I jumbled the paragraphs for the students. The text can be found in a history coursebook for Grade 8).

In the summer of 1956 the Poles rebelled against the Stalinist system. They were shortly subdued, but the Polish leadership was forced to introduce reforms. On 23 October 1956, students of the Budapest University of Technology organised a peaceful procession in support of the Polish people and for democratic changes in Hungary. The leaders of the Communist Party first prohibited, then permitted the demonstration. Later, other universities joined the Budapest University of Technology.

The demonstration started at 3 p.m. Several university students gathered around the statue of Petőfi in Pest, where actor Imre Sinkovits recited Petőfi's "Nemzeti dal" (National Song). Then they marched to the statue of Bem in Buda to meet the students of the University of Technology. The demonstrators, who were joined by more and more passers-by including workers going home, were already carrying the national flag from which they had cut out the hated communist coat of arms. This flag with a hole came to be a symbol of 1956.

Part of the crowd marched to the Parliament building where Imre Nagy gave a speech in the evening. Another group headed for Városliget (City Park), where they fell Stalin's giant statue, the hated symbol of the regime.

From early afternoon, more and more people were waiting in front of the headquarters of the Hungarian Radio. They wanted to have their demands read out on the radio. At 8 p.m., however, the Radio broadcast Ernő Gerő's speech in which he called the demonstrators nationalists and promised retaliation. Seeing that people grew angrier and angrier, the State Protection Authority, who was given the task to defend the Radio Building, fired into the crowd at about 9 p.m.. By that time, the demonstrators had acquired weapons from soldiers, policemen and the warehouses of defence plants. They attacked and captured the building by next morning. It means that the peaceful demonstration turned into an armed uprising.

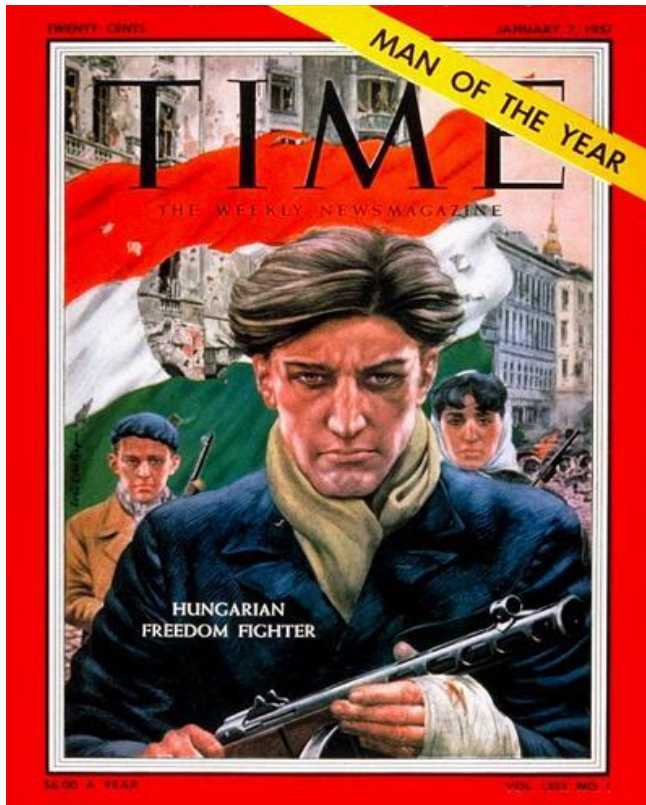
On 23 October, there were demonstrations in other cities, too. The first shots were fired in Debrecen, where the defenders of the county party headquarters fired into the unarmed crowd.

(When students are ready, check solutions by showing them the original text)

- **Q: Do you know how the Revolution ended?**

The Soviets, however, did not want Hungary to leave the Eastern bloc. The freedom fighters were not strong enough to resist the attack of the Soviet tanks on 4 November, and the revolution failed. The following weeks saw 200,000 people flee from Hungary. Revolutionists who decided to stay at home were taken to court – many of them were sent to prison, and several people were sentenced to death.

- **Q:** In 1956, the *Time* magazine chose the Hungarian Freedom Fighter as the Man of the Year. Why? What did other nations think about the Hungarian revolution?



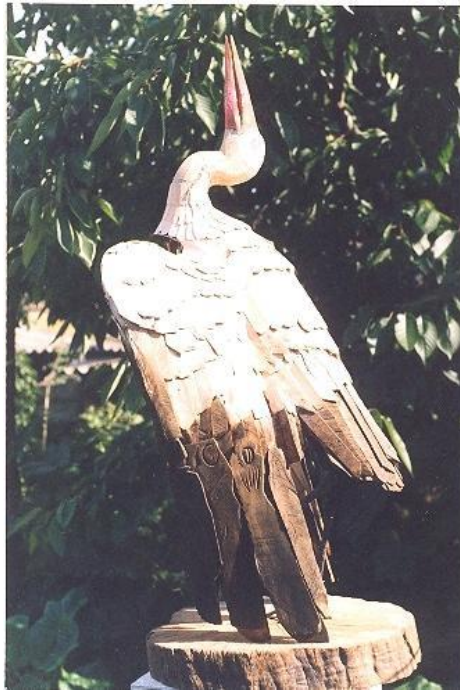
Source: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19570107,00.html>

A: They admired the brave Hungarians who opposed the Soviets. Hungarians fought for democracy, independence – the very basics of Western democracies. However, in the era of the Cold War, no one wanted to give real help. Later, however, they admitted Hungarian refugees. Other members of the Soviet bloc might have thought that it is possible to leave the Soviet bloc, but finally they had to understand there was no choice for them.

3. Analysing the monument (25 minutes)

- If you want to understand an object, you must collect some basic information. Let us try to find the milestones in the life of the stork.

How and when was the monument born? Look at the flyer and find out.



István Lengyel's photos

Text of the flyer: A worthy monument to 1956! Please support the realisation of the design made by István Lengyel, a sculptor living in Dunakeszi.

Q: Why do you think people were asked to contribute?

The short biography of the statue

- Name: Pannón Phőnix / Gólya (Pannonian Phoenix)
- Year of birth: 1996 ("reborn" in 2016)
- Father: Lengyel István
- Place of residence: Dunakeszi, Funerary Memorial Park, Google Map: 47.63577562393299, 19.128720831857187
- Material: wood and metal.
- Height: 5 metres
- Function: 1956 monument, the permanent location of city celebrations



István Lengyel's photos

- As you can see, the statue has two names. Mr Lengyel gave the name Pannonian Phoenix, but the citizens call it the Stork. What association do these names have? Please work in groups of 3-4 and create two word clouds.

(You might want to use an online tool like wordart.com/create, or you can decide to write the words on the blackboard.)

- Let us take a closer look at the statue. Can you guess the meaning of each part?

(pairwork)





Ildikó Hegedűs's photos



(The Phoenix in 2016 – photo of Dunakeszi Post)

- After spending some time with the task, each pair is given the relevant part of an interview with István Lengyel (published by Dunakeszi Post).

“I was inspired by the phoenix, which, having set itself on fire, is reborn from its ashes – and this is what wars of freedom do in the life of a nation.

A wing of my statue stork is hurt, symbolising a bird stuck in its place because of its inability to fly – with this, I wish to refer to the people who stayed at home in 1956 to become victims later.

I was also inspired by the figure of the primaeval crane. According to popular belief, it holds a stone with one leg so that it can be alerted when its attention is about to wither and it drops the stone – this refers to foreign aggression. (*N.B.: there is no stone in the stork’s leg anymore.*)

The stork holds its head as if it were clattering – thus giving a signal or alerting people, while the wing is nailed to the ground.

Its feathers are headstones of the victims who, with their personal fates, bind those who wanted to fly.

The heavy forged chains that hang from the neck represent the weight of an escape from prison.

The inner space of the monument is a tiny chapel which reflects the shrine of Saint Stephen’s Chapel behind it. The flashing necklace-like chains, the wind chimes and the death-bells are the spiritual representation of the spirits of the victims.

The pedestal itself is a nest, which is the confined area where all this struggle takes place.

You can approach the statue on a winding pathway, a river where the graves are small islands. As we go, we go by those who have already passed away.

Part of the monument - the gate - is open only when there is a ceremony. The gate is a giant flag with the iconic hole. Next to this gate imitating a stretched flag there is a real, “living” flag waving on the flagpole.

Some of these elements are now somewhat distorted or lost, which is a pity. I do think, however, that I managed to associate a less usual symbol system with the revolution.”

- **Discussion:** What meaning do the specific parts convey?
- Let us read what Mr Lengyel wanted to tell us. (*Distribute the whole extract from the interview.*)



István Lengyel's photos

4. Follow-up (5 minutes)

- **Q:** Did knowing the biography of the object change your attitude towards it?

Do you know any other monuments in Dunakeszi that are related to the 1956 revolution?

Homework: We are going to have an interview with Mr Lengyel. Write three questions.

Object Biography: Pannonian Phoenix

Secondary materials

- extracts from an interview with István Lengyel (<https://dunakeszipost.hu/meg-fog-lepodni-mi-mindent-nem-tudott-a-dunakeszi-golyarol/>)

“If I am not mistaken, the Stork was not funded by the state but by the public. Can you remember how the fundraising was done? Who started it? How was it organised?”

After the change of regime in 1989, NGOs started to work in Dunakeszi. They lobbied for preserving the history of the place, for creating a new city image and other initiatives of public interest, all on the ground of shared political ideas. As the 40th anniversary of the 1956 revolution was approaching, there emerged a need for a monument – memorable events took place in Dunakeszi, and some of the participants were still alive. One of the NGOs proposed that it would be important to build the monument from public donations, so fundraising started. After investigating financial and other possibilities and drawing the outlines of the project they chose the location, then asked me to design the monument. Continuous meetings started. The location was supported by various factors, including the proximity of the main road and the exuberant natural environment, but the main reason was the location itself where most events took place in 1956. However, this choice turned out to be the first step of the fight for the monument. Since it was to be in a cemetery, many considered it a sacrilege. It is a long story, but finally an agreement was reached: we guaranteed that the memorial would not disturb any known and visible graves. The cemetery is a sacred place – this was to be a pillar of the conception behind the statue.

We all know the statue as Stork, but it is not the original name, is it?

The name I gave and use is Pannon phónix (Pannonian Phoenix) – which refers to the historical province –, but I also accept the simplified name „Stork”, given by the local people. So let us call it Stork.

Why did you choose a stork as the central figure of the monument?

In Hungarian folklore and poetry, storks serve as a symbol of patriotism – they are patriots who have fled there homeland but will return one day.

Your works always have a rich symbol system. What does the statue symbolise?

I was inspired by the phoenix, which, having set itself on fire, is reborn from its ashes – and this is how wars of freedom work in the life of a nation. A wing of my stork is hurt, symbolising a bird stuck in its place because of its inability to fly – with this, I wish to refer to the people who stayed at home in 1956 to become victims very soon. I was also inspired by the figure of the primeval crane. According to popular belief, the crane holds a stone in one leg so that it can be alerted when its attention is about to wither and it drops the stone – this refers to foreign aggression. The stork holds its head as if it were clattering – thus giving a signal or alerting people, while the wing is nailed to the ground. Its feathers are headstones of the victims who, with their personal fates, bind those who wanted to fly. The heavy forged chains that hang from the neck represent the weight of an escape from prison. The inner space of the monument is a tiny chapel that reflects the shrine of Saint Stephen’s Chapel just behind it. The flashing necklace-like chains, the wind chimes and the death-bells are the spiritual representation of the spirits of the victims. The pedestal itself is a nest, which is the confined area where this struggle takes place. You can approach the statue on a winding pathway, i.e. a river where the graves are small islands. As we go, we go by those

who have already passed away. Part of the statue is open only when there is a ceremony: the gate itself, which is a giant flag with the iconic hole in the middle. Next to this gate imitating a stretched flag there is a real, “living” flag waving on the flagpole. Some of these elements are now somewhat distorted or lost, which is a pity. I do think, however, that I managed to associate a less usual symbol system with the revolution.

- Revolution-related commemorative plaques in Dunakeszi



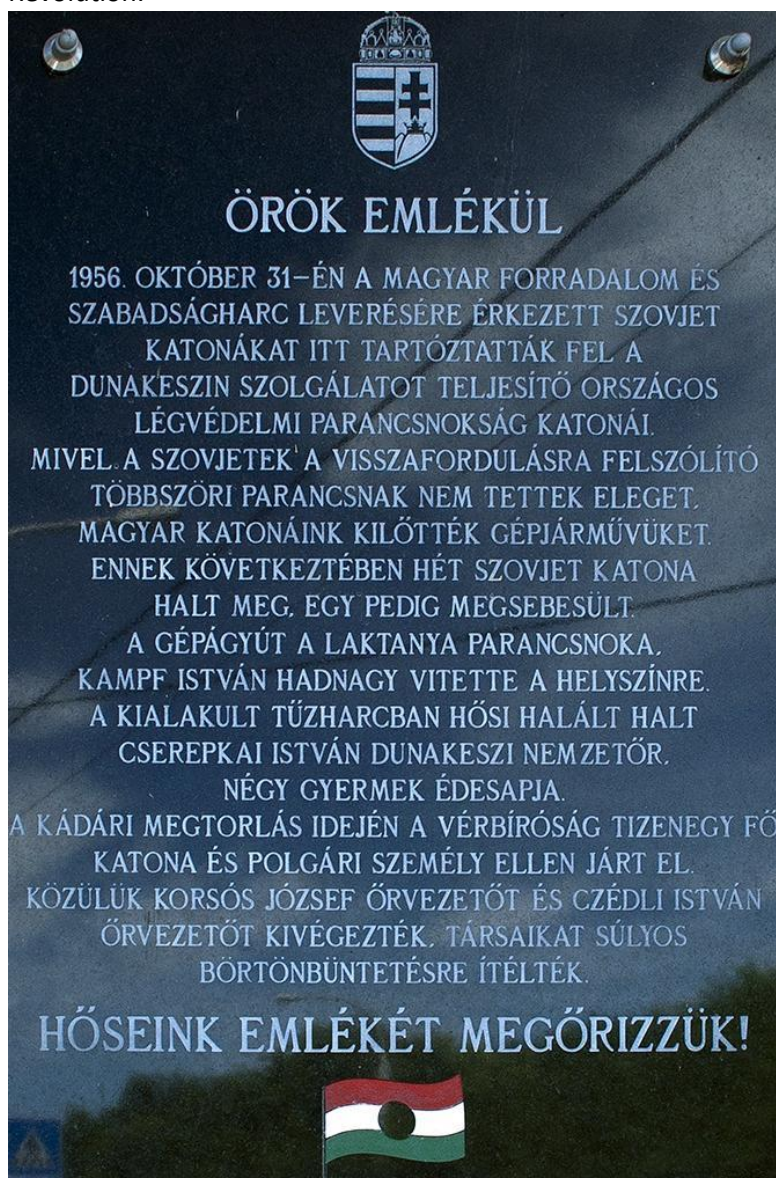
Text of the plaque: This is the house where József Hernádi Jr. lived. He took up arms against the invading Russians in October 1956, and lost his life while fighting. Let his deed serve as an example for all Hungarians.

The plaque was commissioned by the Municipality of Dunakeszi in 1996, on the 40th anniversary of the Revolution.

Additional information: Hernádi took up arms in the 1956 Revolution and fought against the Soviets with other members of the National Guard. After 4 November, most guardsmen from Dunakeszi decided to flee to the West across the Transdanubian region, and József Hernádi joined them. These members of the National Guard engaged in armed conflict with a Soviet tank on the main road between Oroszlány and Gánt. The 16-year-old Hernádi was wounded fatally in the encounter. The plaque was placed on wall of his birthplace by the Municipality of Dunakeszi in 1996, on the 40th anniversary of the Revolution.



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- The 15-year-old István Pálincás was a student at a vocational school in Budapest. He and his fellow students went to Corvin köz where they joined the revolutionists. A few days later he was shot in the abdomen. He was carried to the hospital in Sándor Péterfy street where the basement was assigned for tending those who got injured in the fightings. As soon as the Soviets learnt it, they sent a firing squad there to shoot down the injured. Only one person survived, who, around 10 November, informed Pálincás's family who had been hoping that the son had fled to the West. The plaque was placed on the wall of István Pálincás's birthplace by the Municipality of Dunakeszi in 1996, on the 40th anniversary of the Revolution.



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- the text of the plaque:

As a memorial forever

This is the place where on 31 October 1956, soldiers of the National Air Defense Command serving in Dunakeszi halted Soviet troops who came to subdue the Hungarian Revolution and fight for freedom. Since the Soviets would not turn back despite repeated calls, our Hungarian soldiers opened fire and destroyed their vehicle, killing nine Soviet soldiers and injuring one. The gun had been taken to this location by barracks commander lieutenant István Kampf. Firefight evolved, taking the life of a national guardsman, István Cserepkai, father of four. In the course of the ensuing retribution of the Kádár Era, 11 people – including soldiers and civil persons – were charged by the blood judges. Lance-corporals József Korsós and István Czédli were executed, while their fellows were sentenced to prison. We will safeguard the memory of our heroes!



- the text of the plaque:
Attila Gérecz (1929 – 4 November 1956)
was born in this house 75 years ago.
He was a poet and a pentathlete, dead hero of the 1956 Fight for Freedom
Commissioned by the Municipality of Dunakeszi on 23 October 2004.
- Gérecz was born on 20 November 1929. His father, Ödön Gérecz was a mechanical engineer working for the Hungarian State Railways in the Dunakeszi Vehicle Repair, that is why the family moved to Dunakeszi. Attila Gérecz finished his first school year in Dunakeszi, then the family moved to Budapest.

The Poet Revolutionary (<https://www.freedomfirst1956.com/the-poet-revolutionary/>)

Stories of the proverbial poet at the fore of the revolution are common, and in many cases these poets, at least according to legend, are even the ones who start them. Attila Gérecz belongs among those who not only encouraged the people in their struggle against the enemy, but he also participated in the battles after having spent much time in a communist prison.

The life path of this poet from an intellectual background encapsulates communism's reign of terror in a single person. Despite being an excellent student, his father's well-to-do middle class background meant that he was not admitted to any university, and consequently he trained to be a machinist. Additionally, in 1949, Gérecz became a member of the national

pentathlon team, and was such a good marksman that he frequently defeated his teammate who would go on to be an Olympic and World Champion.

Despite excelling in sports, in his case this was oddly not enough to escape trumped-up charges against him, as opposed to other excellent athletes who were so important to the authorities that they were even occasionally released from prison to compete. Gérecz was falsely charged with conspiring against the one-party state, which at the time was considered a heinous crime, and the paranoid communist state frequently used this charge to liquidate its political enemies. For this reason, on December 8, 1950, he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison. The situation was so serious that four of his fellow accused were sentenced to death, three of them later executed. Gérecz continued to write poetry during his time in prison, as well as to translate works of German, English and French poets. After 1953 the situation in the prison relaxed somewhat, and he was able to form a literary circle, with the participants able to read the poems they had written onto toilet paper to each other. A collection of these poems was later published in the West.

On July 18, 1954, Gérecz escaped prison by throwing himself into the flooded Danube, but three days later an informer betrayed him. He was captured and placed in isolation. The revolutionaries freed him from prison on October 30, 1956, and he joined the fight against the Soviets on November 4th. During the first few days he even managed to knock out two tanks. His third attempt ended in tragedy, however, when a round fired from a T-34 tank struck and killed him.

Gérecz's memory was loyally preserved by the revolutionaries, and from 1957 Hungarian immigrants living in the West published his poems in the journal *Nemzetőr*. The poet's works were published for the first time in Hungary in 1991. His poems handwritten in prison have been published several times since, and his memory is also preserved through the Attila Gérecz youth pentathlon competition.

<https://www.terrorhaza.hu/en/allando-kiallitas/basement/hall-of-the-1956-revolution>