

Warrior on a Horse in Skopje



Age group: 15 to 16 years old



Time: 2 x 45 mins



Key question: How can a single public monument simultaneously serve as a symbol of national pride, an international diplomatic dispute, a catalyst for domestic political division, and an ongoing challenge for multi-ethnic co-existence?



Materials needed for the lesson: Photographs of the "Warrior on a Horse" monument, the 2016 Colourful Revolution protests, and the 2019 plaque installation/physical damage. Source Packs 1–5 (Official State Narrative, Prespa Agreement Legal Text, Civic Society & Colourful Revolution Critiques, International & Academic Historians, Multi-ethnic / Minority Perspectives). Student Worksheet: "The Detective's Guide to Contested Monuments" (Parts A, B, C, and D). Glossary of Historical, Civic, and Pedagogical Terms. Sticky notes, flipchart paper, and marker pens, IT classroom, computer, internet connection.

Skills and Concepts developed in the lesson plan:

- Historical Multiperspectivity: Analysing conflicting historical, domestic, political, and ethnic interpretations of a shared public space.
- Critical Source Deconstruction: Differentiating between political state narrative, international legal treaties, civic activism, academic historical analysis, and minority perspectives.
- Intended vs. Unforeseen Consequences: Evaluating how civic protest interventions can trigger systemic political shifts, including government transitions, international agreements, and constitutional renaming.
- Visual and Media Literacy: Decoding political iconography, scale, urban reconfiguration, and spatial symbolism in public architecture.
- Democratic Dialogue & Negotiation: Articulating sensitive, conflicting viewpoints respectfully and evaluating mechanisms for civic compromise or continuous debate.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Analyse a contested monument from at least five distinct socio-political and ethnic perspectives.
- Explain how collective memory, national identity, and historical figures can be interpreted or become subjects of dispute during contemporary nation-building processes.
- Evaluate the long-term historical and political ripple effects of civic protest interventions (2016), assessing how street protests contributed to institutional shifts, the Prespa Agreement (2018/2019), the constitutional state name change, and ongoing identity contestation.
- Evaluate the impact and limitations of international legal frameworks (such as the Prespa Agreement) and physical interventions (such as contextualising plaques) in resolving memory disputes.
- Propose and justify a well-reasoned civic or pedagogical intervention for a contested public space using historical evidence and critical reasoning.

Pedagogical Recommendations:

- ★ Managing Classroom Polarisation: The "Skopje 2014" project and the "Warrior on a Horse" monument remain controversial and sensitive topics in North Macedonia. The educator must strictly anchor all discussions in source analysis, historical evidence, and critical reasoning rather than personal ideological debates.

- ★ Scaffolding for VET Students and Diverse Reading Levels: Source packs contain excerpts from international legal agreements (Prespa Agreement), political statements, and academic analyses. For VET students or classrooms requiring additional literacy support, the teacher should pre-highlight key clauses, define technical terms using the provided Glossary, and clarify concepts such as "Antiquisation" prior to group work.
- ★ Inclusion of Introverted and Diverse Students: The Jigsaw method and assigned group roles (e.g., Note-taker, Time-keeper, Spokesperson) ensure that quieter students have a safe, structured micro-space to contribute without needing to compete during plenary debates.
- ★ Adapting the Lesson for a 45-Minute Schedule: If operating within a standard single-period schedule (45 minutes), apply the following adjustments:

Breakdown of Activities Step-by-step

Step 1

Conduct the Visual Hook ("See, Think, Wonder") as a whole-class discussion using sticky notes. This part of the activity should last 10 minutes.

Students should have a basic understanding of modern regional geography and the role of state institutions in managing public spaces and public funds. The teacher provides a 3-minute introductory brief on "public memory"—how societies choose who or what to commemorate in public spaces.

Action: The teacher projects an unlabelled, high-resolution photograph of the monument (Image 1/2) without disclosing its official title or context.

Task: Students complete Part A of the Worksheet ("See, Think, Wonder"). On sticky notes, they note:

- ★ See: Physical elements (massive equestrian figure, bronze relief, fountain, classicised soldiers, lions).
- ★ Think: What message or emotion the monument attempts to convey (power, antiquity, state pride, authority).
- ★ Wonder: Questions regarding its identity, cost, legal name, or purpose (Why is the legal name generic? Who built it? Who is excluded?).

Pedagogical Note: The teacher gathers the "Wonder" sticky notes on the whiteboard. These student-generated questions will drive the final reflection in Step 4.

Step 2

Conduct a condensed Source Analysis where groups focus on answering Questions 1 and 4 on the worksheet. This part of the activity should last 20 minutes.

Action: Divide the class into 5 structured stakeholder groups (4–5 students per group):

Group 1 (Official State Narrative / Architects): Focus on national pride, urban renewal, and historical continuity (2011 context).

Group 2 (Civic Activists / Colourful Revolution): Focus on anti-corruption protests, financial extravagance, public spending, and democratic accountability (2016 context).

Group 3 (International Diplomats / Prespa Agreement): Focus on international law, Hellenic heritage designation, constitutional changes, and regional stability (2018–2019 context).

Group 4 (Academic Historians & Heritage Experts): Focus on scientific archaeology vs. political mythology, artistic provenance, and the Florence foundry casting.

Group 5 (Minority & Multi-ethnic Perspectives): Focus on ethnic Albanian, Roma, and Turkish community perspectives regarding civic inclusion, budget distribution, and the exclusively mono-ethnic historical focus of the "Skopje 2014" project.

Task: Groups read their designated Source Pack (Source Packs 1–5), complete Part B of the Worksheet, and outline their group's position for the simulation.

Step 3

Conduct a brief Civic Hearing summary or assign Part C/D as a homework/follow-up activity. This part of the activity should last **15 minutes**.

Action: Set up the classroom as a "City Council Public Hearing".

Task: One spokesperson from each of the 5 stakeholder groups sits on a central panel. The teacher acts as an objective moderator.

Prompt for Debate:

"How should our city manage this contested public space? Should the monument remain as it is, be altered, contextualised, re-labelled, or removed, and how can the space reflect all citizens and international obligations?"

Pedagogical Note: The debate must focus on the quality of evidence, legal frameworks, and critical reasoning.

Step 4

Epilogue, Meta-Reflection & Exit Ticket (20 mins)

Action: The teacher introduces a brief real-world epilogue update:

In August 2019, bronze plaques explaining the Hellenic context of the monument were officially attached to the base pursuant to the Prespa Agreement. Within days, these plaques were repeatedly damaged, scratched, or removed by unknown individuals.

Discussion (5 mins): Can an international treaty or an added plaque permanently settle a memory dispute? What is at stake for those who continue to defend or contest the monument?

Task: Students complete Part D of the Worksheet individually (Exit Ticket), reviewing how their perspectives shifted and addressing the student-generated "Wonder" questions from Step 1.

Adaptability to Other National Contexts

For educators outside North Macedonia: This lesson serves as a case study on what happens when a domestic memory dispute is arbitrated by international diplomacy. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this methodology to local contested monuments by substituting the source packs with local historical disputes involving national identity, border agreements, or contested public figures.

Pedagogical Terms:

- ★ Exit Ticket: A brief end-of-lesson formative assessment task where students write down reflections or answers to specific prompts before leaving.
- ★ Jigsaw Method: A cooperative learning technique where students are divided into groups to become "experts" on a specific sub-topic before sharing their findings with peers.
- ★ See, Think, Wonder: A visual thinking routine designed to encourage careful observation, critical interpretation, and student-driven enquiry.

Assessment Rubric

Educators will assess student performance based on critical reasoning, historical methodology, and evidence usage across the worksheet, simulation, and reflection tasks:

Assessment Criteria	Developing (Level 1)	Proficient (Level 2)	Exemplary (Level 3)
Multiperspectivity & Contextual Understanding	Identifies only a single national, ethnic, or personal viewpoint; dismisses alternative interpretations.	Explains at least three distinct socio-political or ethnic perspectives surrounding the monument objectively.	Evaluates how identity, international relations, and socio-political context shape conflicting historical narratives across all 5 stakeholder groups.
Critical Source Analysis & Reasoning	Repeats political rhetoric, public myths, or slogans without validating sources or citing evidence.	Distinguishes between state narrative, civic activism, legal treaties, and academic historical evidence.	Deconstructs subtle bias, political rhetoric, deliberate omissions, and legal compromises within public monuments and primary sources.
Civic Evaluation & Proposed Interventions	Proposes solutions without providing supporting arguments, historical evidence, or civic justification.	Proposes a clear intervention (e.g., removal, retention, contextualisation) backed by logical reasoning and source material.	Formulates a highly reasoned, inclusive intervention that addresses domestic, international, and multi-ethnic civic dimensions, demonstrating high-level critical argumentation regardless of the specific remedy chosen.

Worksheet for the students

SOURCE PACK 1: Official State Narrative & Project Vision (2011)

Source Type: Official Government Statements & Project Promotional Materials (Ministry of Culture, 2011).

Excerpt:

"The urban redevelopment project 'Skopje 2014' aims to restore the historical identity of our capital, which was visually lost following the catastrophic 1963 earthquake and decades of modernist, utilitarian architecture. The installation of the 'Warrior on a Horse' on the 20th anniversary of our independence represents a monumental tribute to our roots, historical continuity, and national pride. Public monuments are standard expressions of national identity across Europe, designed to inspire future generations and create an attractive cultural centre for international tourism."¹

Context Note: The sculptor was Macedonian artist Valentina Stevanovska, and the bronze work was cast at the Ferdinando Marinelli Artistic Foundry in Florence, Italy.

SOURCE PACK 2: Civic Activism & The Colourful Revolution (2016)

Source Type: Protest Statements, Civil Society Reports, and Investigative Financial Audits (2016).

Excerpt:

"The 'Warrior on a Horse' is not merely a statue; it is the physical symbol of opaque public spending, unchecked political authority, and state capture. While millions of euros were spent on bronze, marble, and classical facades in the centre of Skopje, public hospitals, schools, and basic infrastructure across the country suffered from systemic underfunding. During the 2016 Colourful Revolution, citizens took to the streets under the slogan "No Justice, No Peace". Splashing paint on these monuments was an act of civic reclaiming—turning symbols of authoritarian waste into canvases for democratic protest."²

Context Note: Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's government faced severe criticism for wiretapping scandals and corruption. Gruevski later resigned, was convicted of corruption charges, and fled the country in November 2018.

SOURCE PACK 3: International Diplomacy & The Prespa Agreement (2018–2019)

Source Type: Extract from the Final Agreement (Prespa Agreement, Article 8, 2018) and Plaque Inscription (2019).

Excerpt:

¹ Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia (2011) *Skopje 2014: Official Presentation and Architectural Vision*. Press Release and Promotional Publication Archive. Skopje: Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

² Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Macedonia (2016) *Skopje 2014 Under Scrutiny: Financial Audit and Investigative Database*. Skopje: BIRN. Available at: <https://skopje2014.prizma.mk/> (Accessed: September 2026).

Civil Society Coalition & '#Protestiram' (2016) *Reports on Governance, Public Spending, and Civic Protests in North Macedonia*. Skopje: Civil Society Resource Centre.

Article 8, Paragraph 2: "Within 6 months from the entry into force of this Agreement, the Second Party [North Macedonia] shall review the status of monuments, public buildings and infrastructures on its territory... to ensure respect for Hellenic historical and cultural heritage."³

Official Pedestal Plaque (Affixed 15 August 2019): "In honour of Alexander the Great, a historic figure belonging to ancient Hellenic history and civilisation and to the world cultural and historic heritage. Here he is presented as an equestrian warrior."

Context Note: Although intended to resolve international friction, the political changes that accompanied this agreement—including the constitutional name change—prompted intense national debates. The installed plaques were constantly targeted for damage, scratched, or removed by citizens shortly after their installation.

SOURCE PACK 4: Academic Historians & Archaeological Science

Source Type: Extracts from Academic Journal Articles & Heritage Studies (2015–2020).

Excerpt:

"Nations frequently construct 'invented traditions' and selective historical memory during political consolidation. From an archaeological and historical perspective, attempting to claim exclusive ownership over ancient figures like Alexander the Great overlooks the complex, fluid nature of ancient history. Modern nation-states did not exist in antiquity. Substituting scientific historical methodology with political mythology creates fragile national narratives that alienate international neighbours and reduce rich regional history to simplified political symbols."⁴

SOURCE PACK 5: Multi-Ethnic & Minority Civic Perspectives

Source Type: Statements from Minority Community Representatives, Cultural Sociologists, and Civic Organisations.

Excerpt:

"North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural democratic state comprising ethnic Albanians, Macedonians, Turks, Roma, Serbs, Vlachs, and Bosniaks. The "Skopje 2014" project, centered on the 'Warrior on a Horse', spent hundreds of millions of euros from taxpayers of all ethnic backgrounds to project an exclusively Slavic-Macedonian and ancient narrative. Public heritage in a multi-ethnic democracy must be inclusive. When state resources are used to transform shared public space into a mono-cultural gallery, minority communities are rendered invisible in the heart of their own capital."⁵

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia (2018) *Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as Described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993)* [Prespa Agreement]. Article 8, paragraph 2. Available at: <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/02/Prespa-agreement.pdf> (Accessed: September 2026).

⁴ Plantzos, D. (2024) Archaeopolitics: The second lives of statues, ResearchGate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Skopje-North-Macedonia-Warrior-on-a-Horse-Photo-Wikimedia-Commons_fig4_382941272 (Accessed: September 2026)

⁵ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights / Civil Society Coalition (2016) *Civic Inclusion and Minority Perspectives on the Urban Transformation of Skopje*. Policy Brief & Public Statements Archive. Skopje: Civil Society Resource Centre.

Véron, O. (2021) 'Contested spaces, contested identities: Liberal inclusion and ethnic segregation in Skopje', *Urban Studies*, 58(14), pp. 2890–2907.

STUDENT WORKSHEET: The Detective's Guide to Contested Monuments: The Case of Skopje 2014

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

PART A: VISUAL INQUIRY – "SEE, THINK, WONDER" (Individual Task)

Examine the projected, unlabelled photograph of the monument in Macedonia Square and complete the table below during the first 15 minutes.

SEE (What specific physical details do you observe?)	THINK (What purpose or message does this scale convey?)	WONDER (What questions do you have about its name, cost, or history?)

PART B: EXPERT GROUP SOURCE ANALYSIS (Group Task)

Read your assigned Source Pack (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5). Discuss the contents with your team and answer the following questions to prepare for the Civic Council Hearing.

Source Identification & Objectives:

Who created or expressed the perspective in your source? What is their primary goal or concern regarding the monument?

1. Linguistic Analysis:

Identify two specific words or key phrases in your source text that reveal the mindset, bias, or priorities of the author.

Phrase 1: _____

Phrase 2: _____

2. Civic & Social Impact:

According to your source, does this monument promote unity, division, or exclusion in society? Justify your answer with evidence from the text.

3. Evaluating Intended vs. Unforeseen Consequences (Critical Analysis):

While civic activists during the 2016 Colourful Revolution intended to protest public spending and political corruption, how did the subsequent political shift lead to unintended long-term outcomes (e.g., the Prespa Agreement, the constitutional name change, and identity debates)?

4. Proposal for the Civic Council Hearing:

Based strictly on your source pack, what is your group's official recommendation regarding the future of the monument ?

PART C: CIVIC MEDIATION – PROPOSING AN INTERVENTION (Pair Work)

Imagine your team has been tasked by the city council to propose an intervention for the monument (e.g., adding a digital QR display, modifying physical plaques, adding artistic installations, or re-designing the space).

Instructions: Write a well-reasoned proposal (150–200 words). Your proposal must demonstrate critical reasoning, address domestic civic concerns (e.g., financial transparency), international treaties (Prespa Agreement), constitutional changes, and multi-ethnic inclusivity.

Draft your proposal here:

PART D: METACOGNITION & EXIT TICKET (Individual Reflection)

Complete these reflection prompts individually before leaving the classroom.

1. Before this lesson, I assumed the "Warrior on a Horse" monument was:

2. During the simulation, I was surprised to learn that another group views the monument as:

3. Historians distinguish between immediate protest intentions (2016) and long-term political outcomes (Prespa Agreement, state name change). To what extent do you think the eventual political outcomes aligned with or diverged from what the 2016 protesters originally sought to achieve?

4. Looking at the news about the damaged plaque in 2019, why is it difficult to permanently "settle" a historical dispute through official treaties or plaques alone?

5. Addressing one of my initial "WONDER" questions from Step 1, my critical view on this monument now is:

Monument information background

Monument Name: "Warrior on a Horse" (Воин на коњ)

Common Public Designation: Alexander of Macedonia

Location: Macedonia Square, Skopje, North Macedonia

Inauguration Date: 8 September 2011 (Coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the country's independence)

Sculptor: Valentina Stevanovska

Casting Site: Ferdinando Marinelli Artistic Foundry, Florence, Italy

Dimensions & Scale: Bronze statue height: 14.5 metres; Column/Fountain base height: 10 metres; Total height: approx. 24.5 metres

Estimated Financial Cost: Public records and investigative reporting indicate total expenditure for the statue, fountain, and pedestal ranged between €5.3 million and €9.4 million (as part of the broader €600 million "Skopje 2014" project).

Sponsor: Ministry of Culture / Municipality of Centar / Government of the Republic of Macedonia (under Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, VMRO-DPMNE).

Historical Context and Contestations

Erected in 2011, the 'Warrior on a Horse' monument was the visual centrepiece of "Skopje 2014" – a state-funded urban transformation project whose aim was to consolidate and affirm the national identity of the capital through neoclassical and baroque architectural styles.

The monument triggered contestation across four major dimensions:

1. Domestic Political Conflict, The Colourful Revolution (2016), and Long-Term Shifts: Opposition to the monument expanded beyond architectural criticism. In 2016, widespread public anger over political scandals, wiretapping revelations, and governance issues led to the "Colourful Revolution". The protesters vandalised the monument, as well as other state institutions, by throwing paint-filled balloons, transforming the structure into a primary focal point for anti-government protests. While aiming to demand accountability, these protests acted as a catalyst for political turnover that ultimately resulted in far-reaching geopolitical recalibrations, including the Prespa Agreement (2018) and the constitutional renaming of the state.
2. International Diplomatic Dispute: Greece viewed the monument as historical appropriation and a claim over ancient Macedonian identity. The dispute affected North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration processes until the signing of the Prespa Agreement in June 2018.
3. Legal Contextualisation (2018–2019): Article 8(2) of the Prespa Agreement stipulated that North Macedonia must review the status of monuments on its territory and affix explanatory plaques. On 15 August 2019, an official trilingual plaque (Macedonian, Albanian, English) was affixed to the pedestal:
"In honour of Alexander the Great, a historic figure belonging to ancient Hellenic history and civilisation and to the world cultural and historic heritage. Here he is presented as an equestrian warrior."

Within days of installation, the plaque was physically damaged, demonstrating the persistent complexity of public memory.

4. Multi-ethnic & Social Dynamics: "Critics contended that the 'Skopje 2014' project – implemented in a country with a diverse, multi-ethnic population where ethnic Macedonians constitute the majority, alongside the Albanian, Turkish, Romani, Vlach, Serbian and other non-majority communities – imposed a mono-ethnic historical narrative, marginalising the multi-ethnic character of contemporary society."

Monument Pictures



[Photo1: Monument dominating Macedonia Square](#)



[Photo 1a: Monument dominating Macedonia Square \(Stone Bridge view\)](#)