

# Virtue In Action

VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

“Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day:  
Opportunities to Remember and Honor  
Those Who Protect Our Nation”



# Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day:

*Opportunities to Remember and Honor Those Who Protect our Nation*



The National World War II Memorial is the first national memorial dedicated to all who served during World War II. (National WWII Memorial site)

**I**n the month of May our nation observes Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day. Sadly, Memorial Day has come to mean for many of us a day off from school or work, and most of us don't even realize there is an Armed Forces Day. In this lesson we will discuss the meaning of Memorial Day, and Armed Forces Day with the hope that through our own actions we can restore in our communities the true meaning of these important days.

## **Memorial Day**

Memorial Day is a day of remembrance of the sacrifice of those who have died in defense of our nation. Presently, it is especially important for us to remember and honor the sacrifices of our military members who are dying on a near daily basis in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to remember the sacrifices of their families left behind.

The origins of Memorial Day go back to soon after the Civil War, when throughout the nation citizens placed flowers on the graves of both Union and Confederate soldiers. These tokens of remembrance spread throughout the nation and Memorial Day was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan. General Logan asked the nation to honor the graves of soldiers who died in war with flowers, and to assist their families left behind.

Moina Michael did much to promote the observance of Memorial Day in America. USAMemorialDay.org provides the following account of her work, "She then conceived of an idea to wear red poppies on Memorial Day in honor of those who died serving the nation during war. She was the first to wear one, and sold poppies to her friends and co-workers with the money going to benefit servicemen in need. Shortly before Memorial Day in 1922, the VFW became the

first veterans' organization to nationally sell poppies. Two years later the program was selling artificial poppies made by disabled veterans." The VFW Poppy program continues today as a means of helping disabled veterans, and it is one way we can observe Memorial Day.

In December 2000 Congress approved the National Moment of Remembrance resolution, which asks that at 3 p.m. local time, for all Americans "To voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a moment of remembrance and respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a moment of silence or listening to 'Taps'".

**Armed Forces Day**

Armed Forces Day is celebrated on the third Saturday of May. According to the Department of Defense, it is "a day to honor and acknowledge the people of the Armed Forces of the United States. President Harry S. Truman led the effort to establish the holiday for citizens to come together and thank our military members for their patriotic service in support of our country." We are also called to honor the tens of thousands of families who sacrifice much from the extended deployments of their fathers, sons and daughters, and in some cases even mothers.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower said of Armed Forces Day: "It is fitting and proper that we devote one day each year to paying special tribute to those whose constancy and courage constitute one of the bulwarks guarding the freedom of this nation and the peace of the free world." President Kennedy spoke of the importance of the Armed Forces in securing our

liberties: "...Word to the Nation: Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard."

It is important to remember that in honoring those who have given their lives, and those now serving, we honor the ideals they serve to promote: the ideals of freedom, democracy, and through the deterrence of a strong national defense the ideal of peace. Many of the reporters presently covering the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both those for and against the wars, have discussed how most of the soldiers they interview have a clear sense of why they are serving: to bring freedom and democracy to these nations, and to protect our own nation. Memorial and Armed Forces Days can unite all of us back home, whatever our views are on this war, by honoring the ideals our military members sacrifice to advance.

**Observing Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day**

One powerful way to honor our military members is to support one of the many organizations that help members of the military and their families. One such organization is USA Cares <http://usacares.us/>. Their story not only highlights the sacrifices of our military members and their families, it also is a beautiful testimony of the power of individual volunteers uniting together to make a difference.

USA Cares was started by former military officers and their wives to address the needs of military families. The work of USA Cares shows us the scope of needs that arise when our nation is at war. One significant area of need is financial. When our nation goes to war, most of the troops deployed

Internet Resources



**USA CARES**  
<http://www.usacares.us/>  
<http://www.usacares.us/files/usacaresbrochure.pdf>



**WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT**  
<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/site/c.iqLTi2OBK1f/b.1109075/k.9013/Headquarters.htm>  
[www.soldierride.com](http://www.soldierride.com)



**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS "BUDDY POPPY" PROGRAM**  
<http://www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=cnty.levelc&cid=127&tok=1>  
 To place an order for Buddy Poppies to distribute at school, please use this form  
<http://www.vfwva.org/forms/BPAPPLICATION.htm>

are full time active duty troops who receive salaries that in most cases can provide for their families. However, with the combined operations in Iraq and Afghanistan many of the troops deployed are reserve or guardsmen who train as soldiers part time, knowing that at some point they could be activated. Reserve and guardsmen have assumed that in most cases they wouldn't be activated for more than 6 months. However, presently tens of thousands of guardsmen and reservists have been activated for more than 1 year, some for more than 2 years. For a minority, but still thousands of families, this has meant a significant reduction in their income for an extended period, leaving them unable to pay for basic necessities such as housing, car repairs and in some cases even food.

The volunteers of USA Cares believe that none of the men and women putting their lives at risk to protect us should have to worry about their families being evicted from their homes, or not being able to afford food and clothing. To address this need, USA Cares verifies a family's financial need and then provides financial assistance. Their work has literally meant the difference in soldiers' families being able to stay in their homes, and afford basic necessities.

Military families can also experience financial need due to injury. In many military families the wife is working and taking care of the children as the husband has been deployed overseas. Upon a serious injury the wife often wants to be with her husband even for a short time to provide him with the emotional support so important for recovery. This often means the wife can't work, and needs to pay for transportation and hotels. In hundreds of cases families haven't had the money to pay these expenses. Groups such as USA Cares and Wounded Warrior have stepped in to help provide the funds for transportation, lodging and food. These groups also provide injured soldiers with items the government doesn't pay for such as clothing made with snaps for soldiers who have had arms amputated, and reading materials during their long stays.

The WWP website explains, "The project was founded on the principle that veterans are our nation's greatest citizens. At the Wounded Warrior Project we provide programs and services designed to ease the burdens of the wounded and their families, aid in the recovery process, and smooth their

transition back to civilian life. Our work begins at the bedside of the severely wounded, where we provide comfort items and necessities, counseling, and support for families." One group of injured soldiers named Soldier Ride ([www.soldierride.com](http://www.soldierride.com)) is raising money for WWP by biking across America.

It's amazing to see the work of the volunteers of USA Cares, Wounded Warrior and many other organizations dedicated to helping soldiers and their families. Their generosity and sense of duty to honor the service of our military members is an inspiration to us all. A great way to observe Memorial and Armed Forces Day is to consider how we can join in the efforts of groups like USA Cares and Wounded Warrior to assist our soldiers and their families in need, and as USA Cares likes to say to offer them a "Hand Up and not a Hand Out."

USA Cares and Wounded Warrior remind us that united we can make a difference in the lives of others in need. They also remind us that our freedom, granted to us through the sacrifices of millions of American soldiers and families carries a responsibility - to use our talents, resources and time for the benefit of others. This is freedom's highest calling and our duty as citizens of a great and prosperous nation.

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## Vocabulary

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**Bulwark** - something serving as a defense or safeguard

**Deployment** - to bring forces or materials into action

**Deterrence** - inhibiting criminal action by fear of punishment

**Duty** - that which binds a person to his obligations

**Empathy** - Entering into the feelings or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

**Generosity** - Freely giving of our time, talents and resources

**Perseverance** - Trying hard and continuously, despite obstacles and difficulties

Cover photo courtesy [www.arlingtoncemetery.org](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org)

# Virtue In Action

Opportunities to Remember and Honor Those Who Protect our Nation

## VIRTUE IN ACTION

## FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

### Lesson Goals:

- Help students realize the cost of our freedom – the sacrifices of those who have died, their families left behind, and those now serving our nation
- To gain a greater sense of appreciation for the freedom and security we enjoy, and to consider the responsibilities this freedom and security carries
- Inspire students to use our freedom for the good of our nation and all peoples
- Motivate students to observe Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day in meaningful ways
- Develop understanding of the virtues of sacrifice, duty, thanksgiving, empathy, generosity and community support
- Help students to see the importance of sacrifice and duty in serving a larger purpose
- Help students to realize that in living out the virtues of empathy, generosity and thanksgiving we can make a difference in the lives of others
- Realize the power of individual volunteers uniting together to make a difference



### Discussion Question Options

1. What are the purposes of Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day?
2. Do you think our nation and our own local community do enough to properly observe Memorial Day and Armed Forces Day?

What do you think we could do this year in our own school, local community and families to better observe these days?

3. Has learning about the sacrifices of those in our military and their families changed your perspective on the freedom and relative security we enjoy? Do you think our freedom carries with it responsibilities, if yes in what ways?
4. Do we know any families where a family member has been deployed away from home, or where a family member has died in Iraq or Afghanistan? If yes, what are some ways we could help them, or express our gratitude?

### Journal Writing

1. Create your own poem to observe Memorial or Armed Forces Day. Topics may include honoring soldiers who have died in defense of our nation, their families and / or soldiers presently serving and the sacrifices of their families.

## In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

— John McCrae, 1915.

**In 1915, inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields, Moina Michael replied with her own poem:**

We cherish too, the Poppy red  
That grows on fields where valor led,  
It seems to signal to the skies  
That blood of heroes never dies.

— Moina Michael

2. Send a greeting card to a soldier:

<http://www.americasupportsyou.mil/americasupportsyou/Message.aspx?SectionID=5>

“America Supports You,” a nationwide program launched by the Department of Defense, recognizes citizens’ support for our military men and women and communicates that support to members of our Armed Forces at home and abroad.

If you know of a military family in your community where a family member is deployed overseas or has been killed, send a note expressing your gratitude for their service and expressing your support for them.

3. Write an essay on what freedom means for your life, both now and in the future, and the responsibilities freedom places within your life.

#### **EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

1. Ideas for commemorating Memorial Day From: <http://www.usmemorialday.org/observe.htm>

- Visit cemeteries and placing flags or flowers on the graves of our fallen heroes
- Visit memorials
- Fly the U.S. Flag at half-staff until noon
- Fly the ‘POW/MIA Flag’ as well (Section 1082 of the 1998 Defense Authorization Act)
- Participate in a “National Moment of Remembrance”: at 3 p.m. to pause and think upon the true meaning of the day, and for Taps to be played.
- Renew a pledge to aid the widows, widowers, and orphans of our fallen dead, and to aid the disabled veterans

2. Organize a class, school-wide, or community fundraiser to support one of the organizations highlighted in our lesson, or another organization assisting military members and their families.

#### **INTERNET RESOURCES**

##### **USA CARES HOME PAGE**

<http://www.usacares.us/>  
<http://www.usacares.us/files/usacaresbrochure.pdf>

##### **WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT**

<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/site/c.iqLTI2OBKIF/b.1109075/k.9013/Headquarters.htm>  
[www.soldierride.com](http://www.soldierride.com)

#### **VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS “BUDDY POPPY” PROGRAM**

<http://www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=cmtylevelc&cid=127&tok=1>

To place an order for Buddy Poppies to distribute at school, please use this form <http://www.vfwva.org/forms/BPAPPLICATION.htm>

VFW “adopt-a-unit” program which pairs a Post with a Military Unit.

<http://www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=cmtylevelc&did=2410>

America Bands Together campaign, offering bands in support of our troops

<http://www.americabandstogether.org/>

3. A good way to link the past and present and to more fully appreciate the service and sacrifice of those serving in the military is to interview someone who served in a war. You can ask students to do this individually and provide a presentation back to the class, or by asking present military members and / or veterans to come and discuss their experiences with the class. The class may present questions in advance.

4. Organize the class into teams, asking each team to make a class presentation on one of following topics:

- List via a timeline of all of our nation’s wars. The team should also point out for the class where each war was fought on a large map.
- Summary of how many soldiers died and were injured in each war
- Detailed accounting of the troops deployed for the present wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including: number of soldiers deployed, the percentages that are Guardsmen and Reserve, estimates of how many are in financial need, the number of soldiers who have died so far in these wars, the numbers of soldiers injured, and types of injuries.

5. MemorialDay.org asks us to consider “adding your voice in support of the efforts to restore the traditional day of observance of Memorial Day back to May 30th (instead of “the last Monday in May”). This would help greatly to return the solemn meaning back to the day, and to help return minds and hearts to think upon the ultimate sacrifices made by those in service to our country. Just one day out of the year to honor our loved ones, our ancestors, our friends who died in conflicts and wars -- not to honor war, but those that died in those conflicts and wars.”

<http://www.usmemorialday.org/act.html>