

Lesson Plan: Memorial Day



AMERICAN
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ENGLISH

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Memorial Day

[1] In the United States, Memorial Day is observed on the last Monday of May. The holiday began after the Civil War to honor the soldiers who died. Over time, it has become a day to remember all people who have served their country.

[2] Memorial Day started as a tradition called Decoration Day. After the Civil War, women placed spring flowers on the graves of soldiers. This act showed respect and helped bring people together after the conflict. As the years passed, this event was called Memorial Day to honor soldiers who had died in all previous wars. In 1971, Memorial Day became an official national holiday.

[3] Today, Americans **observe** Memorial Day with many kinds of **tributes**. For example, people place flags or flowers on the graves of soldiers and other important Americans. Many towns and cities hold parades with flags and patriotic music. Across the country, the U.S. flag is flown at **half-staff** until noon. Then it is raised to the top to represent the nation's **resilience**. At 3:00 p.m., Americans pause for the National Moment of Remembrance, one minute of silent **reflection**.

[4] In the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., people visit special places to remember important people and events in American history. Every year, thousands of visitors come to the National Mall to see over 100 monuments and **memorials**. Each place is designed with

thoughtful symbolism. The World War II Memorial includes a large fountain surrounded by a pool of water, granite columns, and a wall of gold stars to honor the service and sacrifices of Americans during World War II. Visitors often come to these places to learn and reflect.

[5] Cities and states around the country also honor important people and events from their own history. Schools, parks, and hospitals are often named to honor people from the **community**. For example, an elementary school in Florida is named for Carolyn Beatrice Parker. She was a research physicist, and her work improved military aircraft radio technology.

[6] Many families also have personal ways to remember loved ones. Some people visit a meaningful place connected to their memories. Others plant a memorial tree or **donate** money to a charity in honor of their loved one. Through these actions, families think about the **legacy** of their family members and the importance they continue to have in their lives.

[7] Although it is a **solemn** holiday, Memorial Day is also thought of as the start of summer. Many Americans spend the long weekend enjoying time with family and friends. They attend barbecues or travel. However they spend Memorial Day, Americans remember and honor the important people in their families, communities, and country.

Overview

In this 90-minute lesson, students learn about the history and observance of Memorial Day in the United States. Students consider ways important people and events are remembered by countries, communities, and families.

Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.
- Learn about the history and traditions of Memorial Day in the U.S.
- Make connections between Memorial Day and their own culture or community.
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills on the topic of remembrance.

Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo at the beginning of this lesson
2. Printed or projected copy of the Memorial Day reading included with this lesson
3. Printed or projected copy of the Memorial Day chart included with this lesson
4. Paper, pens or pencils, and markers

Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the **Memorial Day** reading and the **Vocabulary from the Reading** list below.
3. Consider whether this lesson is suitable for your classroom. This lesson includes topics like war and grief, which may not be appropriate in every classroom.
4. Determine whether you will need to activate students' prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the Procedures section.
5. Consider if, or how, you will adapt or change this lesson to better meet your students' needs.

Vocabulary from the Reading

- **community** (noun) – A group of people who live in a particular place or who are part of a specific group
- **donate** (verb) – To give money or other helpful items, especially to charity
- **half-staff** (noun) – Flying the flag in the middle of the pole as a sign of respect and mourning, or grief



- **legacy** (noun) – The long-lasting impact of a person’s life
- **memorial** (noun) – Something designed to remind people about an important person or event from the past
- **observe** (verb) – To celebrate or acknowledge an event
- **reflection** (noun) – Serious thought
- **resilience** (noun) – The ability to recover from difficult times; toughness
- **solemn** (adjective) – Serious and formal, usually sad
- **tribute** (noun) – An action or statement meant to show respect or admiration

Procedures

Introduction Activity: What Do You Remember? (10 minutes)

1. Show students the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. After a few minutes, hide the photo so they cannot see the image.
3. Ask students to write some notes or key words describing the photo. Tell them to share their notes with a partner and discuss these questions:
 - What do you remember from the photo?
 - What details did you see in the photo?
4. Show students the photo again. Ask them to compare the photo with their notes and discuss these questions:
 - What was the most memorable part of the photo?
 - What parts of the photo did you forget?
 - What makes something easy to remember?

Reading Activity: Memorial Day (20 minutes)

1. Give each student a copy of the Memorial Day chart provided with this lesson or ask students to copy it on their own paper from a model displayed on the board.
2. Give students copies of the Memorial Day reading or display it for all students to read.
3. Ask students to read the article and identify the paragraphs that describe acts of remembrance by a country, community, and family. Tell them to write the paragraph numbers on the chart.
4. Ask students to use the information in the reading to complete the chart with notes about acts of remembrance in the United States. Tell them to compare their answers with a partner.
5. Review the answers as a class. The following chart gives sample answers.

Paragraph Number	Acts of Remembrance	United States of America	My Country
3 and 4	Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fly flags at half-staff • Observe National Moment of Remembrance • Visit monuments and memorials on the National Mall 	
5	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name important places like schools, parks, and hospitals to honor people • Hold a parade 	
6	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit a meaningful place • Plant a tree • Donate money to charity 	

6. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the last column of the chart with their own ideas about acts of remembrance in their country, community, and family.
7. Debrief as a class as time permits. Ask students to identify some similarities and differences between remembrance practices in the United States and in their own lives.

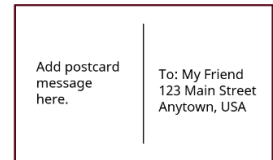
Speaking and Listening Activity: Memory Chain (10 minutes)

1. Ask students to form a circle.
2. Tell students to listen carefully. Explain that the goal of the activity is to remember what each person says.
3. Start the activity by saying, "I went to a parade, and I saw..." Complete the sentence with an appropriate item. For example, *I went to a parade, and I saw flags.*
4. Tell the next student to repeat the entire phrase, including the first item, and add an item of their own. For example, *I went to a parade, and I saw flags and people marching.*
5. Working around the circle, direct each student to repeat the entire phrase and add their own item to the end.

6. The activity ends when a student forgets an item, or when the whole circle has added an item to the list.

Communication and Creativity Activity: Postcard from a Memory (20 minutes)

1. Explain that *memorial* shares the same root as *memory*, *remember*, and *remembrance*. Ask students how they remember and document important personal memories. Tell students that some people like to send postcards from places they visit to share their experiences with loved ones.
2. Ask students to recall a fond personal memory from more than one year ago. What do they remember from this happy time? What made it special? What sensory details can they remember?
3. Give each student a half sheet of blank paper. Ask them to imagine they are sending a postcard from their memory. Guide them to design a postcard to share this important memory with a friend.
 - On one side of the paper, draw a picture to represent the memory.
 - On the other side, draw a vertical line in the middle of the page. On the left side of the line, write the postcard message. If desired, provide sentence frames such as:
 - Hello from ...
 - A memory here that makes me smile is ...
 - I feel ...
 - On the right side of the line, address the postcard to a friend.
4. When students are ready, invite them to share their postcards and memories with their classmates.



Creativity and Collaboration Activity: Design a Tribute (25 minutes)

1. Ask students to think about how important people and events are remembered in their communities and families.
2. Remind them about the tributes from the United States, like public monuments, naming important places, and planting trees, they read about. Ask them to brainstorm other ways to remind the community about important people and events. Write a list of their ideas on the board. Some ideas might include:
 - A mural or other art
 - A song or concert
 - Poetry
 - A service event
 - A garden or other outdoor space

3. Put students in small groups. Ask them to choose a person or event they would like to design a tribute for in their school or community, from either the past or present.
4. Ask each group to work together to design their tribute. Students can draw, write, or use technology tools to present their ideas.
5. When students are ready, ask each group to present their ideas to the class. Ask each group to explain their choices.

Closing Activity: What Do You Want to Remember? (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to reflect on the class session.
2. Tell them to write three things they learned in the lesson and want to remember in the future.
3. Collect students' responses as exit tickets as they leave the class, or ask students to verbally share their responses.

Variations and Extensions

Listening and Speaking Activity: Memory Chain Variations

Vary the Memory Chain activity based on your students' English language levels and interest.

1. Explain the memory chain activity to the students as described above.
2. Choose **one** of the following variations as desired and appropriate for your students:
 - Students must add an item to the chain that starts with the same letter as their first name.
 - Students must add an item to the chain that begins with the last letter of the previous item.
 - Students must add an item to the chain in alphabetical order.

Communication and Creativity Activity: Social Media Memories Variation

Students may complete this activity in place of the Postcards from a Memory activity.

1. Explain that *memorial* shares the same root as *memory* and *remember*. Ask students how they document important personal memories. Ask what popular social media sites students use to share their memories with others. Explain that many social media sites show users "memories" of previously posted content. Invite them to share their own experiences with social media memories.
2. Ask students to recall a fond personal memory from more than one year ago. What do they remember from this happy time? What made it special? What sensory details can they remember?

3. Give each student a piece of blank paper. Ask students to design a social media post for a platform of their choice. Direct them to draw or select an image to represent their memory, write a caption for their post, and select music or other features.
4. When students are ready, invite them to share their memories with their classmates.



Critical Thinking and Reading Activity: Compare and Contrast Extension

Students may complete this activity as an extension to the Memorial Day Chart activity.

1. Ask students to recall other holidays, such as Veterans Day, Presidents' Day, that have similar themes of remembrance and honoring important people from the past or other observances in their own culture or community.
2. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Tell them to draw a Venn diagram, labeling one side "Memorial Day" and the other with another holiday.
3. Tell students to work together and identify similarities and differences between the two (or more) holidays.

Collaboration Activity: National Mall Monuments and Memorials Extension

Students may complete this activity as an extension to the Design a Tribute activity.

1. Ask students to recall the information they read about the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States. Remind them that this area is home to many national memorials and monuments to important people and events in American history.
2. Put students into small groups. Invite groups to explore one or more of the sites on the [National Park Service's National Mall and Memorial Parks website](#).
3. When students are ready, facilitate a class debrief. Ask each group to share the information they found with the rest of the class. Help students make connections between the National Mall and their own acts of remembrance:
 - What places would you recommend a visitor see to learn about important people or events in our country?
 - How do the monuments and memorials on the National Mall compare to monuments or memorials in our country or community?

Memorial Day Chart

Use information in the reading to complete the chart. Then discuss with a partner to complete the last column with your own ideas.

Paragraph Numbers	Acts of Remembrance	United States of America	My Country
	Country		
	Community		
	Family		