

# Lesson Plan: Veterans Day



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# Veterans Day

[1] Each year on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Americans show their respect for **veterans** – men and women who **served** in the U.S. military. This holiday is known as Veterans Day, but it wasn't always called that. For many years, November 11 was known as “**Armistice** Day.” It **honored** veterans of the First World War.

[2] World War One lasted four years. Millions of people lost their lives. The fighting stopped when leaders signed an armistice on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, at 11 a.m. Later, people said peace came on “the **eleventh** hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.” Americans began to honor this date as “Armistice Day.”

[3] In 1954, after World War Two and the Korean War, the U.S. changed the name of this holiday. They wanted to honor everyone who had served in the military, not only World War One veterans. They decided to call November 11 Veterans Day.

[4] Many Americans have strong feelings on Veterans Day. Some families have lost loved ones in war. Others want to say thank you to people who have served in the military. On Veterans Day, Americans often use **symbols** to show their feelings.

[5] For example, people may wave American flags during a parade. The flag is a symbol of the United States. Many Americans stop what they are doing during

the Veterans Day moment of silence. They bow their heads to show respect.

[6] Other important symbols are used during the national Veterans Day program, held at Arlington National **Cemetery**. Many veterans are buried there. The cemetery is known for the **Tomb** of the Unknown Soldier. This special grave is a symbol of respect for veterans who died in war, but whose names are not known.

[7] On Veterans Day, the program begins at eleven o'clock in the morning. This starting time reminds people of the ending of World War One. The President of the United States places flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The President can be a symbol for all of the American people, and the flowers are symbols showing love and respect.

[8] Next, the song “Taps” is played. This song has a special meaning. “Taps” is a symbol for endings because it is played at the end of each day on military bases. This song is also often played at military **funerals**.

[9] Finding words to express strong emotions like love, sadness, respect, and hope for peace can be hard. The symbols used on Veterans Day help people show their love and emotions for their country and honor veterans.



## Overview

This 90-minute lesson introduces students to the U.S. holiday of Veterans Day through activities that encourage the development of both language skills and collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

## Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills.
- Develop visual literacy skills.
- Learn about Veterans Day traditions in the context of U.S. culture.
- Make connections between Veterans Day traditions and their own culture or community.

## Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo page at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Printed or projected copies of the Veterans Day reading included in this lesson.
3. Printed or projected copies of the Veterans Day Graphic Organizer included in this lesson. Students may draw the graphic organizer in their notebooks or use a printed version.
4. Printed or projected copy of the Veterans Day poster from 2018 included in this lesson.
5. Printed or projected copies of the Visual Choices Graphic Organizer included in this lesson. Students may draw the graphic organizer in their notebooks or use a printed version.
6. Printed or projected copies of the Visual Communication Worksheet included in this lesson. If preferred, students may write in their notebooks instead of writing directly on the worksheet.

## Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the **Veterans Day** reading and the **Vocabulary from the Reading** section (below).
3. Consider whether this lesson is suitable for your classroom. This lesson includes topics like war, fighting, and grief, which may not be appropriate in every classroom.
4. Think about any local traditions for military service or honoring veterans. Decide if you would like to connect the U.S. holiday of Veterans Day with these local traditions.



5. 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.
6. Consider if, or how, you will adapt or change this lesson to better meet your students' needs.

## Vocabulary from the Reading

- **veteran** (noun) – A person who served in the military.
- **serve** (verb) – To work for your country in the military.
- **honor** (verb) – To show respect for someone or something.
- **armistice** (noun) – An agreement between countries to stop fighting in a war.
- **eleventh** (adjective/number) – Showing the position of 11 in an order.
- **symbol** (noun) – Something, like a picture, action, or object, that shows a larger idea or feeling.
- **cemetery** (noun) – A place where people are buried after they have died.
- **tomb** (noun) – A special place, often marked with a stone, where a dead person is buried.
- **funeral** (noun) – A ceremony to honor and remember someone who has died.

## Procedures

### Introduction: Flags As Symbols (10 minutes)

1. Show students the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Explain that the people in this picture are members of the U.S. military. They are bowing their heads to show respect on Veterans Day.
3. Point out the U.S. flag in the photograph. Write the word *symbol* on the board. You may say: “When people see this flag, they don’t think of it as a piece of cloth. They think about the United States. That’s because the flag is a *symbol*. A symbol is something, like a flag, that helps people think about bigger ideas. We can explain what a symbol means like we can explain the meaning of words.”
4. Ask students to share other examples of symbols, or even emojis, they know about (such as hearts meaning love, or a smiley face showing happiness).
5. Point out the parts of the flag: the stars and stripes. Help students understand that each star is a symbol of one U.S. state: There are 50 stars, representing the 50 states.
6. Explain that colors can be symbols. Ask students to tell you what emotion or idea they connect with the color red. Make a list on the board. Explain that the color red can have many different meanings across cultures, such love, luck, danger, anger, or joy. Note that on the U.S. flag, the color red means “bravery.”
7. Tell students to think of other flags they know about. Ask: “What colors are on that flag? What symbols are on it? What do they mean?”



## Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening Activity: Veterans Day Jigsaw Reading (20 to 25 minutes)

1. Introduce the vocabulary from the reading. You may also need to activate students' prior knowledge about historical events, such as World War One or World War Two.
2. Ask students to read paragraphs 1 to 4 of the Veterans Day reading. As they read, they may answer the first three questions in Part One on the [Veterans Day Graphic Organizer](#)
3. Bring the whole group together to check for understanding.
4. Next, divide the class into groups of 4 for a jigsaw reading activity. Each group member should be asked to read *one* of the remaining paragraphs (5, 6, 7, or 8) of the Veterans Day reading, and complete Part Two of the [Veterans Day Graphic Organizer](#).
5. Each student should tell their small group about the symbols they read about.
6. When students return to the whole group, ask a few students to share about the Veterans Day symbols they learned about.

## Listening and Speaking Activity: Visual Literacy Lesson (15 minutes)

1. Tell students that the class will be looking at a poster created by an American artist to honor Veterans Day. Explain that they will be talking about how symbols, words, and pictures can create meaning.
2. Share the [Visual Choices Graphic Organizer](#) handout to help students take notes.
3. Share the image of the 2018 Veterans Day poster.
4. Ask students to name the symbols they see, and to share what they think the symbols mean. Students may not be familiar with these symbols; see the [Teacher Notes - Visual Literacy](#) section to guide the conversation.
5. Explain that artists make many different choices to communicate, like:
  - Which **symbols** to use
  - Which **colors** to use
  - What **words** to use
  - The **size** of symbols or words
  - **Placement, or** where to put symbols or words on the poster (such as at the top, bottom, middle, or sides)
  - What **style** to use (such as realistic, cartoon-like, plain, fancy, etc.)
6. Ask students to identify some of the choices the poster artist made (symbols, color, words, placement, size, style). Make a list of students' observations.
7. Review the list with students. For each item, ask:
  - What *feelings* does this communicate?
  - What does this make you think about?



## Creativity and Writing Activity: Making Visual Choices to Design a Poster (30 minutes)

1. Ask students to write a list of 3 to 5 people they would like to honor. They could list:
  - People they know (parents, friends)
  - Famous people (sports stars, singers, leaders, etc.)
  - People from history
  - Veterans
2. Explain that students will create a poster honoring someone from their list. Students may create digital posters (using software like Google Slides or Canva), or they may use another medium, like drawing or collage.
3. Tell students that they will need to explain the visual choices they make, and that they will be asked about things like:
  - What symbols they chose to use, and why
  - Why they chose certain colors (or to work only in black and white)
  - What they hope people who see the poster think and feel
4. Project or hand out the [Communication Choices Worksheet](#). Tell students that they can use the worksheet to help them make choices about their poster.
5. While students create their posters, move through the room, asking students to talk about their ideas and visual choices.
6. Remind students they must complete the Communication Choices Worksheet. It's okay if they don't have time to finish their poster during class – their *ideas* about the poster are most important.

## Speaking and Listening Activity: Interactive Gallery Walk (15 minutes)

1. Divide the class into two groups, A and B. Explain to students that:
  - Group A will stand by their posters and be the “presenters.”
  - Group B will circulate around the room as “visitors.” Their role will be to ask questions about the posters, such as why different styles, colors, or symbols were used.
2. After 7 minutes, have the groups switch roles. Group A now becomes the visitors, and Group B becomes the presenters at their posters.

If students have not completed their posters during class, they may complete the gallery walk during a subsequent class session.

Alternately, if timing and materials are limited, you may wish to use the Critical Thinking Extension or Variation described on the next page.



# Variations and Extensions

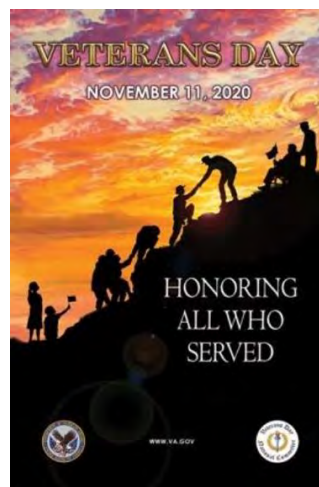
## Critical Thinking Extension or Variation

Students may complete this activity in addition to, or instead of, creating a poster.

1. Ask students to work in groups (or independently) to select one poster from Veterans Day [poster collection](#) at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
2. Students should research online to learn about words or symbols they don't know.
3. As students study their poster, they can use the [Visual Choices Graphic Organizer](#) to take notes.
4. Students may then present their analysis of the poster to the class, sharing their thoughts about the meaning of the poster during an Interactive Gallery Walk, as described above.

## Creativity Extension

1. Review the information from the reading about why the song "Taps" is played on Veterans Day.
2. Play [this video recording of the song](#), provided by the U.S. Navy Band, and discuss the video description. Explain that the song is an example of how music can be used to honor or show respect for people.
3. Ask students to create a playlist or choose a song that goes along with the poster they created. For example, if students were selecting a song to accompany the 2020 Veterans Day poster (below), they might choose a song like "[Further Down.](#)" Students could say, "The singer sings about healing the past. Some of the people in the poster are hurt, and others are helping them. This reminds me of healing."
4. Ask volunteers to share their posters and songs with the whole group.



# Veterans Day Graphic Organizer

## Part One

Read paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 of “Veterans Day.” As you read, answer these questions.

Who are veterans?	
What happened on November 11, 1918? Why would people want to remember or honor that day?	
Why did Americans change the name of the holiday to “Veterans Day” in 1954?	

## Part Two

Read the paragraph you were asked to read. Write down any actions or objects that are used as symbols to show bigger ideas or feelings. Tell your group about the symbols you read about.

Symbol	What Does it Mean?



HONORING ALL WHO SERVED



WWI  
100  
YEARS

VETERANS DAY

NOVEMBER 11, 2018



va.gov



# Teacher Notes – Visual Literacy

Posters, symbols, and visual images can have many meanings. These examples are not complete lists of symbols or design choices, but they may help guide discussion about how poster artists communicate feelings and ideas.

## Symbol Meanings

### Poppy (Red Flower)

- Symbol from World War One — poppies grew on the battlefields
- Meaning: New life coming from death; remembrance; healing

### Barbed Wire

- World War One battlefields
- Meaning: Danger; violence; death

### Grass Growing Near Barbed Wire

- Meaning: New life where there was death; hope

### Colors Red, White, and Blue

- Meaning: United States of America; patriotism

## Visual Choices Artists Make

### Colors

- The overall tone of colors is dark/dark blue. This creates a feeling of sadness.
- The red is very pale, almost pink, over the dark blue land. This makes a viewer think that the time of day could be sunrise, meaning hope or change.

### Style

- Simple style, few details. This isn't a cartoon. It's a serious topic.

### Size

- The poppy is very large. It's the first thing viewers see. The meaning is about focusing on new life, not the sadness of the past.

### Words

- The phrase "100 years" is very big, with "100" in red. This shows a focus on honoring the past.

### Placement

- "100 years" is next to the poppy, in the middle of the page, so you notice it right away. This shows the relationship between Veterans Day and World War One.



# Visual Choices Graphic Organizer

## Symbols and Their Meanings

Symbol	Meaning
Poppy Flower	
Barbed Wire	
Colors	

## Visual Choices and the Meaning of the Poster

Visual Choices	Notes	The feeling or idea this gives you
Colors		
Style		
Size		
Words		
Placement		
Symbols		



# Communication Choices Worksheet

Complete these sentences as you work on your poster.

1. I wanted to honor ...
2. I used... as a symbol because I wanted to show ...
3. I used the words... because...
4. I chose to use these colors because...
5. I want this poster to give people a feeling of...
6. I hope people who see this poster think...

