

MEMORIAL DAY

Last Monday in May

This American holiday serves as a time to remember and honor those who died in active military service to their country. The mission of Memorial Day is “to reach out in support of all the soldiers and their families who have sacrificed so much for us” ([pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org))

ORIGIN

Memorial Day began as a Civil War holiday called Decoration Day, honoring and remembering the 750,000 Union and Confederate soldiers who laid down their lives fighting in the Civil War by decorating their graves with flowers, wreaths, and flags. In the early days, there were scattered celebrations in small towns, where people would gather at cemeteries, decorate the graves, and then listen to speeches or sermons, sing songs, or march in parades.

But the holiday did not become widely prominent until, in 1868, General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic (an organization of Civil War veterans), declared May 30th Decoration Day, stating it was “designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion...”

Few ex-Confederate Southerners recognized this holiday, since it was initiated by Northerners and considered more of a celebration for Union soldiers and the Union cause. Southern states would hold their own Confederate Decoration Day. (To this day, several southern states recognize an additional, separate day for honoring the Confederate war dead.)

Over time, the name of the holiday changed from Decoration Day to Memorial Day, to signify that the act of memorializing is greater than simply decorating the graves of the fallen. After World War I, the meaning of the holiday shifted from remembering those who died in the Civil War to honoring all of America’s war dead. As a result, many Southern states began to observe Memorial Day as well. In 1968, one hundred years after the first national Decoration Day, Congress finally declared Memorial Day a national holiday.

In addition to fighting both in the Revolutionary War and (unofficially) in the War of 1812, 186,000 African-Americans fought for freedom with the Union during the Civil War; of these, between 38,000 and 40,000 died.

It is more difficult to assess the total number of lives lost as a result of slavery in the United States. Slavery was practiced for over two hundred years, overtly racist laws remained in place for a much longer period, and the United States continues to feel the ramifications of these horrific practices today. As Frederick Douglass said: “No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck.”

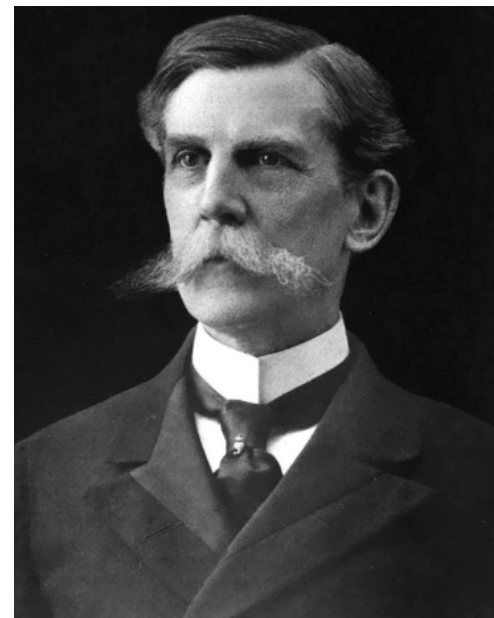
Timeline

- **1868** General John A. Logan declares May 30th Decoration Day. General James A. Garfield (later, president) gives a speech at Arlington National Cemetery.
- **1873** New York becomes the first state to officially observe Decoration Day on May 30th.
- **1884** Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. gives a Memorial Day Address, which becomes one of the most quoted Memorial Day speeches ever given.

“The generation that carried on the war has been set apart by its experience. Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing... Year after year the comrades of the dead follow, with public honor, procession and commemorative flags and funeral march—honor and grief from us who stand almost alone, and have seen the best and noblest of our generation pass away.”

—Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.
May 30th, 1884, Keene, New Hampshire

- **1890** By this year, all Northern states have made Decoration Day an official state holiday.
- **1915** Poet John McRae writes “In Flanders Fields,” and poppies become a popular symbol of remembrance.
- **1966** Congress resolves to officially recognize Waterloo, New York as the birthplace of Memorial Day; however, it remains in debate, as many cities claim to be the first to celebrate it.
- Congress declares Memorial Day a national holiday.
- **1968** The National Holiday Act goes into effect, establishing Memorial Day as a Federal holiday and moving it to the last Monday in May.
- **1971**
- **2000** The “National Moment of Remembrance” resolution is passed, which asks Americans to set aside 3 pm (local time) on Memorial Day 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.”



The Blue and the Gray

by Francis Miles Finch
(1827-1907)

*this poem is about the
origins of Memorial Day*

By the flow of the inland river,
 Whence the fleets of iron have fled,
Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver,
 Asleep are the ranks of the dead:
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day;
 Under the one, the Blue,
 Under the other, the Gray.

These in the robings of glory,
 Those in the gloom of defeat,
All with the battle-blood gory,
 In the dusk of eternity meet:
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day
 Under the laurel, the Blue,
 Under the willow, the Gray.

From the silence of sorrowful hours
 The desolate mourners go,
Lovingly laden with flowers
 Alike for the friend and the foe;
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day;
 Under the roses, the Blue,
 Under the lilies, the Gray.

So with an equal splendor,
 The morning sun-rays fall,
With a touch impartially tender,
 On the blossoms blooming for all:
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day;
 Broidered with gold, the Blue,
 Mellowed with gold, the Gray.

So, when the summer calleth,
 On forest and field of grain,
With an equal murmur falleth
 The cooling drip of the rain:
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day,
 Wet with the rain, the Blue
 Wet with the rain, the Gray.

Sadly, but not with upbraiding,
 The generous deed was done,
In the storm of the years that are fading
 No braver battle was won:
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day;
 Under the blossoms, the Blue,
 Under the garlands, the Gray.

No more shall the war cry sever,
 Or the winding rivers be red;
They banish our anger forever
 When they laurel the graves of our dead!
 Under the sod and the dew,
 Waiting the judgment-day,
 Love and tears for the Blue,
 Tears and love for the Gray.

In Flanders Fields

by John McCrae (1872-1918)

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.

this poem reflects Memorial Day's shift to include all wars

WAYS MEMORIAL DAY IS OBSERVED



Traditional observances of Memorial Day have diminished over the years, and many Americans have forgotten the meaning and traditions of this day. Here are a few:

Traditionally, the US flag is raised for a moment to the top of the staff, and then solemnly lowered to the half-staff position, where it remains until noon. In this way the more than 1,000,000 men and women who gave their lives in service to their country are remembered. Then the flag is raised to full-staff for the rest of the day, a reminder that their memory is raised high by the living, who rise up and continue to fight for liberty and justice.

Across the United States, Memorial Day parades are held each year, incorporating veterans and military personnel.

Americans visit cemeteries and memorials on this day, placing flags or flowers on the graves of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their nation.

Some people visit local veterans' homes and hospitals on this day, to express appreciation for their sacrifice, as well as that of their loved ones who died in battle. They may bring cookies, books, or movies to share.

The tradition of wearing Memorial Day Poppies, which was inspired by the 1915 poem "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrea, began with war worker Moina Michael, who pledged to always wear red silk poppies as a symbol of "keeping the faith with all who died." Many others have adopted this practice, not only in the US, but also in more than 50 other countries.

At Arlington National Cemetery, Memorial Day rituals are strictly upheld: American flags are placed at each of the more than 260,000 graves, and soldiers patrol day and night throughout the weekend to make sure the flags stay upright. Traditionally, the president or vice president gives a speech on Memorial Day and lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. About 5,000 people attend the ceremony.

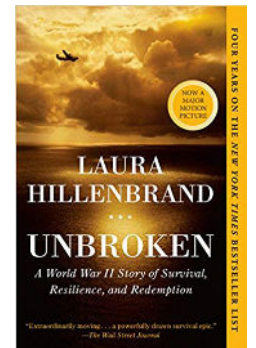
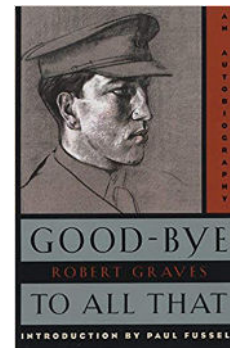
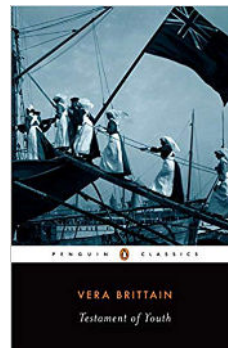
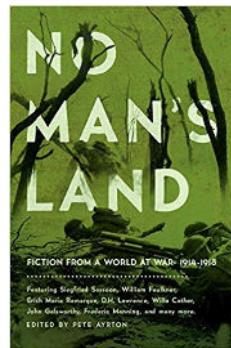
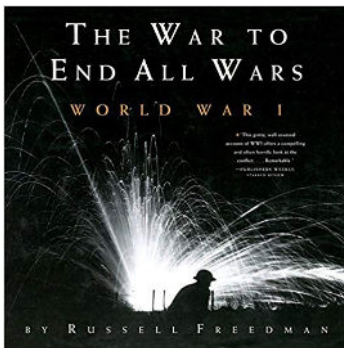
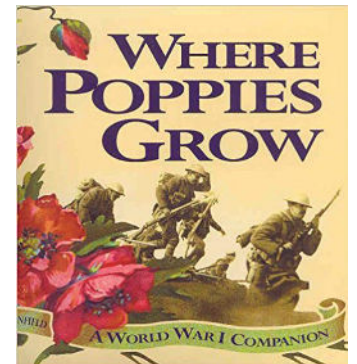
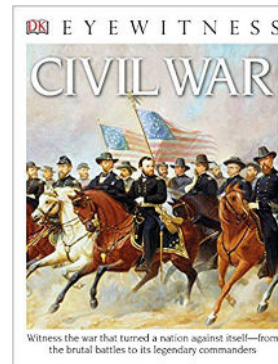
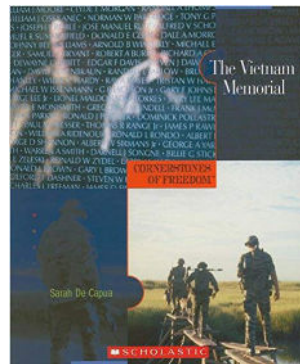
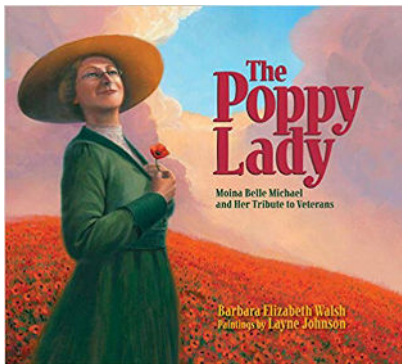
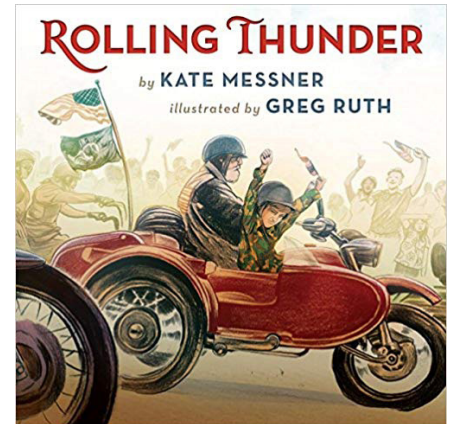
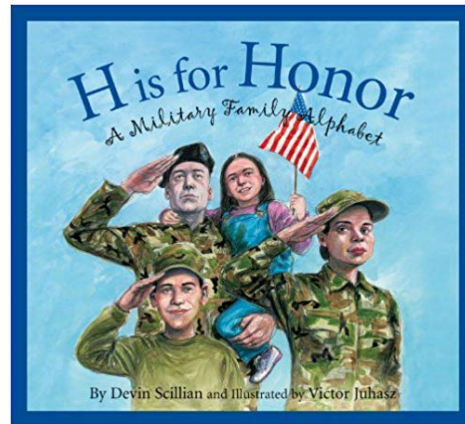
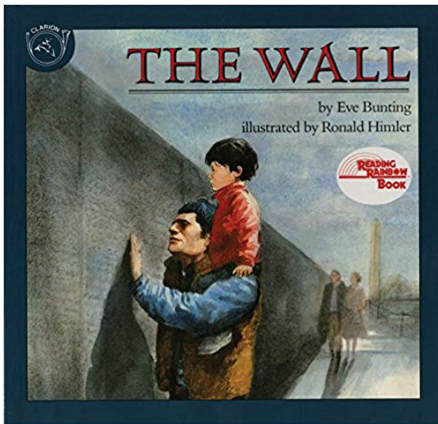
Americans are asked to observe a "National Moment of Remembrance" at 3 pm (local time) as a moment of silent reflection to honor the fallen.

take a moment to honor and reflect on the many U.S. fatalities from U.S. wars + conflicts

American Revolution (1775-1783)	4,435
War of 1812 (1812-1815)	2,260
Mexican War (1846-1848)	13,283
Civil War (1861-1865)	750,000
Spanish-American War (1898-1902)	385
World War I (1917-1918)	116,516
World War II (1941-1945)	405,399
Korean War (1950-1953)	36,574
Vietnam War (1964-1975)	58,220
Gulf War (1990-1991)	383
Afghanistan War (2001-present)	2,381
Iraq War (2003-2012)	4,500

Dates denote U.S. involvement in the wars.

a small selection of books



NOTE: Several of the following books, movies, and TV shows are repeated from the Veterans Day resource guide, since there is clearly much overlap between the two holidays. However, we've also included a few additional Memorial Day books and videos here.

parents +
educators:

PLEASE PREVIEW ALL MATERIALS BEFORE SHARING WITH YOUR CHILD

You are the best judge of what is appropriate for your child(ren) and what they will enjoy. Try checking goodreads.com for reviews.

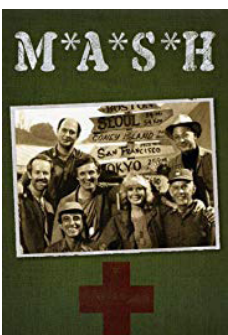
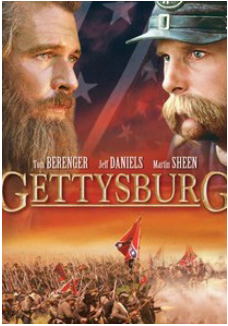
SEE NEXT PAGE FOR DETAILS + MORE

a small selection of books

CONTINUED

TITLE	AUTHOR	LEVEL
<i>The Wall</i>	Eve Bunting	K-Int
<i>Memorial Day</i> (<i>Rookie Read-About Holidays</i>)	Jacqueline S. Cotton	K-Int
<i>H is for Honor</i>	Devin Scillian	K-Int
<i>A Poppy is to Remember</i>	Heather Patterson	K-Int
<i>Rolling Thunder</i>	Kate Messner	K-Int
<i>Let's Celebrate Memorial Day</i> (<i>Holidays & Heroes</i>)	Barbara deRubertis	Pri-Int
<i>America's White Table</i>	Margot Theis Raven	Pri-Int+
<i>The Poppy Lady</i>	Barbara Walsh	Pri-Int
<i>The Vietnam Memorial</i> (<i>Cornerstones of Freedom</i>)	Sarah De Capua	Int-LMS
<i>DK Eyewitness Books: Civil War</i>	DK	Int-UMS
<i>DK Eyewitness Books: World War I</i>	DK	Int-UMS
<i>DK Eyewitness Books: World War II</i>	DK	Int-UMS
<i>World War II: Visual Encyclopedia</i>	DK	Int-UMS
<i>In Flanders Fields</i>	McCrae & Granfield	LMS-UMS
<i>Where Poppies Grow: A WW1 Companion</i>	Linda Granfield	LMS-UMS+
<i>The Unknown Soldier</i>	Linda Granfield	LMS-UMS+
<i>The War to End All Wars: World War I</i>	Russell Freedman	LMS-UMS+
<i>No Man's Land: Fiction From World at War</i>	Pete Ayrton	HS-Adult
<i>A World Undone: The Story of the Great War</i>	G. J. Meyer	HS-Adult
<i>Testament of Youth</i>	Vera Brittain	HS-Adult
<i>Goodbye to All That: An Autobiography</i>	Robert Graves	HS-Adult
<i>Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption</i>	Laura Hillenbrand	HS-Adult

MOVIES + TELEVISION



- *Ken Burns: The Civil War* (documentary series on Netflix; rated TV-PG; 1990)
- *Civil War 360* (documentary series on Netflix; rated TV-PG; 2013)
- *Gettysburg* (Civil War; rated PG; 1993)
- *The Red Badge of Courage* (Civil War; NR; 1951)
- *Glory* (Civil War; rated R; 1989)
- *Apocalypse WWI* (documentary series; 2014)
- *Our World War* (BBC dramatic presentation of true stories from WWI; 2014)
- *All Quiet on the Western Front* (WWI; there is a 1930 movie and a 1979 TV movie)
- *War Horse* (WWI; rated PG-13; 2011)
- *Private Peaceful* (WWI; NR; 2012)
- *My Boy Jack* (BBC movie about Rudyard Kipling looking for his MIA son during WWI; 2007)
- *They Shall Not Grow Old* (WWI documentary; rated R; 2018)
- *Band of Brothers* (HBO series of E Company, 506th Regiment of 101st Airborne Division, U.S. Army, WWII; 2001)
- *Saving Private Ryan* (WWII; rated R; 1998)
- *Patton* (WWII; rated PG; 1970)
- *The Longest Day* (D-Day, WWII; 1962)
- *Memorial Day* (WWII; rated R; 2012)
- *Letters From Iwo Jima* (WWII; rated R; 2006)
- *Unbroken* (WWII; rated PG-13; 2014)
- *Dunkirk* (WWII; rated PG-13; 2017)
- *M*A*S*H* (Korean conflict; film made in 1970, television series produced 1972-1983)
- *We Were Soldiers* (Vietnam; rated R; 2002)

and more!

- [Turner Classic Movies Memorial Day Marathon list](#)
- [Memorial Day videos and stories from History.com](#)
- [Memorial Day videos from Watch Know Learn](#)
- [Live from the Nation's Capital: The National Memorial Day Concert – check here on Sunday, May 26th, 2019 at 8 pm ET](#)
- [Other videos from the National Memorial Day Concert website](#)

parents + educators:

Common Sense Media is a good online resource to see whether or not a movie is appropriate for your child(ren).

links

Multiple Ages

[Memorial Day Photo Gallery](#)

[Memorial Day Puzzles, Coloring Pages, and Worksheets from The Holiday Zone](#)

[Memorial Day Themed Activity Pages](#)

[Making Memorial Day Memories: 10 End-of-Year Friendly Ideas from Scholastic](#)

[Memorial Day Lesson Ideas and Resources](#)

[Send a Letter to a Soldier](#)

Preschool – Kindergarten

[Memorial Day Preschool Cutting Practice](#)

[Memorial Day Penmanship Practice](#)

[Memorial Day Coloring Pages](#)

[Memorial Day Dot Marker Printables](#)

[6 Quick Projects for a Meaningful Memorial Day from Scholastic](#)

Primary – Intermediate

[Memorial Day Crafts and Projects from Enchanted Learning](#)

[7 Children’s Games for Memorial Day](#)

Upper Middle School, High School + Adult

[Memorial Day Address of Oliver Wendell Holmes \(entire speech can be found here\)](#)

[Fact Sheet on America’s Wars](#)

[Memorial Day Resources from the US Department of Veterans Affairs \(including flag display guidelines, info about the poppy, and Taps\)](#)

[Memorial Day Infographics](#)

[The Taps Bugler](#)

[Civil War Fact Sheet](#)



MEMORIAL WEBSITES

[The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#)

[WWI Museum and Memorial](#)

[World War II Memorial](#)

[National D-Day Memorial](#)

[Korean War Memorial](#)

[Vietnam Memorial](#)

[Vietnam Women’s Memorial](#)

[US Marine Corps War Memorial](#)