



The History Channel® Presents

## *“The Story of Veterans Day”*

The History Channel is proud to join together with the U.S. Department of Education in celebration of Veterans Day with a special presentation devoted to this holiday which honors all the men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Featuring commentary from veterans, political leaders and young people, this program reveals the depth of commitment members of the military have shared for centuries. *The Story of Veterans Day* is a half-hour long exploration of this holiday from its initial founding as Armistice Day through the contemporary parades and commemorations which take place throughout the nation today. With archival footage and photographs of soldiers past and present, this compelling program captures the valor and unwavering courage of American soldiers from throughout U.S. history.

Through first-person stories and recollections, this presentation reminds viewers of the ways men and women comprised of diverse backgrounds have sacrificed their time with family, their sense of security, and often, their lives—in the service of the freedoms all Americans hold dear. *The Story of Veterans Day* also explores what the military has given in return as viewers hear about the occupations, educational opportunities, and skilled training a career in the armed services provides. While the gravity of a life at war is never far from the minds of U.S. service men and women, the bountiful rewards of duty and family tradition are strong ties which bind them. Teachers, students, and community members will be drawn in by the stories of bravery and dedication these men and women share. *The Story of Veterans Day* presents all of us with an excellent opportunity to show our appreciation for the tremendous contributions veterans have made, which enable so many of the rights and freedoms we enjoy every day.

### **Curriculum Links:**

*The Story of Veterans Day* is useful for History, Social Studies and Civics courses, as well as lesson plans which incorporate current events. It is an excellent resource for Veterans Day events, and would be useful as well for youth group programs and community activities. It is appropriate for middle and high school students. This documentary fulfills several National Standards guidelines as outlined by the National Council for History Education including: (1) Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas and Institutions, (2) Conflict and Cooperation, (3) Human Interaction with the Environment and (4) Comparative History of Major Developments. ***Nothing herein shall be***



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*construed as a U.S. Department of Education endorsement, sanction, or control over curriculum or any program of instruction.*

**Family Viewing Suggestions:**

Families may want to watch *The Story of Veterans Day* together. This program gives students the perfect opportunity to learn more about our nation's history through discussions with family members and friends willing to share their experiences of serving in the military. Together, viewers can explore the significance of the armed forces throughout U.S. history and discuss the causes and consequences of war.

**Vocabulary:**

Using the dictionary at [www.merriamwebster.com](http://www.merriamwebster.com), an Internet resource such as [www.history.com](http://www.history.com), or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

**allies**

**battalion**

**patriotism**

**resolve**

**self-esteem**

**veteran**

**armistice**

**duty**

**providence**

**regiment**

**squadron**

**victor**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Who does Veterans Day honor? How does it differ from Memorial Day?
2. What is the meaning of the term "Armistice"? When and why was Armistice Day first declared a holiday? When and why was the name of the holiday changed to Veterans Day?
3. What are some of the reasons the veterans in the documentary describe for joining the Armed Forces?
4. What purpose do you think Veterans Day serves in American society? What are some of the ways Americans can show their appreciation to veterans and servicemen and women all year round?
5. What are some of the benefits of a career in the military? What are some of the biggest risks?
6. What are some of the military jobs the veterans in the documentary describe? Which ones sound most interesting to you?
7. What are the branches of the military? What are the different tasks of these various branches?



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8. Do you have any family members who have been or are in the military? What were or are their responsibilities in the Armed Forces?
9. Why do you think many families have multiple members and generations who join the military?
10. Do you think most Americans know about the history and meaning of Veterans Day? What are some of the ways more Americans might learn this history?

Extended Activities:

1. The origins of Veterans Day are rooted in the conclusion of World War I when “armistice” was declared, marking the onset of peace negotiations, in November of 1918. The first “Armistice Day” was celebrated on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1919, honoring U.S. soldiers who served during World War I. Individually or in small groups, research the circumstances surrounding the end of World War I, and the first “Armistice Day” celebrated one year later. Then, imagine you were a newspaper reporter sent to cover this event. Write a short article describing the meaning, significance, and events of this day in 1919. If possible, you can include photographic images of this day and its events in your report. Share these projects with your larger class or group, and discuss the relationship of Armistice Day to Veterans Day.
2. Veterans are all around us—they are our family members, our neighbors, and our friends. They have diverse experiences in the armed forces; some of them pursue long careers in the military, and others serve for a few years. The Library of Congress has a project devoted to preserving the memories and experiences of veterans through recording their stories. You can learn more about this effort at the following web site <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/>. For this activity, you can do your own oral history with a veteran or member of the military. To start, find someone you know or who your family knows who has been or is in the military. Ask this person if they would be willing to talk to you about their experiences in the armed forces. When you find someone who would be interested in sharing their experiences and stories with you, prepare for your interview with them. Compile a list of questions before you start, and let your interviewee know how long you would like to talk to them. When you are writing your questions, think carefully. Many issues involving war or conflict are sensitive—be sure to keep that in mind when you write your questions. (For a step-by-step guide to doing an oral history interview, see the oral history guidelines on this website, also posted on [www.history.com/classroom](http://www.history.com/classroom).) Take notes, or, if possible, videotape or audio record this conversation so that you will be able to preserve their stories. Share what you have learned with your larger class or group in a presentation of 3-4 minutes. The United States military is comprised of several different branches, each of which has a distinct set of



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- responsibilities. Break up into groups of four or five. At the library or using the Internet, research the various branches of the military. Find out when each of these branches was founded and what tasks they are dedicated to providing. On a poster-board, describe these groups and their duties. You may want to decorate your poster with the symbols and mottos of the various Armed Forces, and with images of their seals. (To the teacher: these posters would be a nice billboard display for your classroom or school hallways as a way to celebrate Veterans Day. This activity can also be modified for younger students, you can instruct them to draw the seals or write down the mottos of the branches of the military.)
3. The United States military is made up of people from all ages, races, and social backgrounds. This has not always been the case, however. Just as with other parts of our society, the military was once segregated and excluded some members on the basis of race. At the library or using the Internet, research the history of segregation in the military. Through your research, you should get a brief background on the participation of African-Americans and other people of color in the military before it was officially desegregated. Locate the Executive Order which officially ended segregation in the military and read this document for background. Focus on the process of desegregation while doing your research. In what year was the military desegregated? What prompted the change? In a brief essay of 2-3 pages describe the process of desegregation and the historical context in which it occurred.
  4. The United States military is comprised of several branches, each of which has a distinct set of responsibilities. Break up into groups of four or five. At the library or using the Internet, research the various branches of the military. Find out when each of these branches was founded and what tasks they are dedicated to providing. On a poster-board, describe these groups and their duties. You may want to decorate your poster with the symbols and mottos of the various Armed Forces, and with images of their seals. (To the teacher: these posters would be a nice billboard display for your classroom or school hallways as a way to celebrate Veterans Day. This activity can also be modified for younger students, you can instruct them to draw the seals or write down the mottos of the branches of the military.)
  5. There are many organizations throughout the country devoted to providing services to veterans. Research local organizations in your community which help or honor veterans. Think of some ways you could get involved as a volunteer for one of these groups and, if possible, contact them about participating in the programs or services they offer. To share your findings with your class or group, write a one-paragraph description of one of the organizations you locate and present it to others in a short presentation.



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### *Special Activity*

#### *From Armistice Day to Veterans Day: A Timeline and Quiz*

*This documentary traces the path of the national Veterans Holiday throughout the twentieth century. Students will find it helpful to fill out the timeline and identification chart below as they are watching the program in order to chart the progression of this holiday and see how it became the holiday we celebrate today.*

World War I, also known as the “Great War” was officially concluded on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> Day of November in the year \_\_\_\_\_. On November 11<sup>th</sup> of the following year, President \_\_\_\_\_ declared an Armistice Day in honor of the peace. “Armistice” is defined as \_\_\_\_\_. The day was marked with public celebrations and a two minute halt to business at 11 AM. In 1921 the Tomb of the \_\_\_\_\_ Soldier was dedicated in Arlington Cemetery with a ceremony on November 11<sup>th</sup>. After this dedication, Armistice Day was adopted in many states and at the federal level as a day to honor veterans. This was made official in the year \_\_\_\_\_ when Congress made Armistice Day a national holiday. In 1954, President \_\_\_\_\_ changed the name of Armistice Day to Veterans Day. In the year \_\_\_\_\_ Congress enacted legislation making Veterans Day the fourth Monday in October as of 1971. For several years, Veterans Day was observed in October by many states but in 1978 it was returned to November 11<sup>th</sup>. Today, Veterans Day is still



observed on November 11<sup>th</sup> as a national holiday to honor all veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

**Primary Source Analysis:**

The following document is an excerpt from an official proclamation delivered by President Dwight Eisenhower to establish Veterans Day as a national day to honor and recognize former members of the Armed Forces. Reading and analyzing this document presents an excellent opportunity to explore the history and meaning of Veterans Day. This document also gives students experience with using primary sources and thinking carefully about historical documents.

Veterans Day, 1954

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

3071

**Whereas** it has long been our customs to commemorate November 11, the anniversary of the ending of World War I, by paying tribute to the heroes of that tragic struggle and by rededicating ourselves to the cause of peace; and

**Whereas** in the intervening years the United States has been involved in two other great military conflicts, which have added millions of veterans living and dead to the honor rolls of this Nation; and

**Whereas** the Congress passed a concurrent resolution on June 4, 1926 (44 Stat. 1982), calling for the observance of November 11 with appropriate ceremonies, and later provided in an act approved May 13, 1938 (52 Stat. 351) , that the eleventh of November should be a legal holiday and should be known as Armistice Day; and

**Whereas**, in order to expand the significance of that commemoration and in order that a grateful Nation might pay appropriate homage to the veterans of all



its wars who have contributed so much to the preservation of this Nation, the Congress, by an act approved June 1, 1954 (68 Stat. 168), changed the name of the holiday to Veterans Day:

Now, Therefore, I, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America , do hereby call upon all of our citizens to observe Thursday, November 11, 1954 , as Veterans Day. On that day let us solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom, and let us reconsecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace so that their efforts shall not have been in vain.

### **Primary Source Questions:**

Reading and analyzing primary sources presents an excellent opportunity to consider the processes of government and the ways historical events are recorded. The questions below provide a guide for thinking about Eisenhower’s Veterans Day Proclamation and for examining primary sources in a variety of formats.

1. After reading the above passage, think about the events of the 1940s and 1950s leading up to Eisenhower’s proclamation. What were some of the historical developments and events (such as World War II and the return of large numbers of servicemen and women from that war) which might have influenced the creation of this proclamation?
2. What were Eisenhower’s primary goals in delivering this proclamation? What changes does this order describe and establish?
3. What does it mean to “pay homage” to veterans? What are some of the ways veterans are honored in our society today?
4. President Eisenhower states that veterans have contributed to the “preservation” of the United States. What do you think he means by using this term? How and what do you think veterans preserve?
5. Eisenhower suggests at the end of this proclamation that “promoting and enduring peace” and honoring veterans are obligations that go hand in hand. Do you agree with this idea? Discuss.



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**Web Resources:**

The History Channel's "Take A Veteran to School" website:

<http://www.veterans.com>

An excellent website based on a Smithsonian's "Price of Freedom" exhibition:

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory>

The Library of Congress web page dedicated to Veterans Day:

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/>

A helpful short history of Armistice and Veterans Day:

<http://www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday/vetdayhistory.asp>

The Department of Veterans Affairs home page, with helpful links and volunteer suggestions:

<http://www.va.gov>

**Books:**

Chambers, John Whiteclay (Editor). *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Cotton, Jacqueline S. *Veterans Day* (for younger readers), Children's Press, 2002.

Landau, Elaine. *Veterans Day: Remembering Our War Heroes*, Enslow Publishers, 2002.

Wiener, Tom. *Voices of War: Stories of Service from the Home Front and the Front Lines*, National Geographic, 2004.