



Curriculum and Planning Guide Grades 5-8

To the Teacher:

Your cable provider may be able to provide extra resources for your *Take a Veteran to School Day* event. Contact their community or education representative to see if they are participating. Let HISTORY™ know if you are celebrating *Take a Veteran to School Day*. Register by filling out the participation form at www.veterans.com.

Below are some suggestions for *Take a Veteran to School Day* activities including curriculum-based projects to bring this program into your classroom in meaningful ways. These suggestions are not written in stone – we’re counting on you to take what will work for you and adapt it as you see fit. We know that there is a tremendous difference between fifth-grade students and eighth graders, in terms of both maturity and curriculum levels. However, all ages and ability levels can benefit from this program. These events open doors to chronological thinking, social studies and history learning, concepts in geography, and an understanding of service and civic responsibility. This program also offers opportunities for vocabulary building, reading comprehension, critical thinking and teamwork.

A little preparation goes a long way in making *Take a Veteran to School Day* a truly memorable experience for all involved. If you only have one 40-minute time period to devote to this project, it can still be an outstanding lesson. This program may connect with lesson plans and course units you have already developed. Below are some suggested activities. (Note: this website also includes a documentary entitled *The Story of Veterans Day* and a viewing guide companion for additional classroom curricula related specifically to Veterans Day.)



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Planning: Set a date now!

Notify all school officials so that there are no surprises. Invite veterans in your communities, who may or may not be related to your students. Invite your cable representatives and city officials, as desired. Reach out and invite the press, including your school newspaper. Provide directions to the school with the invitations. Assign a welcome committee to meet guests at the school entrance and to create an appropriate welcome sign. Download the Participation Passport on this website and make color copies for your students for that day. Assign two parents or high school students to be on hand to take photographs, digital if possible. Have water available for the veterans to drink in the classroom. Simple refreshments may be served as desired, after the event.

Getting Ready to Greet Veterans: You may want to prepare name tags for invited veterans in advance. This is a great way for students to acknowledge veterans and make them feel welcome as they arrive. Another way to connect students with veterans is to give students a “star” to decorate at school or at home. Students can label these stars with the name and service branch of each veteran. Students may also want to attach photographs and decorate their stars, and they can be put on display as a salute to veterans at the event. A sample star is included at the end of this document.

Remember: Our veterans are both men and women, and are from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Including veterans from a diversity of backgrounds and reaching out to women who have served will enrich your Take a Veteran to School Day!

Note: If you are organizing a Take a Veteran to School Day event, fill out the participation form located online at www.veterans.com. HISTORY™ will provide your class with special Take a Veteran to School Day wristbands, while supplies last.

Below are a few classroom activities recommended for “pre-event” preparation.

1. What is a veteran? Introduce students to the term “veteran” and provide them with the dictionary definition. An explanation of the origins of this term can also be located online at www.veterans.com. Discuss the term and its meaning. Remember that a military veteran does not have to have served during war time.
2. What does “service” mean? Veterans have served in the U.S. armed forces. Discuss the term “service.” What are other forms of service people in our country perform? (Answers can include firefighters, police, emergency workers, nurses, teachers, etc.) Ask students if they have participated in any service projects. This might also be a good time to talk



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generally about civic responsibility and commitment. (Other related terms students can define might include: civilian, draft, duty, enlistee, patriotism, sacrifice, and military terms such as squadron.)

3. Discuss the five branches of the armed forces in the United States: Describe the responsibilities of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. What are the major roles of each of these branches? Younger students might choose one of the branches and draw a simple picture illustrating its role. More advanced students can research the various branches and prepare visual or written reports which describe the history and duties of one or more of these branches.
4. Do you know a veteran? Ask students if they know any veterans and if so, who they are and what they know about their military careers. Many students may have relatives who have served at some point over the past decades, or who are currently serving. You can also discuss the role of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, or ask students to research this agency. This is a good time to discuss the role of government with regards to veterans once they are no longer in active military duty.
5. Questions for your vets. After leading students through these discussions, ask them to think about what questions they would like to ask a visiting veteran. Older students write down their questions; teachers may want to assign individual students to ask specific questions at their Take a Veteran to School Day. It is important for students to remember that some questions might be sensitive, so they should be thoughtful and considerate when writing a list of questions for veteran visitors. It is inappropriate for a veteran to be asked if he or she ever killed someone. Don't go there!
6. Good manners are important. This is so fundamental but it still bears repeating to your students. The veterans are guests in your classroom. They deserve to be treated with respect.
7. Reading activity. For younger students, read aloud an excerpt from a relevant selection from your school library (consult your librarian). Ask more advanced students to read selections of oral histories or letters written by or about veterans. Students with research experience can also use the library or Internet to locate a document or primary source related to veterans to share with the larger class or group. Visit our resource section on this website for recommendations.
8. Chronological thinking. Ask students to work together in small groups to create a timeline of major U.S. wars and conflicts. This exercise helps students practice chronological thinking and will help put visiting veterans' experiences into a broader historical context. Ask students to create these timelines on roller paper, marking off each decade from the American Revolution to the present day. Then they should mark off significant wars and conflicts in U.S.



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history, such as the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and the Iraq War. Other events may be added as well. Use this timeline during the Take a Veteran to School Day event and have veterans indicate on the timeline when they served.

9. Art and visualization. Have students draw the American flag or U.S. Armed Forces seal. Discuss what these symbols mean and how they relate to our veterans. Advanced students can research patriotic images, songs, or posters from throughout U.S. history. Ask students to write short essays reflecting on the meaning of these symbols and the context in which they were created.
- 10.

Civic engagement. In each city and town, mayors and other public officials have an opportunity to honor individuals or groups with an official proclamation. This program presents an opportunity to introduce the concept of recognition to younger students. More advanced students, once they are familiarized with the concept of an official proclamation, can author one of their own to honor the service of a veteran or the work of a local veterans' organization.

Extra Credit. Ask students to watch the HISTORY™ documentary Dear Home: Letters from World War I or Dear Home: Letters from World War II and write a short essay about what they learned.

Sample Agenda for Take a Veteran to School Day

Multi-Class Participation and Introductions

If many classes or even your whole school is participating in Take a Veteran to School Day, you might choose to begin with a school assembly. Otherwise, the event for a single classroom can follow these suggestions, but be modified accordingly. Participating vets should be invited, along with your cable representative, school board, community officials, and elected representatives. Students and at least one adult (teacher or parent) should be available to meet your guests at

the school entrance and help them sign in as needed before going into the assembly room. A welcome sign is always reassuring for people who aren't familiar with your school. Providing each veteran with a name tag prepared as they arrive or in advance is also a great way to welcome them.

Pre-arrange with the visiting vets in which class they will be participating. They can sit with that class during the assembly, or sit in reserved seats in the front. Your principal should welcome everyone to Take a Veteran to School Day and serve as the M.C., unless otherwise decided. The assembly should open with a reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the



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Star Spangled Banner or another appropriate song by all. The principal should recognize your outside guests. If the mayor, county supervisor, or school superintendent has a proclamation prepared for this day, he or she should read it aloud to all. Then the VIPs should be recognized – and by that we mean, the veterans! The veterans should stand as the principal calls their names and receive a round of applause from the students, once all vets are standing. Remember that some vets may be physically disabled and will need special accommodations.

Classes and veterans should meet in homerooms, or wherever is most appropriate. You may find that the school library provides the right setting if it is just one class participating. In many cases, the veteran will be a friend or relative of a member of the class. Each student may introduce his or her veteran, speaking loudly and clearly to the class when announcing the vet's name and branch of service. (You might want to practice this with the appropriate child beforehand.) Otherwise, the teacher should welcome the vets to the class. The name of each veteran, and how the students should address that veteran, should be written on the wall board.

Questions and Answers

At this point, vocabulary can be reviewed to refresh students' understanding of the word veteran, service, and branches of the armed forces. That can help lead into simple questions by the teacher or by a student. Sample questions:

"In what branch of the armed forces did you serve?"

"When was that?" (This is where the timeline can be helpful.)

"Where were you posted?"

Ideally, a classroom map would be used to show the locations. Once a few questions are asked, students usually feel more comfortable raising their hands and asking their prepared questions, but you probably can predict your students. If you have more than one veteran visiting the class, let each one establish the basics about his or her service. After that, you can open it up with broader questions, such as "What is one story about your time in the service that you would like to share with us?" Just be careful of one person talking at length and leaving little time for the other veterans, especially if you have more than two vets in your classroom for a 40-minute period.

Remembering the Day

Bring a camera, or have a parent or two bring a camera. Leave time for photos. If you have access to a digital camera, you can use these photos to create an online photo gallery or scrapbook, or make an illustrated newsletter for your school district.

At www.veterans.com, you can find a Participation Passport or signature page that can be printed in color. We have found that young people enjoy getting their vet visitors' autographs. The page also includes basic questions for students to answer during and after Take a Veteran



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to School Day. Students have sometimes asked veterans to sign their t-shirts. Everyone seems to enjoy this, but ideally you should be prepared with an inexpensive t-shirt for everyone, and plenty of markers.

At the end of the class period, remind your students to thank the veterans for sharing their stories with your class. You may have students present a hat, a school pin, or flower to each vet in appreciation of his or her time and service.

Recap and Evaluation

Each student should complete his or her Participation Passport that day if possible. Extra paper should be provided as needed. You should review these pages and evaluate the students' responses. We recommend that parents be asked to sign this once it is completed, but of course that is up to you. This helps students share what they have learned with parents and spread the word about the importance of hearing the stories of our nation's veterans. Advanced students may want to create scrapbooks or PowerPoint presentations to share with the visiting veterans later, or to share what they learned with younger students or other members of your community.

Post-Event Activities

Thank You Letters. A great way to keep in touch with the veterans you met is to send thank you letters expressing your thanks for their participation. This will give you a chance to thank them for their time and for sharing their stories. Your students may also choose to write thank you letters to veterans in your community who were unable to attend your event, to thank them for their service.

Volunteer. There are many organizations in communities throughout the country dedicated to helping veterans after they have served. Visit the "organizations" section of www.veterans.com to reach out to veterans groups in your local community and find out how you can help veterans who may be in need.

Tell Us About Your Events. Fill out the participation form at www.veterans.com if you have not already. Report back to us and let HISTORY™ know about your event!



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Resources

Below are a few additional resources that you might find helpful in planning your Veterans Day activities:

Books:

Ansary, Mir Tamim. *Veterans Day* (Heinemann, 2006).

Cleland, Max (Introduction), and Hagel, Sen. Chuck (Afterword). *The Library of Congress Veterans History Project: Voices of War: Stories of Service from the Home Front and the Front Lines* (National Geographic Press, 2005).

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

Websites:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Day website:

www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday/index.asp

(Includes helpful classroom resources and background history)

The Library of Congress Veterans History Project:

www.loc.gov/vets//vets-home.html

(Includes information and tips for recording the stories of veterans)

The Digital Clubhouse Network *Stories of Service* Project:

www.digiclub.org/sofs

(See digital stories produced by youth; find tips on how to video-record veterans' histories)

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Visit veterans.com





Take A Veteran To School Day



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"Our Veterans Are Stars"

Have students label these stars with the name and service branch of each veteran. They may also want to decorate these stars with photographs or other images. These can be displayed at school and/or given to veterans to take home as a memento from Take a Veteran to School Day.

(Many thanks to Timothy Gallo and Cider Mill School in Wilton, Connecticut for sharing this creative idea and many more helpful hints for Take a Veteran to School Day!)

