



History™ Presents The Story of Veterans Day

History 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 in 1938 through the contemporary parades and commemorations which take place throughout the nation today. With documentary footage and the personal reflection of soldiers past and present, this compelling program captures the valor and unwavering courage of American soldiers.

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. But *The Story of Veterans Day* also explores what the military has given in return as viewers hear about the jobs, educational opportunities, and 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. servicemen 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 activities. It is appropriate for middle and high school students and fulfills several standards 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 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* with one another and with family and friends who have served or are serving in the armed forces. 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 assess the significance of the armed forces throughout U.S. history and discuss the causes and consequences of war.

Vocabulary:

allies	nations, groups or individuals united by a common cause or purpose
apprehension	suspicion or fear of future evil or unknown results
armistice	suspension of hostilities by agreement between the opponents; truce
battalion	a body of troops organized together; military unit composed of a headquarters and two or more companies or units
duty	the sense of obligation or responsibility to perform a task or service
patriotism	love for or devotion to one's country
providence	characterized by divine guidance or care
regiment	a military unit consisting usually of a number of battalions
resolve	to reach a firm decision about
self-esteem	a confidence and satisfaction in oneself
squadron	a unit of military organization higher than a troop and lower than a regiment

Discussion Questions:

1. Who does Veterans Day honor? How is it different from Memorial Day?
2. What are some of the reasons the veterans in the documentary describe for joining the armed forces?
3. What are some of the benefits of a career in the military? What are some of the biggest risks?
4. When was Armistice Day first declared a holiday? Why was the name of the holiday changed to Veterans Day?
5. What are some of the military jobs the veterans in the documentary describe? Which ones sound most interesting to you?
6. What are the branches of the military? What are the different tasks of these various branches?
7. What are some of the qualities which make a good soldier according to the people in the documentary?
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. How do you think veterans should be honored in our society for their willingness to serve their country?



Extended Activities:

1. Veterans are all around us – they are our family members, our neighbors, and our friends. They have diverse experiences in the armed forces, but all of them share a willingness to serve their country through military service. 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 oral history. You can learn more about this effort at www.loc.gov/folklife/vets. For this activity, you can conduct 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 experience with you, conduct an oral history in which you ask them some questions about what they did or do in the military. Be sure to compile a list of questions before you start, and let your interviewee know how long you would like to talk to them. Take notes or, if possible, record this conversation so that you will be able to record these memories. Share what you have learned with your larger class or group in a presentation of 3-4 minutes.
2. The United States military is comprised of several different 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 posterboard, 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. Focus on the process of desegregation while doing your research. In what year was the military desegregated? What prompted the change? What groups advocated and opposed this transformation? In a brief essay of 2-3 pages describe the process of desegregation and the historical context in which it occurred.
4. Imagine that you are in charge of creating a float for a Veterans Day parade. Your float should be dedicated to honoring veterans and celebrating our nation's history. On a posterboard or piece of construction paper, draw a picture of what your float would look like, including how you would decorate it. Make a list on the back of your poster of who you would invite to be part of your group at the parade. Be sure to include some members of the military. You can be creative in designing your float and in determining who you would like to invite. Your invitation list can include military veterans from the past who you respect or admire for their service as well. A fun and creative twist on this activity: make a three-dimensional model of your float!



Extended Activities:

5. For many years, there has been a debate in the military and in our society about whether women should participate in combat roles in the armed services. Break up into two groups. At the library or using the Internet, research the history of this debate and learn about the reasons given on both sides. Then, have a debate among the two groups about women in combat roles. It is important to set aside your own personal views during this debate and instead concentrate on making careful and conscientious arguments. Your teacher or group leader can judge which group has made more compelling arguments in the debate.
6. There are many organizations throughout the country devoted to providing services to veterans. Do some research into 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.

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 following timeline and identification chart 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 11th hour of the 11th day of November in the year _____. On November 11th 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 11th. 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 11th. Today, Veterans Day is still observed on November 11th as a national holiday to honor all veterans of the United States Armed Forces.



Primary Source Guide:

The following document is an executive order signed by President Harry Truman ending segregation in the armed services and calling for the complete integration of the military. This order was the culmination of efforts among members of the military and their supporters, and it is remembered as one of the initial victories for integration which ushered in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s. This document and others can be found online at www.ourdocuments.gov, the home page for the Our Documents initiative, a cooperative effort among National History Day, the National Archives and Records Administration, and USA Freedom Corps., and includes links and suggested resources for using primary sources.

Transcript of Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948)

Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity In the Armed Forces.

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.
2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the Armed Services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.
4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.



Take A Veteran To School Day



5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.
6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order.

Harry Truman
The White House
July 26, 1948

Transcription courtesy of the Truman Presidential Museum and Library.

Primary Source Questions:

Reading the transcript of this radio address and other primary sources presents an excellent opportunity to analyze how historical events are recorded and what we can learn from these documents. The questions below provide a guide for thinking about Truman's order as a government source and for examining primary source documents in a variety of formats. Students will want to consider how the executive order and the integration of the armed forces has shaped the U.S. military of today.

1. Primary sources are eyewitness or firsthand accounts of events in written or other form; a primary source records an event as it occurred or is a documentation of an event from someone who witnessed or experienced it as it occurred. These sources are distinct from secondary sources, which are documents that are not original or first-hand accounts but which build upon primary sources to provide more context and analysis. Examples of primary sources: government documents, speeches (audio or in transcription), journals, photographs, and creative works such as art and music pieces. Examples of secondary sources: textbooks, reviews, encyclopedia entries, and newspaper articles which are published long after an event. Can you think of other examples of each kind of source?
2. Interpreting primary sources properly requires understanding the "historical context" or background to a document or event which shaped its creation and content. In order to more fully analyze and make sense of their primary sources it is helpful to research the circumstances surrounding it's historical moment. In analyzing Truman's order, for example, you would want to know what else was going on in the U.S. history during that time. After reading the above passage, research the events leading up to Truman's declaration. What were the historical developments (such as World War II and the struggle for equal rights) which led up to this speech? How had African-Americans and other people of color contributed to World War II and other wars? (Hint: the **History**™ program *America's Black Warriors: Two Wars to Win* is a great resource for understanding the political context behind Truman's order.)
3. Why was the military segregated before this order was written?
4. What reasons does Truman give for the desegregation of the military?
5. What are the methods Truman establishes for ending integration? What are the specific recommendations he gives for the process of desegregation?



Take A Veteran To School Day



6. Who does Truman order to testify and provide information if called upon?
7. What were some of the debates and discussions which led up to the passing of this order in 1948?
(Hint: you may want to read the background information on this source available at www.ourdocuments.gov.)
8. How do you think Truman's action has influenced the make-up of the U.S. military today?
9. Who do you think was Truman's intended audience for this order? Who do you think read it, and how do you think most Americans found out about it?
10. How has the availability of digital sources changed the collection and maintenance of primary sources?

Web Resources:

The official web page of the Department of Defense, for information about the armed services and veterans:
www.defenselink.mil

The Library of Congress web page dedicated to Veterans Day:
www.loc.gov/folklife/vets

An excellent website with activities for younger students:
www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/veterans

The Truman Library's site with background information on Truman's executive order:
www.trumanlibrary.org/9981.htm

The Department of Veterans Affairs home page, with helpful links and volunteer suggestions:
www.va.gov

A site with additional activity ideas and background information:
www.umkc.edu/imc/vetsday.htm

Books:

Clark, Christopher, et al. *Without Regard to Race: The Integration of the U.S. Military* (Franklin Watts, 1995).

Cook, Martin L. *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military* (State University of New York Press, 2004).

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).

