

Topic: Holidays and Traditions – Memorial Day

Let’s get started.... “Memorial” means to preserve a memory. There are many ways to remember special events or people – such as pictures, songs, diaries, stories, or holidays. How do you like to preserve your special memories?

Background:

Memorial Day is a federal, national American holiday celebrated on the last Monday in May each year. It is a day to honor soldiers who have died in wars. In the United States, it marks the beginning of the summer season. Many families celebrate with picnics, or three-day weekend trips to the beach. The original meaning and purpose is often forgotten with the preparations for summer.

History: The first national celebration of this holiday was held in May, 1868, three years after the end of the American Civil War. In the beginning, the holiday was celebrated with military parades, public speeches by government officials, picnics, and visits to cemeteries to put flowers and small American flags on the graves. Today, the U.S. President gives a speech, and puts a wreath on the “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” in Arlington National Cemetery, to honor soldiers who have died in wars.

[Extension information: Some smaller celebrations had been held in states since 1866. It was originally called “Decoration Day,” and was established as a time for people to decorate with flowers, the graves of the soldiers who had died in the Civil War. The date was chosen because flowers are blooming by the end of May. The first national observance was held at Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C.] **[Extension information:** After World War I, the day was expanded to honor soldiers who had died in any American war.]



In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

- Do you have a day in your native country to honor soldiers who died in wars? If yes, when is this day? How does your native country celebrate this day to honor its soldiers?
- How does your native country remember its political history? Are there special celebrations or special days to remember other events in your native country’s history? Tell a partner about some of these events or celebrations.

Share your partner’s answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

Does your native country have any special holidays to remember deceased ancestors? If so, tell a partner about some traditions and activities to honor your ancestors.

Does your country have any special holidays with parades, music, and speeches? Tell about a partner about a holiday, and about the activities.

Do you eat any special foods on this holiday?

Does this holiday have special colors?

Does your native country have any special celebrations to start the summer season? Tell about how people in your native country prepare for the summer season.

Does your native country have any established three-day weekends? If so, how do people use this extra time off from work? Do they celebrate the holiday in a traditional form, or use the time for vacation and relaxation? Tell about your native country's observances and people's habits.

In America, the rose is a symbol and special flower for Valentine's Day; the white lily is a special flower for Easter; the tulip is a special flower for early spring; and the red poppy is the special flower for Memorial Day. Does your native country have any special flowers for different holidays? Tell about the role of flowers in your native country's culture and holidays.



New words and Idioms: preserve; federal; national; marks; picnic; original; meaning, purpose; parades; public speeches; government officials; cemeteries; graves; speech; wreath; "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier;" honor; soldiers; decorate; blooming; observance, expanded; political history; deceased; ancestors; traditions; established; symbol; role; culture; observances