

# VETERANS DAY

## Objectives:

1. Study history of Veterans Day/Armistice Day
2. Analyze current ways to recognize American veterans
3. Re-imagine ways to acknowledge and celebrate veterans
4. Define satire and study example

## Set up:

Teacher displays excerpt of speech explaining the history of Veterans Day on the overhead and allows students to read to each other in pairs or take turns reading sections for whole class. (See materials)



## Script:

*Veterans Day was created "...to honor and recognize American service members past and present. This day of celebration and reflection originated from the signing of an armistice--a temporary cessation (stopping) of hostilities--on Monday, November 11, 1918, at 11:00 a.m., when all fighting ceased between the Allied nations and Germany, effectively ending World War I. A year later, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11, 1919, as the first commemoration of Armistice Day...*

*The original concept for the celebration was for a day observed with parades and public meetings and a brief suspension of business beginning at 11 a.m. The actual legal federal holiday was approved by Congress in 1938. It wasn't until 1954 following World War II and the Korean War that Congress replaced "Armistice" with "Veterans," amending the original Act to commemorate November 11 – a day in America when veterans of all wars are honored.*

*Veterans are recognized as men and women who have or are serving in America's Armed Forces. Today, Veterans Day is a celebration to honor all of America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good. It is also a day for reflection--for remembering."*

Source: Airforce Outreach <https://tinyurl.com/26pybrb6>

## Activity: Why Veterans Day Matters

**Teacher says:** Veterans Day connects family members, friends, neighbors and countrymen and women with those men and women past and present who served in the military.

Let's find out how many in this class are connected to those who serve or have served. Stand up by your desk or seat if the statements I read apply to you. Keep standing until all statements are read. If you are standing and hear a new connection that applies to you, raise your hand and keep it up until all statements are read.

**Teacher reads** the following statements one at a time allowing students to raise hands appropriately.

1. If someone in your immediate family, (parents, siblings), is in active military service in any capacity right now-stand up.
2. If someone in your extended family, (cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces), is right now serving active duty in the military, stand up.
3. If someone in your immediate or extended family was once deployed or is deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan, an area designated as a combat zone, stand up. If you are standing right now and this statement applies to you- raise a hand.
4. If someone in your family is or was deployed in another foreign country besides Iraq or Afghanistan or other Middle Eastern country in any capacity related to military service, stand up. If you are standing and your hand is raised already -raise both hands.
5. If someone in your immediate or extended family ever served in the military, raise your hand.
6. If someone in your immediate or extended family served or died serving during the Vietnam War, stand up- if you are already standing raise your hand.
7. If someone in your immediate or extended family served or died serving during the Korean War, World War II-stand up-or if you are already standing raise a hand.
8. If you have an acquaintance, neighbor or friend who is or was in military service-stand up.

*By this time- all or nearly all students should be standing with one or two hands raised.*

**Teacher looks around the room and says:**

“Ask your neighbor about the military service in their family or community of friends.”

Teacher gives the class time to briefly share with each other. Then say:

“This shows the connection we all have to Veterans Day which gives an opportunity to recognize those who currently serve or have served in the military in the past.”

Teacher says:

“Turn to your neighbor and discuss the ways that we recognize and celebrate veterans on Veterans Day”

*(Possible answers: Parades, discounts or giveaways at stores and restaurants, Veterans Day sales days, concerts, commemorative events.*

**NOTE:** *Some may say “thanking a veteran for their service”-if they do say this wait to highlight it until after the short video with Iraq War veterans below)*



**Teacher says:** Do you think this is the best way to recognize and celebrate our veterans? ( Give a few seconds for students to think and ask one or two to respond. Lots of companies and organizations give discounts or free items to veterans. Many have good intentions-even donating a portion of proceeds to nonprofit organizations who support veteran services, yet some in the military community criticize these events saying that they are empty of meaning and even self-serving.

Some suspect that the concerts, and the companies and organizations who promote sales are using the status of military Service men and women to highlight their own brands without a true understanding of the reality of veteran service-especially the experience of those who were deployed to wars around the globe.



**Teacher says:**

“The following is a short article written by a veteran using satire to criticize the commercialization of Veterans Day at a fictitious Denny’s Restaurant. It was not meant as a specific critique of this one restaurant, but as a commentary about the loss of meaning due to a general commercialization of the day by many groups and companies.

Satire is a humorous way to speak truth to powerful entities- in this case companies and organizations which seek profits by commercializing Veterans Day. Some of the greatest satirists, such as Mark Twain, used sarcasm (saying one thing and meaning another) to make their points. Sarcasm is one element of satire and we use sarcasm every day. For example, even if the weather is uncomfortable, you may say to your friend, “Nice day, huh?” to express how hot/cold it is.

Teacher displays the following article and reads it (or students read it out loud, maybe popcorn method.) Teacher can also print out article for use in class. \*\*See materials for PDF.



## Scars Of War Healed by Free Meal at Denny's

<http://www.duffelblog.com/2013/11/scars-war-healed-free-meal-dennys> (Nov 11, 2013)

SEATTLE, WA – Local veteran Jonathan Henry has reported that the traumatic psychological scars he has carried since his numerous wartime deployments were miraculously healed today, thanks to Denny's annual "Free Veterans Day Pancake Breakfast."

"Today I was actually thinking about killing myself. Got the gun and everything," Henry told reporters. "But when all these people started thanking me for my service and then walking away without any further conversation, I knew I had something to live for."

Earlier this morning, Henry's eyes happened to glance across a week-old newspaper which had fatefully fallen open to the brightly colored coupon section. This section was alight with red, white, and blue — local businesses displaying their love for flag and country amongst their pleas to do business with every America-loving consumer in Seattle. There, in the center of the page, Denny's reached out a soothing hand.

"One minute I was picturing my buddy Smith laying on the side of MSR Tampa, and the next I was awash with the possibility of free pancakes. It was kind of spiritual," said Henry.

Upon entering the small buffet style restaurant, Henry was greeted by a waitress. Upon hearing that Henry was there for the veteran's pancake breakfast, she thanked him for his service and shuffled him towards a table near the restroom and demonstrated the mechanism of the pancake buffet. Soon, the entire staff made the rounds.

"I got enough handshakes to carry me to Memorial Day, I think," said Henry. "Maybe even Flag Day."

Sources confirmed that Henry sat alone in a booth, ate pancakes, and graciously shook hands. During the breakfast, he returned to the pancake bar three separate times and chatted with a few older veterans who were having [breakfast] that morning.

"Listening to some of the war stories that were told by the other vets -while I was eating, I quickly realized that my life wasn't that bad. Did you know in previous wars guys were running from trench to trench wearing khaki as body armor?"

The meal ended shortly after his third trip to the buffet, when management explained the nine pancake maximum. Nonplussed, Henry paid for his soft-drink and stepped out of the restaurant and into the sunlight where he quietly laid to rest all of the ghosts which had been haunting him.

While Denny's is famous for its pancake breakfast, other companies have offered similar rewards for military veterans. Outback Steakhouse routinely offers free Bloomin' Onions, and Starbucks made national headlines by offering Medal of Honor recipient Capt. William Swenson a free pumpkin spice latte. Starbucks officials stressed that this was a one-time deal, and Swenson would need to receive a second Medal of Honor to qualify for another free coffee.

(\*\*\*article was adapted for use in high school classroom)



**Teacher asks class:**

1. Why is this an example of satire?

(Answers: it is told in a humorous manner and uses sarcasm)

2. What examples of sarcasm can you identify in this article?

(Possible answers: "...the traumatic psychological scars he has carried since his numerous wartime deployments were miraculously healed today."

"...stepped out of the restaurant and into the sunlight where he quietly laid to rest all of the ghosts which had been haunting him"

"Today I was actually thinking about killing myself. Got the gun and everything, ...But when all these people started thanking me for my service and then walking away without any further conversation, I knew I had something to live for."

3. What point is the author making?

(Possible answers: Veterans need actual care, rather than free pancakes, the wait staff and others do not try to truly understand the vet's trauma, that the breakfast is unrelated to the vet's real situation, that he feels lonely, and that maybe giving a free Starbucks coffee once a year does not truly recognize the vet's sacrifice.)

**Teacher says:** How many of you have heard that when you meet a veteran the proper response is to say, "Thank you for your service",

Most people who say this most often have a genuine desire to recognize their service; however, let's see how several Iraq and Afghan War veterans feel about this common greeting:

Display 4-minute video on overhead-excerpt from a documentary in progress.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5P-aYAw6Do>

**Teacher says:** Discuss the reasons that these vets feel awkward about the phrase "Thank you for your service" after reading the following veterans' comments from the video. *Teacher or student reads the following quotes from the movie.*

**The Private Miles Lagoze says**

"the civilian who says, 'thank you for your service' makes me feel uncomfortable. I know that (he or she) wants to show support-they are uncomfortable about the veteran who has been to war, but it is frustrating because that is not really talking about anything. It's scary to me that people are so afraid to NOT support the troops....that it contributes to these unending wars."

### Capt. Tommy Furlong says

“You are thanking me ...because you do not understand the situation. It is easy to give a generic response of thank you. I wasn’t doing this for you, the situation is that we are all different and don’t have the same belief system. Don’t assume that I want to be thanked.”

### Sgt Michael Bergman says,

“Thanking me is weird. It is good that people are thankful, but am I in a war for a good reason to be thankful?”

### Sgt Alan Pitts

“If folks knew what some of the things they are thanking me for- or others for, they would be disgusted. It [thanking him] is a way to put veterans on a pedestal.”

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**Teacher asks class:** What does Sgt Bergman think would be better than thanking him?

#### Teacher WRAP-UP:

**Teacher says:** Most veterans appreciate why people want to thank them for their service, but there are many who would prefer not to be thanked. Think of a situation or experience a veteran may have had during or after his/ her military service that might cause him to feel uncomfortable when thanked in public for their service.

Working in partners, decide what ways people could thank veterans without commercialization, or making generic statements which tend to dehumanize the veterans’ military experience , and/or put them on pedestals.

Teacher asks groups to report while writing their suggestions on the board.

*(Answers may vary: volunteer to help veterans’ organizations for the day, ask a vet how he/she is doing? Chat about their experiences, ask what the country can do to be of assistance to vets, advocate for vet services, and laws which provide care for wounded vets ,etc.)*

### OTHER RESOURCES

<https://bakercountypress.com/2015/11/commercializing-of-veterans-day-lamented/>

<https://www.skyword.com/contentstandard/marketing-to-veterans-this-veterans-day-proceed-with-caution/> Ways to celebrate appropriately

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHG\\_TA1T5mg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHG_TA1T5mg) 5 minute Ronald Reagan and JFK

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWD4Oy6fKlo> 2 minute explanation of history of Veterans Day