

Honoring Our Fallen Military Men & Women

Memorial Day

Celebrated on the last Monday in May, Memorial Day started as an event to honor Union soldiers who had died during the American Civil War and eventually was expanded to include all men and women who died in any war or military action. Originally known as Decoration Day, Memorial Day is a federal holiday and it is traditional to fly the flag of the United States at half staff from dawn until noon. It didn't become an official federal holiday until 1971.

Although many think of Memorial Day simply as the unofficial start of summer, thousands of volunteers acknowledge the origin and true meaning of the holiday by placing American flags in front of veteran's markers in cemeteries throughout the country. Another tradition is for the President or Vice President to give a speech and lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

The practice of wearing of red poppies as a memorial to fallen soldiers started following World War I and takes its origin from the poem *In Flanders Fields*, written in 1915 by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae and another poem written by Moina Michael in 1918, *We Shall Keep the Faith*. An often quoted portion of her poem is:

Newspaper Activities:

Look through the newspaper for community events scheduled on or around Memorial Day. In what ways do these events reflect the origin of the holiday?

After attending a Memorial Day event in your community write a brief article about what happened. Were fallen soldiers remembered and honored in some way? If so, how? Be prepared to share your report with your class.



Image: Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery "Flags In" day in preparation of Memorial Day courtesy of Gold Star Mother, Cindy Roberts.

*"We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies."*

To read more about Moina Michael's story and how she championed the tradition of wearing red poppies, go to www.greatwar.co.uk/people/moina-belle-michael.htm

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