

# “Remember Not to Forget”

## A read-aloud play for Memorial Day, celebrated the last Monday in May

In the play, “Remember Not to Forget,” students learn about the history and origins of Memorial Day, as well as a number of common traditions we observe to commemorate this national holiday.

### History

Originally called “Decoration Day,” Memorial Day began in 1868 as a way to honor soldiers who had died fighting in the Civil War. Although there are many legends about its origin (more than two dozen states claim to have originated the holiday), it was first declared a national holiday on May 5, 1868. After World War I, Memorial Day observances began to include the remembrance of all American soldiers who have died in war. In 1971, a congressional act made it an official national holiday, to be celebrated the last Monday in May.

Americans commemorate this holiday in a number of ways, including the Boy and Girl Scout Luminaria program and the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) Buddy Poppy program. The VFW program, which supports veterans and their families in need through the sale of poppies, was inspired by the poem “In Flanders Fields” (page 48). Canadian doctor John McCrae wrote this poem during the First World War. As Dr. McCrae tended to the wounded in France, he noticed a field of red poppies blooming over the graves of dead soldiers and was inspired to create what would become one of the most recognized war poems ever written.

### If You Stage the Play . . .

**Set:** While this play calls for a simple set, students may wish to include props that suggest the setting of a park or a field. This might include paper bushes and trees that are propped against chairs as well as gardens made from recycled materials or pretend playground equipment. For those scenes that take place in a cemetery, students may use cardboard boxes to create simple headstones or commemorative plaques that match the time period of the scene.

**Costumes:** Costumes should reflect the time period and occupations of the characters in the scenes. For example, the elderly guide may have a cane or graying hair. Soldiers may wear appropriately dark colors or military-style uniforms or hats. Scouts may wear a sash or medals, and state characters may simply carry a sign with the state name.

## The Cast

(in order of reading level)

### Grade 2

VIRGINIA • GEORGIA

SOLDIER #1 • SOLDIER #2 • SOLDIER #3

### Grade 3/Low 4

VOLUNTEER #1

MISSISSIPPI • PENNSYLVANIA • NEW YORK

WOMAN #1 • WOMAN #2 • VOLUNTEER #2

KID #1 • KID #2 • GIRL SCOUT

### Grade 4

BYSTANDER #1 • BYSTANDER #2

BYSTANDER #3 • VOLUNTEER #3

BOY SCOUT • YOUNG SOLDIER

MOINA MICHAEL

### Grade 5/High 4

PROLOGUE READER (optional)

GENERAL JOHN LOGAN • ELDERLY GUIDE

**\*Casting Note:** To reduce the number of characters in this play, you may want to create a single United States character who reads all the individual states' lines.

## Vocabulary

**civil** *adjective* having to do with a nation's people.

**ideal** *noun* something that is considered perfect.

**infantry** *noun* a unit of soldiers who fight on foot, rather than on ships or in airplanes.

**legend** *noun* a story that is often told as if it were true, but cannot be proved.

**memorial** *adjective* honoring the memory of people or events.

**observe** *verb* to respect or pay attention to.

**poppy** *noun* a type of brightly colored flower.

**pursue** *verb* to try to reach or achieve.

**remembrance** *noun* action taken to honor a memory or person.

# Remember Not to Forget

HONORING MEMORIAL DAY,  
CELEBRATED THE LAST MONDAY IN MAY



## THE CAST

*(in order of appearance)*

PROLOGUE READER (optional)

KID #1 • KID #2

ELDERLY GUIDE • YOUNG SOLDIER • WOMAN #1 • WOMAN #2

NEW YORK • MISSISSIPPI • PENNSYLVANIA • GEORGIA

VIRGINIA • GENERAL JOHN LOGAN

BYSTANDER #1 • BYSTANDER #2 • BYSTANDER #3

SOLDIER #1 • SOLDIER #2 • SOLDIER #3 • MOINA MICHAEL

VOLUNTEER #1 • VOLUNTEER #2 • VOLUNTEER #3

GIRL SCOUT • BOY SCOUT

**PROLOGUE (optional):** The conclusion of the Civil War in 1865 was both an ending and a beginning for our country. It marked the end of slavery and the beginning of a country that pursued freedom for its people. After all, this country was founded on ideals of freedom. Memorial Day began one year later, in 1866, a day to remember those who died fighting in the Civil War.

Memorial Day has become a day for us to remember any man or woman who has died while serving in wartime, a day to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

*(Kids #1 and #2 enter)*

**Kid #1:** So what are you going to do this weekend? It's Memorial Day on Monday and that means . . .

**Kid #2:** We get a day off from school!

**Elderly Guide:** *(enters)* Well, hello, young'uns. Did I hear you talking about Memorial Day? *(Kids nod)*

**Kid #1:** We were just trying to figure out what we were going to do with our day off.

**Elderly Guide:** A day off, huh? Do you know why we celebrate Memorial Day?

**Kid #2:** I'm not sure, but I think it has to do with war.

**Kid #1:** And we always get a day off from school.

**Elderly Guide:** Well, did you know that the first Memorial Day took place right after the Civil War, way back in 1868?

**Kid #1:** Really?

**Kid #2:** No, I didn't know that.

**Elderly Guide:** To truly understand this holiday, you have to start at the beginning. Look over there. *(points offstage)* Do you see that young soldier?

**Kid #1:** *(hands up to eyes, looking offstage)* Where?

## Memorial Day

**Kid #2:** *(hands up to eyes)* I don't see anything.

*(Young Soldier, Woman #1 and Woman #2 enter from the direction Elderly Guide is pointing.)*

**Elderly Guide:** There—over there.

**Kid #1:** Oh, yeah. I see him!

**Elderly Guide:** You two go on over there and he'll tell you more.

*(Kid #1 and Kid #2 approach Young Soldier and women. Elderly Guide exits. The two women kneel at a grave and gesture to show that they are tending to the grave. The Young Soldier watches.)*

**Kid #2:** *(to Young Soldier)* Sir, excuse us, sir?

**Young Soldier:** Yes?

**Kid #1:** What are you watching?

**Young Soldier:** Well, this here is the year 1866, only one year after the end of the Civil War. I came to this cemetery to remember one of my friends who was killed in the war.

**Woman #1:** And he found us here.

**Young Soldier:** And I was amazed and surprised by their kindness.

**Kid #2:** What kindness?

**Woman #2:** We came to take care of the graves of soldiers from the South who were killed.

**Young Soldier:** But they were also taking care of my friend's grave, and he was from the North.

**Woman #1:** His friend's grave was neglected and needed tending to. North or South, all these boys died fighting for what they believed in.

**Woman #2:** And they all deserve to be remembered.

*(Elderly Guide enters quietly.)*

**Young Soldier:** Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to help these kind women take care of these graves. (*Young Soldier and Women #1 and #2 exit*)

**Elderly Guide:** That is one legend about how Memorial Day began.

**Kid #1:** Really?

**Elderly Guide:** Yes. The story goes that in 1866, a soldier from the North came upon two Southern women taking care of a Northern soldier's grave.

**Kid #2:** Even though people from the South disagreed with people from the North?

**Elderly Guide:** Exactly. Seeing the two sides come together helped people realize that both sides were grieving for their fallen young men. But as I said, this is just one legend about how Memorial Day began. There are actually many legends about its start. More than two dozen states claim to have helped it begin. States like . . .

*(New York enters, followed by Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Virginia.)*

**New York:** New York played an important part in starting this holiday. In 1873, we were the first state to officially recognize Memorial Day as a holiday. (*exits*)

**Mississippi:** Mississippi was also important in the first Memorial Day celebrations. (*exits*)

**Pennsylvania:** Pennsylvania helped begin Memorial Day. (*exits*)

**Georgia:** So did Georgia! (*exits*)

**Virginia:** Hey, don't forget about Virginia! We helped, too! (*exits*)

**Elderly Guide:** And there were many others states involved as well.

**Kid #1:** But when did it become an official holiday?

**Elderly Guide:** Ahh. If you head on over in that direction, to the year 1868, that general standing there will tell you more.

## Memorial Day

*(Enter General John Logan, Bystanders #1, #2, and #3. Kid #1 and Kid #2 approach as Elderly Guide watches from afar.)*

**Kid #1:** Hello, sir, we were wondering . . .

**Bystander #1:** *(to Kid #1)* Shhh.

**Kid #2:** *(to Bystander #1, pointing at General John Logan)* But we were told that he could tell us about Memorial Day.

**Bystander #2:** *(to Kid #2 in a stage whisper)* That's General John Logan. He's about to make an important announcement.

**Kid #1:** That's who?

**Bystander #3:** General John Logan. He's the commander of the Grand Army of the Republic in the year of 1868.

**Kid #2:** The Grand Army of the what?

**Bystander #1:** The Grand Army of the Republic. It's a group of veteran soldiers who fought in the Civil War. General John Logan is their leader.

**Bystander #2:** Hush, now. He's about to speak.

**General John Logan:** *(addressing the crowd)* On this day, the fifth of May, 1868, we do declare the observance of Decoration Day. We establish this day to help remember those soldiers who died in the Civil War. Let this show forever that we have not forgotten the cost of a free and undivided country. *(Bystanders, Kid #1, Kid #2 clap)*

**Kid #1:** *(to Bystander #1)* So was this the first Memorial Day?

**Bystander #1:** This was the first official Memorial Day.

**Bystander #2:** And it took place right here, at the Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

**General John Logan:** Let us now place flags on the graves of both the Southern and Northern soldiers who died fighting for their beliefs. *(General John Logan exits, followed by Bystanders; Soldiers #1, #2, and #3 enter)*



**Leveled Read-Aloud Plays**

**Soldier #1:** *(walking past Elderly Guide and Kids, carrying a small American flag on a stick)* Good afternoon. *(exits)*

**Soldier #2:** *(follows #1)* Thank you for observing Decoration Day. *(exits)*

**Soldier #3:** *(follows #2)* Excuse me, please. *(exits)*

**Kid #1:** *(to Elderly Guide)* Who are they?

**Elderly Guide:** This is the 1950s. Those young soldiers are members of the Third United States Infantry. Every Memorial Day weekend, they put small United States flags on all of the graves at the Arlington National Cemetery. Then they patrol 24 hours a day to make sure the flags stay put. They're still doing this every Memorial Day, even now.

**Kid #2:** That's a lot of flags!

**Elderly Guide:** Absolutely. Over 260,000 flags in all.

**Kid #1:** Whoa. But everyone's been calling it Decoration Day. When did it become Memorial Day?

**Elderly Guide:** Well, after the Civil War it took a great while before our United States really became united. Even though people had been celebrating Decoration Day for one hundred years, it wasn't until 1971 that Congress declared it a national holiday, officially calling it Memorial Day. *(enter Moina Michaels, Volunteers #1, #2, and #3, with red flowers)*

**Kid #1:** *(pointing)* Hey, look! All those people have red flowers.

**Kid #2:** *(to Elderly Guide)* Do you think it has to do with Memorial Day?

**Elderly Guide:** Why don't you find out? *(Kids #1 and #2 approach Volunteers)*

**Kid #1:** Excuse me, why do you have a red flower?

**Volunteer #1:** It's a poppy. Moina Michael gave it to me.

**Kid #2:** Who?

**Volunteer #2:** You don't know who Moina Michael is?



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**Volunteer #3:** Or why we're wearing poppies on Memorial Day?

**Kid #1:** Uh, no. Sorry.

**Volunteer #1:** There's Moina, there. She'll explain it.

**Kid #2:** Excuse us, are you Moina?

**Moina Michael:** Why, yes, dear, I am. Would you like a poppy? (*hands one to Kid #2*)

**Kid #2:** Thank you.

**Kid #1:** (*also accepts a poppy from Moina*) Thank you. Can you tell us about these poppies?

**Moina Michael:** Of course, dear. In 1915, I read a lovely poem called "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae. The poem talked about poppies growing over a field of buried soldiers. It inspired me to do something to help remember those who have died in war. I liked the idea of the poppies, so I decided to make some of my own that people could wear to remember.

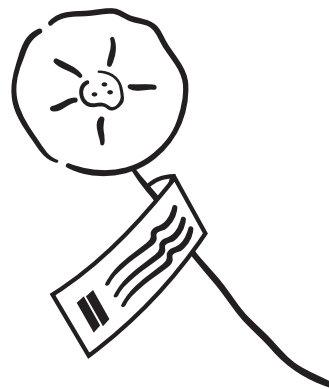
**Kid #2:** So the red poppy became a sort of symbol—that's a great way to remember!

**Moina Michael:** Thank you, dear. Now, before I rush off to get some more red poppies for the rest of the day, I'll leave you with this poem:

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. (*exits*)

**Kid #1:** (*to Volunteer #1*) So she was the one who thought of the idea to wear poppies on Memorial Day.

**Volunteer #1:** That's right. And her idea got so big that a group of veteran soldiers took on the project as their own.



**Volunteer #2:** It's called the Buddy Poppy program and all the money made goes to help veterans and their families.

**Volunteer #3:** And it's been so successful that in 1948, the United States Postal Service even made a stamp to honor Moina Michael for her efforts.

**Kid #1:** Really?

**Kid #2:** Wow. That's a pretty big deal.

**Volunteer #1:** Yes, well, Moina's idea was a pretty good one. And it keeps us volunteers busy. Please excuse us—we must help Moina with the poppies.

**Volunteer #2:** See you later! (*Volunteers #1, #2, and #3 exit; Elderly Guide approaches*)

**Kid #1:** (*to Elderly Guide*) Did you hear that?

**Kid #2:** Yeah. The idea for the red poppies that are sold on Memorial Day was started by Moina Michael.

**Elderly Guide:** Yes. It's a tradition that's been around a long while. And after World War I, about the same time Moina was creating her poppies, it was decided that Memorial Day should be a time to remember those who have died in *all* United States wars.

**Kid #1:** That's right: Memorial Day really is about more than just the Civil War now.

**Kid #2:** That makes sense. (*enter Girl Scout and Boy Scout*)

**Girl Scout:** (*to Kid #2*) Hello, can you help us, please?

**Kid #2:** Sure. What do you need?

**Boy Scout:** We're looking for the Fredericksburg National Cemetery.

**Girl Scout:** The one on Marye's Heights.

**Kid #1:** Gosh, I'm not sure if I know where that is.

**Kid #2:** Why are you going there?

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**Boy Scout:** Well, I'm a Boy Scout and she's a Girl Scout.

**Girl Scout:** And every year before Memorial Day, we put candle lanterns on each of the graves at the Fredericksburg National Cemetery.

**Boy Scout:** To commemorate Memorial Day.

**Kid #1:** That sounds like a big job!

**Girl Scout:** Well, we do light over 15,000 candles every year.



**Boy Scout:** It's called the Luminaria Program.

**Girl Scout:** And even though there's a lot of candles to light, it's a really good way to remember those who have died fighting in war.

**Kid #2:** Yes. It really is.

**Boy Scout:** But we have to find the cemetery first.

**Elderly Guide:** I can help you there. (*pointing*) If you keep going that way for another few blocks and then turn right, you can't miss it.

**Girl Scout:** Gosh, thanks!

**Boy Scout:** Yeah, thanks. Let's go! (*Boy Scout and Girl Scout exit*)

**Kid #1:** (*to Elderly Guide*) I had no idea there was so many things that have to do with Memorial Day.

**Kid #2:** Yeah, and I didn't know how the holiday started.

**Elderly Guide:** In fact, it's such an important holiday that in the year 2000, President Clinton declared a National Moment of Remembrance to take place at 3:00 p.m. every Memorial Day. That means everyone is supposed to stop for one minute and think about those people who have died fighting in war.

**Kid #1:** (*looking at watch*) I'm going to set my watch for Monday at three.

**Kid #2:** I'm going to go home to tell my brother about this.

**Kid #1:** Me, too! (*shakes Elderly Guide's hand*) Thanks! It was nice talking to you.

**Kid #2:** (*shakes Elderly Guide's hand*) Yeah, thanks for all the information!

**Elderly Guide:** Absolutely. Just remember in the future not to forget.

## Curtain Call

# Memorial Day

## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

### Memorial Day Writing Prompts

**Purpose:** Extend ideas about remembrance, service, and symbolism.

**How to:** In journals or during free writing time, invite students to write about any of the following (note that students will need copies of “In Flanders Field” (page 48) to respond to the last prompt):

- 🌿 What are three events in your life that you think are important to remember? What do you do to remember these events? Why is it important to remember these events?
- 🌿 What are some of the ways people remember soldiers who died in war on Memorial Day?
- 🌿 Think of and write about at least three ways you can help your fellow citizens, neighborhood, or country. Describe how you can help someone who is your age, someone who is younger, and someone who is older.
- 🌿 Make a list of at least five things from your bedroom at home that are symbols of important things in your life. Be sure to include where these items came from.
- 🌿 Read the poem “In Flanders Fields” and write your own remembrance poem for Memorial Day.

### The Importance of Symbols

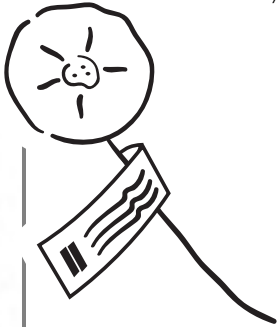
**Purpose:** Understand symbolism by creating a meaningful class symbol.

**How to:** Remind students that the red poppy has become a symbol strongly associated with Memorial Day. Brainstorm a list of familiar items that serve as symbols, such as the U.S. flag, yellow ribbons, or colored bracelets. As a class, create a list of items that might symbolize something about the class, such as a pen (if students enjoy writing) or a globe (if students enjoy geography or traveling). Let students vote for one item to become the class symbol. In small groups, invite students to create posters of this symbol.

**Extend it!** You may wish to have students create individual symbols that represent an aspect of themselves or interview their families and create a family symbol. Andrew Clements’s *Frindle* (Simon and Schuster, 1986) offers students an interesting look at symbols and word meanings.

# In Flanders Fields

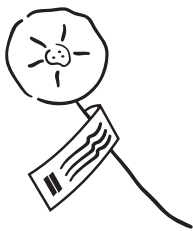
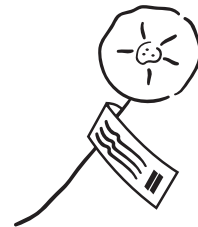
by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, M.D. (1872–1918), Canadian army



In Flanders Fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.



Canadian doctor John McCrae wrote this poem in 1915 as he helped wounded soldiers during World War I. He noticed that a field of red poppies had begun to grow on the recently dug graves of young soldiers. This sight inspired him to write about the war in the voice of the soldiers who had died.