



# CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

## Memorial Day

For many, the last Monday in May has come to symbolize the end of the school year and the beginning of summer, but it is much more than that. Memorial Day is an opportunity to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice serving our country.

The origins of Memorial Day can be traced back to the end of the Civil War. Then, Union Army veterans decorated fallen Union soldiers' graves with flowers. This act came to be known as [Decoration Day](#) and was observed every May 30th because the flowers used to decorate the gravesite were in bloom. This tradition became popular across the nation, and after World War I, this day was [broadened](#) to honor all those who died in American wars.

It was not until 1968 that Congress decided to set Memorial Day as the last Monday in May with the [Uniform Monday Holiday Act](#). Since its passage, Congress has passed other legislation encouraging Americans to reflect and remember those men and women who lost their lives in service to our nation.



### The ways that Americans honor the fallen are varied and each is significant in bringing solemnity to this day.

**"Flags In" Tradition** - Right before Memorial Day, the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment honors America's fallen heroes by placing American flags at the gravesites of service members buried at Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery. This tradition, known as "Flags In" has taken place since 1948. Every available soldier in the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment participates, placing small American flags in front of more than 228,000 headstones and at the bottom of about 7,000 niche rows in each cemetery. Each flag is inserted into the ground, exactly one boot length from the base of the headstone of each fallen soldier.

**National Moment of Remembrance** - At 3:00pm local time on Memorial Day, all Americans are encouraged to pause and quietly reflect to commemorate the lives lost to protect our freedom.



**The Red Poppy** - After World War I, the poppy flower flourished in Europe. Scientists believed this was due to the soil enriched with [lime](#) after the war. Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian doctor who served in World War I, honored these poppies in his famous poem "[In Flanders Fields](#)." On September 27, 1920, the poppy became the official flower of [The American Legion Family](#) to memorialize the soldiers who fought and died during the war. The distribution of poppies has become a popular way for veterans' groups to honor and spread awareness of Memorial Day.



**To Think and To Do:** What does it mean to honor those who have died in service to our country on Memorial Day? Click on the Learn More articles and read about different ways to honor those who have died in service on Memorial Day. Think about some ways you might commemorate Memorial Day.

**Learn MORE** about Memorial Day. Free registration may be required.

- [How to Observe Memorial Day](#), from the Memorial Day Foundation
- [10 Ways to Honor Memorial Day](#), from the National Parks Foundation
- [10 Ways to Honor Memorial Day](#), from Saint Leo University



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