

Name _____

Date _____

Memorial Day

“The Last Monday in May”

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Yellow ribbons and red poppies are two symbols you might see on Memorial Day. The yellow ribbon’s connection to Memorial Day is often linked to a song. “Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree” was a hit song in the 1970s. Shortly after the song came out, it became popular to tie ribbons around trees. This is done as a sign of remembrance for fallen soldiers or as a celebration of soldiers coming home. The tradition of wearing red poppies comes from the poem “In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae. It was written in 1915 during World War I. The poem describes poppies growing on graves. The poppy is used as a symbol of remembrance in more than 50 other countries, too.

Notes

2. People celebrate Memorial Day with flowers and parades. There are other more serious ways Memorial Day is celebrated, too. American flags are flown at half-staff from sunrise until noon. This is a symbol of remembrance for those who died. The flags are raised to full height at noon. They stay flying until sunset. The full height of the flag is meant to symbolize the country’s strength. There is also a National Moment of Remembrance. At this time, all Americans are asked to recognize the sacrifice of those who served the nation. There is a moment of silence at 3PM local time across the United States.

Notes

3. Major General John A. Logan was a leader of the Union army during the Civil War. After the war ended, he led a group of former soldiers, or veterans to decorate the graves of fallen soldiers. He said they should use “the choicest flowers of springtime.” He hoped that people would not forget “the cost of a free and undivided republic.” He wanted to make sure people remembered the sacrifices soldiers had made during the Civil War. Major General Logan suggested that Memorial Day be celebrated on May 30th. It is likely because of Major General Logan that Memorial Day is now celebrated on the last Monday of May.

Notes

4. Many soldiers died during the Civil War. Women in the South would put flowers on their graves at cemeteries where they were buried. After the Battle of Shiloh, women in Columbus, Mississippi, went to decorate a nearby cemetery. They noticed that the graves of Union soldiers did not have any flowers. The women did not think any of the graves should be bare. They decided to put flowers on the graves of both the Union soldiers and the Confederate soldiers. This is said to be another place where Decoration Day traditions began.

Notes

5. On Memorial Day, the president and vice president often visit Arlington National Cemetery. This is a military cemetery near Washington, DC. At Arlington, they visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and lay a wreath on the memorial. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is the grave of a soldier from World War I. The soldier's identity is unknown. The grave represents all of the unknown soldiers who have fought and died for the United States.

Notes