

# Memorial Day and National Military Appreciation Month: Memorial Collage Activity

Begin the activity by leading a discussion on the Vietnam War. Explain that during this war, Americans experienced great loss and pain. The total number of American deaths was close to 60,000. Point out that in the years when the Vietnam War ended and soldiers came home, many felt shamed or ignored by other Americans because the war had become very unpopular. It was only in later years that memorials were built to honor these soldiers. Show students photos of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC. Let students know that the names of 58,195 soldiers who were killed in the Vietnam War are written on the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Here are three sites that can help you find names on the wall. Try finding your city at the first site listed to show students the losses from their own area. Some students may even have lost a family member or friend to the Vietnam War or another war—whether a parent, a grandparent, an uncle, a cousin, or a neighbor.

[http://www.cantho-rvn.org/VN\\_Mem/](http://www.cantho-rvn.org/VN_Mem/)

<http://www.nps.gov/vive/index.htm>

<http://thewall-usa.com/>

Tell your class that the architect who designed the memorial was named Maya Lin. Her design won the Vietnam Veterans Memorial contest, beating out 1,441 other designers. Ask students if they have visited any war memorials. Why is it important to have war memorials? Why do they think the architect who designed the memorial decided to create a wall with soldiers' names written on it?

After the discussion, assign students to choose a war in which soldiers from the United States fought and to create a photo and art collage about it. (You may also choose to include other significant, tragic events such as the 9/11 attacks.) Clarify that the collage can be a mix of photos that students find online, photos that students take themselves, and artwork. Students can use mixed media to create and organize the pieces of the collage—paint, pen and ink, cut or torn paper, found art, words cut from newspapers and magazines, etc.

Create a class collage gallery and have a gallery walk in which students study the artwork and write down what they think. Then conduct a class discussion on the way wars can change our lives and our thinking as Americans. Is war always completely good? Is it always completely bad? How can different people see the same war in different ways? Why is Memorial Day an important day for our country? Why do many Americans believe that we

should express gratitude for the soldiers who have fought for our country in different conflicts and wars?

Finally, have students write thank you letters to soldiers currently serving. (Check your school's policy regarding this type of project before you begin.) Two sites that support such letters are as follows:

[http://amillionthanks.org/send\\_a\\_letter.php](http://amillionthanks.org/send_a_letter.php)

[http://www.operationgratitude.com/?gclid=CjwKEAjwm-aqBRD39YPqhbzthzYSJACFj-At4vLbd2qbMbil\\_iQoMF5\\_eeV3e0rqqecXwKaLAXFyBoC4Ejw\\_wcB](http://www.operationgratitude.com/?gclid=CjwKEAjwm-aqBRD39YPqhbzthzYSJACFj-At4vLbd2qbMbil_iQoMF5_eeV3e0rqqecXwKaLAXFyBoC4Ejw_wcB)