

How to...

COMMEMORATE A HOLIDAY



Photo 1: The Field of the Dead at Arlington National Cemetery circa 1868. (National Archives)

All nations commemorate certain holidays throughout their calendar year. The dates that are designated for remembrance reveal much about what a country values and cherishes. Indeed, holidays should reflect a nation's deepest beliefs and its culture and principles.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon issued Executive Order 11582. He ordered that many of the United States annual commemorations be moved from their actual dates to a nearby Monday in order to accommodate federal and state workers desire for extended three day holiday weekends.ⁱ Although the motive to help accommodate people's leisure needs may have been benign and well intentioned, the true nature and meaning of federal holidays have become increasingly obscure. For instance, Memorial Day was created in 1868 at Arlington National Cemetery as a time to remember and honor the Union war dead.ⁱⁱ Today, it is considered by most to be merely the first weekend of summer and celebrates the opening of municipal pools. Sadly, we become a poorer nation when we lose our sense of time, place and history.

Federal Holidays <i>during the School Year</i>	Date Celebrated	Actual Date
Labor Day	September	
Columbus Day	3 rd Monday/October	October 12th
Veterans Day ⁱⁱⁱ	November	November 11th
Thanksgiving	4 th Thursday/November	
Christmas	December 25th	
New Year's Day	January 1st	
Martin Luther King Day	3 rd Monday/January	
Washington's Birthday	3 rd Monday/February	February 22nd
Memorial Day	Last Monday/May	May 30th

Other Days Worthy of Commemoration	Date
9-11: World Trade Center/Pentagon Attacks	September 11th
Constitution Day	September 17th
Birthday of Abigail Adams	November 11th
Pearl Harbor Day	December 7th
Abraham Lincoln's Birthday	February 12 th
Frederick Douglass' Birthday ^{iv}	February 14th
Boston Massacre	March 5th
James Madison's Birthday	March 16th
Repeal of the Stamp Act	March 18th
Thomas Jefferson's Birthday	April 13th

There are several ways that you and your school can return the true meaning to our nation's holidays. Moreover, you can also research other historic dates that may not be officially recognized by the government but are nevertheless significant and you can use these important dates to increase historical awareness and appreciation.^v

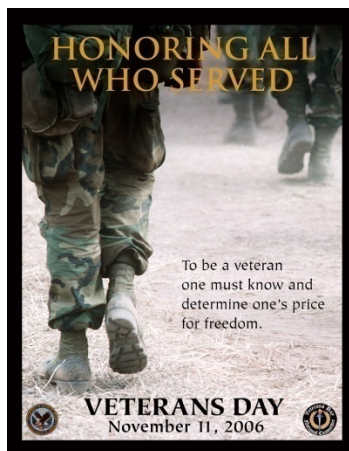


Photo 2: Poster commemorating Veterans Day, 2006. (Department of Veterans Affairs)

Projects and ideas:

- Research the origins of a particular holiday. When was it first commemorated and why?
- Locate the annual presidential proclamation celebrating a particular day; read it and post it in your school and classroom.
- Have regular “This Day in History...” announcements over the school’s public address system to increase student awareness of important events and holidays. [The History Channel](#) has an excellent website which posts important dates in history (and you can find out what happened on your birthday!).
- Create a poster or a photo collage for a specific holiday.
- Design a commemorative stamp or coin and write a justification for its design and subject. Check the websites for the [United States Postal Service](#) and the [U.S. Mint](#) for examples.

On the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, Americans honor the memory of a man who stirred the conscience of a Nation. We also recommit ourselves to the dream to which Dr. King devoted his life an America where the dignity of every person is respected; where people are judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character; and where the hope of a better tomorrow is in every neighborhood. [President George Bush’s proclamation for Martin Luther King Day 2007.](#)

These dead whom we have gathered here today to honor, these valiant and unselfish souls who gave life itself in service of their ideals, evoke from us the most solemn mood of consecration. They died that peace should be established. Our obligation is to see it maintained. Nothing less than our resolve to give ourselves with equal courage to the ideal of our day will serve to manifest our gratitude for their sacrifices, our undying memory of their deeds, our emulation of their glorious example. [From President Herbert Hoover’s Memorial Day address at Arlington National Cemetery, 1921.](#)

- Write a “Letter to the Editor” about the importance of remembering the true intent and nature of a holiday.
- On Veterans and Memorial Day, conduct oral, recorded interviews of soldier and serviceman about their experiences during their time in the military. Hold a school-wide assembly to honor these veterans.
- Write a speech to be delivered on a given holiday.
- Design a monument or memorial for your home town or city to honor the topic of a holiday (e.g. a civil rights memorial, a veteran’s monument, a 9-11 commemorative, etc.).
- Research state holidays and see how they differ from region to region.
- Write a bill proposing a new federal holiday and present it to the class for consideration (see below).^{vi}

Susan B. Anthony Birthday Act (Introduced in House)

HR 856 IH

110th CONGRESS

1st Session

H. R. 856

To honor Susan B. Anthony by celebrating her legacy on the third Monday in February.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 6, 2007

Mrs. MALONEY of New York (for herself, Mrs. CAPPAS, and Ms. CLARKE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

A BILL

To honor Susan B. Anthony by celebrating her legacy on the third Monday in February.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Susan B. Anthony Birthday Act'.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Susan Brownell Anthony created the first women's movement in the United States and led that movement for more than 50 years.

(2) Born in South Adams, Massachusetts, on February 15, 1820, Susan B. Anthony met Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1851 and attended her first women's rights convention in Syracuse in 1852, where she joined the fight to get women the right to vote, arguing that `the right women needed above every other . . . was the right of suffrage'.

(3) The first proposal for women's suffrage was presented to Congress in 1868.

(4) Susan B. Anthony appeared before every Congress from 1869 to 1906 to ask for passage of a suffrage amendment.

(5) Susan B. Anthony served as the president of the National Woman Suffrage Association from 1892 until 1900.

(6) Designated then as the 16th amendment, the first formal women's suffrage amendment to the Constitution of the United States was introduced in January 1878 and stated, `The right of citizens to vote shall not be abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.'. This same amendment was introduced in every session of Congress for the next 41 years.

(7) Before her death on March 13, 1906, Susan B. Anthony's last public words were `Failure is impossible.'.

(8) On May 21, 1919, the House of Representatives passed the 19th amendment, and 2 weeks later, the Senate followed.

(9) On August 18, 1920, when Tennessee became the 36th State to ratify the amendment, the amendment passed its final hurdle of obtaining the agreement of three-fourths of the states. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby certified the ratification on August 26, 1920.

(10) The text of the 19th amendment is: 'The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.'

(11) In 1921, a marble statue of Susan B. Anthony and her women's rights colleagues, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was dedicated in the United States Capitol.

(12) Susan B. Anthony's picture has appeared on two postage stamps, the 3-cent purple stamp issued in 1936 and the 50-cent deeper purple stamp issued in 1955.

(13) Susan B. Anthony's home in Rochester, New York, has been a National Historic Landmark since 1966.

(14) In 1979, Susan B. Anthony was honored by having her image placed on a dollar coin.

(15) No **Federal holiday** celebrates the birthday of a woman.

SEC. 3. CELEBRATING SUSAN B. ANTHONY'S LEGACY ON THE THIRD MONDAY IN FEBRUARY.

Section 6103(a) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by striking 'the third Monday in February' and inserting 'the third Monday in February, on which day the Nation shall also celebrate the legacy of Susan B. Anthony'.^{vii}

ⁱ [Executive Order 11582](#) was known as the Observance of Holidays by Government Agencies and was signed by President Richard Nixon.

ⁱⁱ General Alexander Logan issued General Order #11 that proclaimed: “The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion. See Philip Bigler: *In Honored Glory: Arlington National Cemetery, the Final Post*, p. 25.

ⁱⁱⁱ [The Veterans Administration](#) has teacher and student resources for commemorating Veterans Day including downloadable posters and a student guide.

^{iv} Slaves were did not know their birthdays. Douglass chose February 14th himself. In his famous *Narrative Life*, Douglass poignantly writes: “*I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest- time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit. The nearest estimate I can give makes me now between twenty-seven and twenty- eight years of age. I come to this, from hearing my master say, some time during 1835, I was about seventeen years old.*”

^v One of the best sources on the web for information and documents on the presidency is the [American Presidency Project](#) at the University of California, Santa Barbara. You will find speeches, party platforms, FDR’s fireside chats, presidential proclamations, and a wide variety of other materials.

^{vi} You can see what bills are currently proposed before Congress by searching the Thomas portion of the Library of Congress’ website.

^{vii} [This bill](#) was proposed in February 2007 and can be found at www.thomas.gov. All legislation, resolutions, treaties, presidential appointments, committee reports, *et al* that are proposed before Congress can be searched by topic and/or actual bill number.