



What We Can Learn from Our Veterans: “Take a Veteran to School Day”

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I have worked as an historical advisor and an educator at The History Channel since before it was launched in 1995. My team is always on the lookout for new ideas and projects that will ring true with schools and teachers, and connect with the focus of our network. This year we’re kicking off a new initiative that has enormous resonance around the country, in partnership with local cable systems. It’s called ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”***. And we’re hoping that every school district in every state will participate, from K-12, and even on college campuses.

There are many reasons ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”*** resonates so powerfully. We can’t all agree about this war, but we can agree that our vets deserve our support – from the greatest generation to the latest generation. Inviting veterans to share their stories helps illustrate our interest in their experiences while helping young people learn about our past. Participating in this program doesn’t have to be complicated. Holding a ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”*** at a school can range from a small program in the library with one or two family members who have served in the military to a district-wide, half-day observance, kicked off by all-school assemblies joined by several veterans, family members, and elected officials. Whether simple or more robust, these events can be a meaningful educational experience for all who are involved.

Many history and social studies classes have done an impressive job of linking students with World War II survivors for powerful oral history projects. Those projects exemplify one kind of curriculum-based activity that The History Channel is encouraging. But there are also curriculum links for lower grades. From their special vet visitors, primary students can learn vocabulary (*“What does the word veteran mean?”*), geography (*“Where is Seoul? Where is Fort Hood? Where is Fallujah?”*), and concepts such as *service*. Reading comprehension, always a big focus under NCLB, can be another component. Even small school libraries are often rich in the compelling stories and accounts children find fascinating, from the Revolutionary War to today’s Iraq. Students can create posters about veterans’ affairs, and listen to music that was popular during wartime eras. To encourage these classroom connections to the program, we are developing free guidelines, activities, and resources, linked to state standards, for all grades. These materials will all be available at www.veterans.com this August. They can help as educators plan a ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”***. We’ll be including primary sources as well as helpful web links for more background information and connections to related projects.



Some schools in this country are stunningly diverse, others are the exact opposite. ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”*** gives your students the chance to meet and talk to men and women from all walks of life. For some children, this alone is an important learning opportunity. To help schools make contact with veterans to participate in this event, we have contacted several not-for-profits to help spread the word. Their information will be posted on our www.veterans.com web site. They are eager to link with local schools.

Along with building our students’ core understanding of history and civics, plus art and music, this project can teach a larger lesson. This program gives our young people a chance to welcome all our veterans and recognize their service to our country. We can’t rewrite history, but we can learn from our mistakes. That learning process is something we can share with our students. Many of us remember that Vietnam vets were not given a warm welcome when they came home; in fact, some of them were treated with disdain. We never want to repeat the way some Vietnam vets were treated after they were discharged. Today, most people are eager to welcome our young vets home from wherever they have served. ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”*** gives educators and their students that opportunity, and many more rewards.

For schools already linking students with veterans, please use this program with our free additional resources to step it up a notch. Some of the inspiration for this project comes from teachers who are currently in the classroom. Tom Gregory and Paul LaRue in Ohio, Tim Gallo in Wilton, Connecticut, Mike Gatto, from Long Island, New York, and Kathryn Parks in Bakersfield, California have worked steadfastly with veterans in their neighborhoods, and shared their impressive results with us. We want to hear more about the ways educators become involved in this program, too. On our www.veterans.com site, teachers can register and described their plans and student projects. Best practices from some of our teacher advisors will be presented. And by partnering with a local cable provider, schools will be able to access even more resources that students will enjoy.

Many middle and high schools have found that their students respond very enthusiastically to helping those in need, even when they start out their service only with college applications in mind. The History Channel has identified five not-for-profit organizations that support our neediest veterans in a variety of ways, and donated \$50,000 as part of our commitment. These organizations are just some of the many reputable groups providing service opportunities for young people. Many valuable volunteer and service-based experiences can be woven into ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”***.

All of the information above, and many additional resources, are available at www.veterans.com for any school or community wanting to get involved with this important effort. Reach out to your local cable provider (ask for their education representative) and veterans organizations. ***“Take a Veteran to School Day”*** can make a difference in your community, in your school’s academic achievement, and in the life of a veteran.