



***Understanding Veterans Day and World War I – Grades 4-7***  
***Remembering Our Veterans***  
***Eleven points for 11-11***

1. November 11 is Veterans Day. A veteran is a former soldier, also called a GI – which stood for “Government Issue” since everything worn by the soldier was issued to him (or her) by the Government.
2. Thirty-five countries fought in World War I. They fought for five years, from 1914 to 1918. The United States fought in the war from 1917 to 1918. One interesting story about World War I occurred Over Christmas in 1915. Your parents might be old enough to remember a popular holiday tune from the 1950s called “*Snoopy’s Christmas*,” that told the story of a Christmas Day encounter between World War I Flying Ace Snoopy (from the Peanuts/Charlie Brown comic strip) and the infamous Red Baron (who was a real person). While there were very few helmeted, flying Beagles in that or any other conflict, the theme of the story is based in fact and happened on the front lines as German and British soldiers climbed out of their trenches on Christmas Day and shared toasts and sang Christmas carols with each other, despite their status as enemies. For one brief moment in 1915, the concept of “peace on earth” became a reality, only to be stopped by military and political leaders who did not think their troops would be effective in battle if they were getting chummy over eggnog on the battlefield.
3. Finally the countries stopped fighting and, in 1918, the leaders signed an “armistice,” and agreed to stop fighting. They signed the armistice on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month (11 a.m. on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of November). The armistice meant that the war was over.
4. Americans were very happy to hear about the armistice. No more soldiers would die in the war. The soldiers would come home and America would be at peace. Even though the United States was only involved in the war for a year, over 116,000 Americans were killed and 204,000 were wounded. How does that compare to the lives that were lost in other 20<sup>th</sup> Century conflicts?
5. People went out into the streets and laughed and danced. They blew horns and whistles and rang bells. They sang songs. They thought that there would never be another war. For a long time, people referred to World War I as “the war to end all wars.” It had been such a bloody war that no one could imagine anything that terrible ever happening again!

6. President Wilson made November 11 a holiday to remember the end of the war. The holiday was called Armistice Day. An “armistice” is a truce between warring countries.
7. At eleven o'clock in the morning on Armistice Day, everyone was supposed to stop doing whatever they were doing. People were expected to be completely silent for one minute. This silent minute was to remember all the soldiers who have died in wars.
8. The body of an unknown soldier was brought to America from a cemetery in France. His body was buried in a tomb at Arlington National Cemetery. It became known as “The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.” That tomb stands as a tribute to all soldiers who have died in battle and have not been identified. On patriotic holidays our President lays a wreath at this tomb in honor of the men and women who have given their lives for freedom.
9. By the 1950s America had been in two more wars: World War II, the Korean War... and the Vietnam War was looming on the horizon. In order to honor all veterans, it was decided to change the name of the holiday from Armistice Day to Veterans Day.
10. The bodies of three more unknown soldiers were brought to Arlington National Cemetery. On Veterans Day, there are special services at the Tomb of the Unknowns.
11. On Veterans Day (and also on Memorial Day) many organizations sell paper flowers made by disabled veterans. These flowers, known as poppies, became a symbol of the terrible toll of World War I after a brutal battle in a field of poppies known as “Flanders Field.”