

2020 Essay 1st Place-Savannah Pionke
What is Memorial Day?

Memorial Day. Where to start? Let us start with part of a speech from Ronald Reagan in 1985, "Sometime back I received in the name of our country the bodies of four marines who had died while on active duty. I said then that there is a special sadness that accompanies the death of a serviceman, for we're never quite good enough to them -- not really; we can't be, because what they gave us is beyond our powers to repay. And so, when a serviceman dies, it's a tear in the fabric, a break in the whole, and all we can do is remember. It is, in a way, an odd thing to honor those who died in defense of our country, in defense of us, in wars far away. The imagination plays a trick. We see these soldiers in our mind as old and wise. We see them as something like the Founding Fathers, grave and gray-haired. But most of them were boys when they died, and they gave up two lives -- the one they were living and the one they would have lived. When they died, they gave up their chance to be husbands and fathers and grandfathers. They gave up their chance to be revered, old men. They gave up everything for our country, for us. And all we can do is remember." I feel foolish when looking back at what I thought Memorial Day was before this project. I originally thought it was the start of summer. I would normally go to a parade and go swimming. Talking to my family, a veteran, and looking at history has changed my outlook on the holiday of Memorial Day.

Historically it is a holiday observed on the last Monday in May. It honors the men and women who have died serving in the United States Military. Normally people honor the holiday with parades or visiting cemeteries and memorials.

To my family, it means many different things. To Grandma, "Memorial Day for me is remembering all those who went before us. I like to honor it by going down to the cemetery and listening to the color guard play taps and have a little memorial service. Then I like to walk around throughout the cemetery and see how many people I know. I especially like to visit relations that are buried there." To my cousin, Kayden, "Camping and celebrating our people that fight for our country." To Aunt Amanda, "Memorial Day for me is the kick-off to summer. It is a fun and relaxing weekend spent with family and friends grilling out, playing games, and enjoying beautiful weather. Now that you make me think about it, I feel bad that it isn't more about the reason we actually have Memorial Day, which is to remember those who sacrificed their lives for our country and safety. It seems that happens a lot with holidays- it becomes more about the time off than it does for the actual purpose of the holiday. This year I will remember the reason why - thank you!" These are different people with different perspectives on the same holiday. Memorial Day means one thing historically, but people can interpret it in different ways.

As I was researching for this paper, I asked a veteran what Memorial Day means to him. To Richard Nitzke, "It is more of a honoring of the people that have died. Many people think it is about a celebration, but it is a solemn holiday," He is absolutely right. Memorial Day is about honoring the people that have died for our country. It doesn't have to be in a big way, but it should be at least something. Something as small as walking around a cemetery and honoring soldiers. How can you find a soldier's gravestone? At some cemeteries they have a plaque with a star on the inside of a circle on a stick in the ground.

Finally, to me, it means honoring those more than 1.1 million people (PBS.org) who have died from the Revolutionary War to today defending our country. The veterans that visited our school told us that of those soldiers that died, 1,244 from Wisconsin died in Vietnam alone. Those 1,244 Wisconsinites who left brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, children, friends, and other family members to serve our country. They went without hesitation to protect us and gave the ultimate price of their life. I don't know where we would be without them. We might be still under the control of the British or any other country that has threatened our freedom. I am so grateful for those 1.1 million people. I'm grateful for their sacrifice in keeping our country safe and free. Those people are the reason we are the home of the free and brave. We need to carry on their legacy or I don't know what will happen....