

THE INQUISITIVE scholar

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Westtown-Thornbury 5th Annual Veterans Day Celebration on November 9, 2018 – We honored 44 veterans from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines.



Honoring All Who Served

By Dr. Nora Wheeler, Principal, Westtown-Thornbury Elementary School

All photo credits: Dr. Nora Wheeler

On November 11, 2019, the faculty, staff, and students at Westtown-Thornbury will honor dozens of active and retired military veterans associated in some way to our school (e.g., parent, uncle, etc.) at an event that has quickly become a treasured school tradition. Although only in its sixth year, it already means so much to the entire school community.

THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE EVENT

After observing an 8th grade assembly when I was a Social Studies Curriculum Specialist in Virginia over a decade ago, I made a promise to myself that when I became a principal I would begin a program to honor veterans if the school did not have something established. In addition to helping others remember

our past, I believe it is important for students to appreciate that men and women serve all over the world to protect us and our freedoms. Regardless of the politics and the debates about various military engagements, our service members are willing to sacrifice on our behalf. Not to mention, they are often involved in providing humanitarian relief after natural disasters.

TEAMWORK BRINGS THE VISION TO LIFE

In each of the last six years, I have worked with a small group of dedicated staff and parents with ties to the military to plan. We all agreed that a short assembly would not allow us to create a meaningful experience for our students nor honor our guests in the way we hoped. In addition, we wanted a half-day format that



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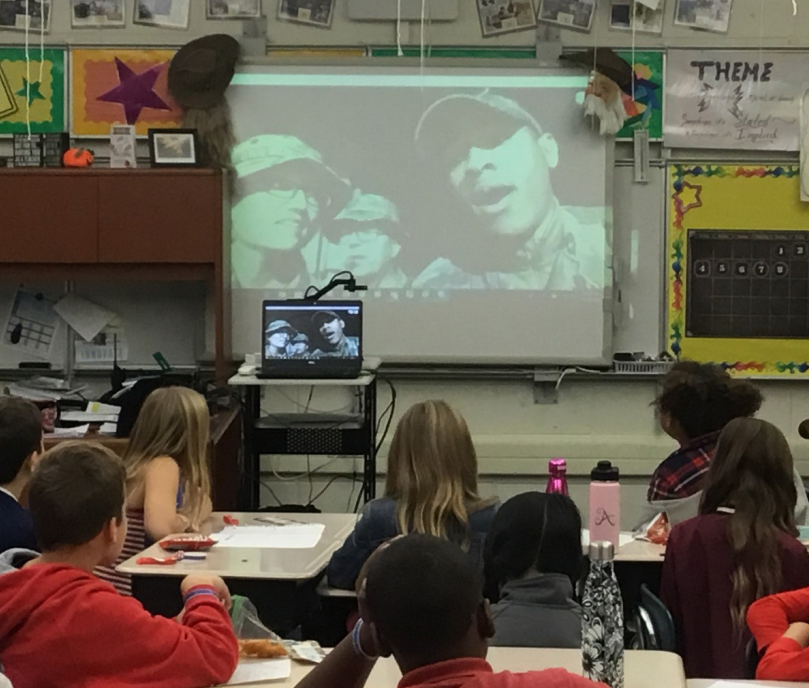
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4th Grade students Skype with several soldiers deployed in an undisclosed location in the Pacific.

provided for both whole group and grade level breakouts so that the annual event would be different each year to engage students. Beyond the event itself, we also wanted to do something for local veterans and active military.

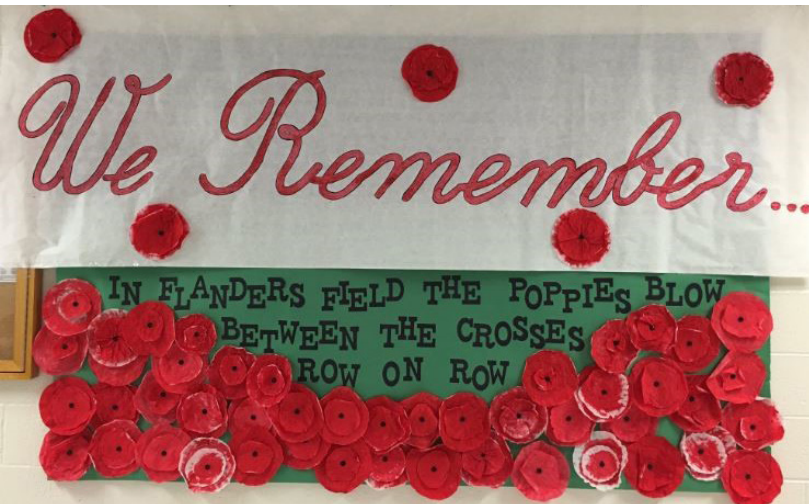
The planning begins in September to organize the activities completed by students before the event and for the program itself. For example, we always have a school project to ensure that each student feels included regardless of whether there is a veteran in the family. One year each student traced a hand in order to create a giant flag that now hangs in our Cafeteria. Students also donate extra Halloween candy to ship overseas to active military and they have supported the VA Medical Center in Coatesville in different ways such as last year's poppy campaign.

A PATRIOTIC CELEBRATION

After assembling all students in the Gymnasium on the big day, we sing patriotic music and welcome each honored guest. The grade level breakouts occur in the middle part of the program and vary from Skype sessions with active military and the Marine Corps Museum in Virginia to guest speakers or reading a book. The finale involves everyone back together for more patriotic music before closing with "Taps".

The response to our annual half-day program from students, staff, and veterans has been amazing. The opportunity to bring my vision to life as a principal is very gratifying and motivates me to want to do more.

The poppy is an international symbol of remembrance. In 2017, each student painted coffee filters and paper plates to create a poppy to decorate the building.



In November 2018, to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, we showcased the official Veterans Day poster from the Department of Veterans Affairs on our main doors.



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