

What Does it Take to be a Medal of Honor Recipient?

Introduction:

This lesson involves watching or listening to a program called *Medal of Honor with Ed Tracy*, which is taped at the Pritzker Military Library and available to view (or download as a podcast) on the Pritzker Military Library website or through interlibrary loan. This is a monthly program in which Ed Tracy interviews a Medal of Honor recipient. They discuss the recipient's background, military service, the event for which he received the Medal of Honor, and his later life. After viewing the program, students will answer reflective questions about what they saw and heard and then discuss them. For follow-up, students may write a journal entry or engage in a debate about war.

Students hear history from the source, hear war described first-person, and see how this experience has affected the recipient.

This lesson plan is applicable to all *Medal of Honor* programs. However, you may want to modify it according to what's emphasized in the particular program you watch.

Illinois State Goals:

3C, 4A, 16A, 16B, 16D, 17D, 18B

Materials:

DVD of *Medal of Honor with Ed Tracy* OR computer with audio/visual/podcast capabilities

Questions provided in this lesson plan

Paper

Pencil/pen

Medal of Honor with Ed Tracy covers World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the war in Afghanistan. The majority of the programs are with Vietnam War Medal of Honor recipients.

For a list of all the Medal of Honor programs available, go to www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org, and click on "Medal of Honor" in the "Categories" box on the home page. There you will find a chronological list of all the Medal of Honor guests. Make sure to check out the "Medal of Honor Fact Sheet" on the right hand side.

You may borrow the DVD of any *Medal of Honor with Ed Tracy* through interlibrary loan through your school library. Or, you can watch it on your computer by pressing the play button on the program's page.

Time:

Medal of Honor with Ed Tracy lasts about 60 minutes. You can show it in two different class periods or only show a part of the program. You may want to view the entire program first to know what parts you want to show. Follow-up activities take 1-2 class periods.

Grade level:

Grade 4 and up (modify as necessary)

Overview:

Give some historical background about the war. Add other information as necessary: the military, geography, communism, etc.

Students then watch (or listen to) the program. Afterwards, students write answers to questions about the program. Students then discuss their responses, either in small groups or as a class. As a follow-up, students can:

- Write a journal entry as a soldier in the war, a Medal of Honor recipient on the front lines, an enemy soldier, or as someone on the home front.
- Write about what the word “hero” means to them
- Engage in a debate about the war- if it was justified. (Can also talk about today’s wars.)

Procedure:

1. Background information.

The **Medal of Honor** is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States. Generally presented to its recipient by the President of the United States of America in the name of Congress, it is often called the Congressional Medal of Honor. (Congressional Medal of Honor Society website, www.cmohs.org)

It was first awarded during the Civil War and continues to be awarded today. There must be two eyewitnesses to the brave act. People don’t “win” the medal, they are recipients of it.

2. You may want to give students a few guiding questions to think about before they watch.

1. Why is it important to hear these experiences?
2. Is this person someone you would use the word “hero” for?
3. What information other than the war and the battle do you hear from this person? (history, politics, personal life)

3. Students should listen, watch, and take notes. You may want to view for 20-minute chunks at a time and then stop to review what was discussed, the history of the battle, answer questions, etc.

4. After viewing, have students write answers to the following questions.

1. What is the attitude of the recipient? Is he proud, cocky, humble, down-to-earth?
2. What other information are you hearing besides the battle information? (growing up in the 50s, the clothes they wore, politics, etc)
3. Do you understand the description of the battle? Can you picture the setting in your mind?
4. What is the recipient's feeling towards his medal?
5. Realize that- most likely- this man is not very young. Notice how much detail he is able to give after all these years. Do you think it's the particular experience he went through? Or is he just good at remembering? Do you think he'd be able to recall the events of the past year's Thanksgiving (for example) with as much detail?
6. What current issues does the recipient touch on?
7. Can you describe how close these men are who fought together? Why is it that tragedy brings people together more strongly than something happy? Can you think of an example of that in your own life?
8. Has the recipient's life changed as a result of receiving the Medal of Honor?
9. Do you think it's wrong to honor someone for battle?
10. What questions would you like to ask the recipient?
11. 464 Medals of Honor were awarded for actions in World War II, 131 were awarded for the Korean War, and 246 were awarded for the Vietnam War. 7 have been awarded for conflicts since then: 2 for Somalia, 1 for Afghanistan, and 4 for Iraq. Those 7 were awarded posthumously. Why do you think so few have been awarded for the Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq? What does that tell you about how those wars are viewed? Are they less dangerous?
12. Only one woman, Dr. Mary Walker, has received the Medal of Honor. She received it for her actions in the Civil War. Why do you think only one woman has received it? (What are the rules for women in the military?)

After writing their responses, students can get into small groups to discuss, or discuss as a class. There are no right or wrong answers.

5. For homework or follow-up, students can:

Write a journal entry as an American soldier in the war, a Medal of Honor recipient on the front lines, an enemy soldier, or as someone on the home front. It can be a "Day in the Life" type of entry.

Write about what the word “hero” means to them. Who are their heroes? What characteristics does a hero have?

Write about the difference between hearing something from a person who was there and reading about it in a book. Which has more impact? Why is it important to hear history from living people?

Engage in a debate about the war- if it was justified or not. Students are assigned to different sides. (Can also talk about today’s wars.)

Related Materials

See Medal of Honor bibliography at the end of the Medal of Honor fact sheet:

<http://www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org/medalofhonor/pdf/moh-faq.pdf>

Congressional Medal of Honor Society website: www.cmohs.org

www.medalofhonor.com

www.homeofheroes.com