

# Remembering Sept. 11

a K – 5 resource guide  
for Texas educators  
in accordance with  
TX HB 1501

Prepared by





Dear Educators,

This year marks the 16th anniversary of the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

In 2013, the Texas House of Representatives passed HB 1501, which states that *“to commemorate the events of September 11, 2001, in each year that date falls on a regular school day, each public elementary or secondary school shall provide for the observance of one minute of silence at the beginning of the first class period of that day. Immediately before the period of observance required by this section, the class instructor shall make a statement of reference to the memory of individuals who died on September 11, 2001.”*

For adults, September 11, 2001 is a date of profound significance, seared in American hearts and minds. Yet, over fifteen years later, the children of today have no memory of what transpired. How do we talk to children about such a tragic and complex event and its impact on this country? The Institute for Diversity and Civic Life has created this resource to provide guidance for commemorating and teaching about this event in public school classrooms.

For many children, discussions of terrorism and violence may be scary, confusing, and potentially traumatic. As we remember the thousands of lives lost, it is important to also remember how the nation came together in a spirit of unity and how this tragedy inspired courage, compassion, and kindness in Americans and everyday heroes across the country.

Many narratives of September 11 connect the event with the religion of Islam in some way. However, we advise that this be deemphasized. While the hijackers did self-identify as Muslim and made religious claims for their actions, their relationship with Islam is contentious. Many Muslims and scholars of Islam point out that this extremist ideology falls on the fringes and is a distortion of true Islam. Others argue that Islam is neither inherently violent or nonviolent. Its expression reflects how humans interpret it in light of their own interlinked social, political and cultural circumstances.

Ideally, students would have the opportunity to learn about Islam in its full and complex diversity. However, if time constraints do not allow you to adequately address this diversity, we recommend you not reference religion. The events of September 11 can be adequately explained without mentioning Islam. To only mention Islam briefly and associate it with violence can confuse students, reinforce certain stereotypes, and potentially make Muslim students feel marginalized and vulnerable. In a current climate where many minority students face increased bullying and prejudice, extra precautions should be taken to ensure a safe learning environment for all. We also have resources for teaching about Islam and other religions in constitutionally appropriate ways.

We hope this resource helps you talk about this very solemn day with your students.

# Remembering Sept. 11

## A statement of commemoration

*If you do not have enough class-time for additional content, we recommend sharing the following commemoration to meet the requirements of TX HB 1501:*

In the United States we are fortunate to have students from many religious and cultural backgrounds. We are lucky that we are a diverse country. Because we get to know people who are different from us, we get to know a bigger world. This helps us become more knowledgeable, smarter, and more compassionate. Diversity – this wonderful mix of many cultures and religions – is what makes our country great. Sept. 11 was a tragic day when many people suffered because of hate. As we remember this day, let us consider how it affected all the different people in this country, and what we can do to stand together when disaster strikes.

## Lesson and Objectives

*If you have class-time for additional content, we recommend the following activities. These materials can be used in whatever combination and order you find most appropriate for your unique class.*

### **At the end of this lesson, students will be able to...**

- Commemorate how Sept. 11 brought out the best in Americans as we united to support each other in the face of tragedy
- Conduct an effective group discussion about the kinds of things we can do when national tragedies like Sept. 11 occur, even if they happen in another city or state
- List some simple ways that they can unite to support each other to limit the influence of misplaced fear and anger



# Remembering Sept. 11

Overview (5-6 minutes):

## What happened on September 11, 2001?

On September 11, 2001, a group of 19 men took control of four airplanes in order to terrorize the people of the United States of America. In total, more than 3,000 people from 93 different nations were killed by the attack, including passengers on the planes, people in the buildings, firefighters, police officers, and medics. There are no simple explanations for why this group committed this terrible crime, but they were driven by hate and anger.

## How did Americans react to the attacks of September 11, 2001?

### Heroes

The heroes of Sept. 11 were the thousands of men and women working for the New York City police department, fire department, and emergency medical services. These First Responders immediately rushed to help rescue those who were affected, risking their own lives to help ordinary citizens get to safety. Some of the First Responders even died trying to help others. The heroes were also everyday people who showed great courage in the face of adversity, including the passengers of the four flights and many of the workers and visitors in the World Trade Center buildings, who helped colleagues and strangers evacuate the buildings. We remember all of them and their families on this day. Their example reminds us how ordinary people have the power to make a difference in the lives of others.

### Organizers

People in New York, New Jersey and other areas close to the attacks pitched in to help organize extra help in the days and months following the attacks. These citizens organized blood drives, raised money for people who lost family members in the attacks, and made sure there were lots of resources available as the community began to recover.

### Supporters

Even Americans who live far across the country were touched by the events of Sept. 11. Many saw video of the attacks on the news and heard people who lost their family members share their stories on TV and the radio. All over the US and the world people organized fundraisers and other events to provide support for the people who were directly affected by the attacks and to show the world that they would stand together and not be divided by tragedy.

## Misplaced Fear and Anger

September 11 brought out the best in many Americans. But for some Americans, it made them feel fearful and brought out the worst in them. They started to attack other Americans who looked or sounded like they were from the same part of the world as the people responsible for the September 11 attack. Many innocent South Asian and Arab Americans suffered from violent attacks, threats and discrimination for years following 9/11 and even now.

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## Activities for Grades 3-5

### Group Breakouts

Have the class break into smaller groups of no more than five or six and ask them take turns sharing their ideas about how they can unite to support their classmates, friends, and neighbors or how they extend a hand to someone in need and help others on a daily basis.

Bring the whole class back together, then ask groups to share key takeaways.

### Creative Activity

Read *One Green Apple*, by Eve Bunting, to the class. This story reminds readers that it can be hard being the new kid in school, especially when you are from another country and do not know the language. It shares how other students can help new kids feel like they are connected and belong.

Ask students to write a letter welcoming someone to America. Have them share what is good about living in the United States. Encourage them to think of ways that they will help newcomers feel like they belong here by standing with their fellow Americans.

### Other Suggested Reading

*14 Cows for America*  
by Carmen Agra Deedy

This book shares with readers the story of a gift of fourteen cows that was bestowed upon American men, women, and children from Maasai warriors in Africa. News of this unexpected and extraordinary gift traveled around the globe. For Americans, this selfless gesture has deeper meaning, as the story of this gift reminds readers of the soft light of hope and friendship.

# Remembering Sept. 11

## Class Discussion (10-15 minutes):

- Was anyone in your family directly impacted on Sept. 11?
- How does hearing about the events of Sept. 11 make you feel?
- What kinds of things can we do when national tragedies like Sept. 11 occur, even if they happen in another city, state or country?

## Class Pledge: "I Stand with My Fellow Americans"

Have the class repeat after you...

*I pledge to stand beside my fellow Americans, no matter who they are or where they are from, during good times and bad. I will have the courage to support and protect my fellow citizens even when a tragedy makes me feel afraid or angry, because we are stronger united as one.*

Invite students to discuss what this pledge means to them.

## K-2 Creative Activity

Have students draw a picture of someone who is a hero to them.

Ask each student to present that picture, and share how that person helps their community.

## K-2 Suggested Reading

*On that Day: A Book of Hope for Children*  
by Andrea Patel

This book presents a gentle tribute to the power of goodness in the world that compensates for even the most destructive events. Readers will benefit from this story as it helps each young citizen construct meaning from the history of 9/11.

*Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of John J. Harvey*  
by Maira Kalman

Recounting the true story of a fireboat that helped with rescue efforts on 9/11, this book focuses on how Americans came together and teaches readers to look for helpers. This story opens conversation about 9/11 and about how we are sometimes led to do things for a purpose we may not see immediately.

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## Glossary

### **First Responder:**

Someone who is trained to respond immediately in an emergency. Firefighters, police officers, EMS officers, ER nurses are all examples of first responders.

### **Terrorist:**

A person who carries out an act of violence against innocent people to create fear among the general population.

### **American:**

A person who lives in the United States of America. Americans come from every ethnicity, religion, culture and heritage.

### **South Asian:**

Someone whose cultural and ethnic heritage are from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka.

### **Pakistan:**

A country in South Asia where Osama bin Laden was hiding from the U.S. government

### **Osama bin Laden:**

The leader of the international terrorist organization Al-Qaeda who was killed by the U.S. military on May 1, 2011. Osama bin Laden was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, but hid in Pakistan and Afghanistan after his own country banished him.

### **Arab:**

Someone whose cultural and ethnic heritage are from one of many countries in the Middle East, including Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

## Other Resources

Texas House Bill 1501:

<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/billtext/html/HB01501F.HTM>

Southern Poverty Law Center:  
<https://www.splcenter.org/>

Facing History and Ourselves  
<http://facinghistory.org>

Teaching Tolerance  
<http://tolerance.org>

Religious Freedom Center  
at the Newseum Institute:  
<http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/>



For more information:  
<http://diversityandciviclif.org>