

TEACHERS NOTES

HOW TO ARRANGE A VISIT FROM A VETERAN TO YOUR SCHOOL OR CLASSROOM

A visiting veteran can support and enhance learning in a number of important ways. Students will gain unique insights into the everyday life, values and significant experiences of someone new to them. The opportunity to interact with an unfamiliar person and to become comfortable relating to adults are important social lessons for children. Having veterans visit classrooms also provides opportunities to build important partnerships between the RSL Queensland and the school community, which can be of significant benefit to all involved.

But veterans can offer you and your students more than just these benefits. Veterans will bring new perspectives and insights about very important aspects of our nation's past, present and future. They can expose students to firsthand, real-life experience which brings a richness and authenticity to their learning. Students' knowledge and understanding is enhanced by their access to information and the opportunity to discuss and question. When information – stories, personal anecdotes, answers to specific questions and the display of artefacts – is recounted by someone who has 'been there', the positive impact on students' learning is momentous.

HOW TO ORGANISE A VISIT FROM A VETERAN

Your first call should be to the school community: Put a note in your class or school newsletter, make a request at the next school assembly when parents are present, or send an email to the entire parent community asking if they can put you in contact with family members or friends who may have served in the Australian Defence Force.

Alternatively, contact your local RSL Sub Branch (rslqld.org/Contact-Us/Sub-Branches). Your local RSL Sub Branch may have an existing relationship with your school, helping with ANZAC and Remembrance Day activities, award presentations and school functions.

Consider what learning areas you hope this visit will enhance for your students. What specifically would you like the veteran to speak about? Are there particular objects or artefacts you hope they might bring along?

ESTABLISH CONTACT

Once you have a contact, you can make your request and establish a mutually agreeable date and time for the visit. Ensure that you explain carefully what you hope to achieve from the visit. The veteran



will need to know all the relevant details to properly prepare, but they may not necessarily know what to ask for. Be prepared to explain:

- How many students are in the group
- The age of the students
- How long you wish to allow for the visit
- Any special needs particular students may have
- Any additional requirements, such as a blue card, that may be required
- How best to access the school, including parking arrangements and sign-in procedures
- Any audio-visual equipment (microphone, data projector etc) that you can provide to enhance the presentation
- The level of prior knowledge the students have and any questions they are likely to ask.

BEFORE THE VISIT

Prepare your students to welcome their guest speaker. Make sure they know the veteran's name and a little of their background. Depending on the students' age, you may read a picture book or novel, look through news articles or watch a video so they have some prior knowledge of the nature of the veteran's service, or any historical events associated with the visit. Have students think about some questions they would like to ask. You may provide these to the veteran prior to the visit, or prepare some students to ask particular questions during the visit.

PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

Alert the front office or admin staff of the likely time that your visitor will be arriving. Arrange for two or more students to collect their visitor from the office and escort them to the room where they will hold the presentation. Prepare a small gift or memento for students to give your visitor at the end of their presentation, along with a vote of thanks.

Ensure students are primed to be on their best behaviour for the visit, as the veteran may not be accustomed to addressing large groups of children. Explain clearly your expectations for how students will show their respect and welcome their visitor.

If you have offered any audiovisual equipment, have it set up ready to use before your visitor arrives.

PLANNING CONTENT (WHAT TO DISCUSS, SHOW AND HIGHLIGHT)

Once you have communicated your educational goals to the visiting veteran, the content of their presentation will be largely at their discretion. Find out what artefacts or pictures the veteran can bring with them to enhance their presentation (items of uniform or kit, photographs,



medals or memorabilia etc). Consider obtaining other relevant items via museum loan schemes, local libraries or from your school community to display or refer to during the presentation. Let your visitor know beforehand if you wish them to speak about any of these specifically.

If you know of any refugee students or new arrivals who have had a recent negative experience of war or conflict, be aware these students may be sensitive or anxious about some of the content that is shared. Ensure your visiting veteran is made aware of this and offer your advice and recommendations. Consider making alternative arrangements for potentially affected students to avoid a negative experience.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Never leave your visitor alone with your students. Listen carefully to their presentation, modelling the listening behaviour you would expect from your students. If there are other teachers present, ensure they do this as well. Be ready to step in with sensitive and respectful assistance if you notice your visitor needs support of any kind. It is in everyone's interests to ensure the visit is a success and your visitor feels at ease at all times.

You are the trained professional when it comes to handling the unexpected. If a student exhibits inappropriate behaviours during the presentation, you will know how best to handle this. It would be preferable to use non-verbal cues or proximity to deter disruptive students. If absolutely necessary to separate the student from the group, do so discreetly to minimise any disturbance to other students and your guest.

AFTER THE VISIT

Following question time, gift presentation and a vote of thanks, arrange for two or three students to escort your visitor back to the office to sign out. Have students create and sign a card or certificate or write thank you notes that you can send to the veteran in the week following the presentation. A thank you note also serves as a way for students to revisit the experience and reflect on what they learnt.

Evaluate the visit from both your own perspective and your students'. You may do a quick survey (verbal, written or by show of hands) to find out what your students learnt or gained from the visit. Make notes about what worked well and what could be improved for future veteran visits.

As you are aware, whenever children are interested, encouraged or inspired and are given the opportunity to ask questions, they learn better. You should therefore be congratulated for your efforts to arrange a visit from a veteran and to engage students in meaningful learning about something very important to all Australians.

