

Hearing from Crew Members: Why Join the Navy?

GRADES 5-12



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 5-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 45 minutes.

The U.S. Navy is full of personnel from several different backgrounds and experiences, but what led them to serve in this branch of the military? In this lesson, participants will look through several responses from Navy veterans in which they share some of the reasons they joined the Navy.

Participants will sort the responses into different categories and try to determine major reasons why people joined the Navy.



Objective

Participants will be able to identify major reasons why people joined the military, the Navy in particular.



Materials

- “Reasons for joining the Navy” Responses
- Bowl
- Chart Paper
- Marker



Set Up

Cut “Reasons for joining the Navy” into strips and place the strips into a bowl.



Inquiry

Ask participants the following and record their answers on chart paper:

- What are some activities you take part in outside of the classroom?
- What are some reasons you enjoy those activities?

Have participants find the commonalities in the different reasons that are shared. Share those themes with the whole group. Pose the following questions to the group:

- What do you already know about the Navy?
- Why do you think people might join the Navy?



Investigation

Each participant will select a “Reasons for joining the Navy” strip from the bowl and move around the room, comparing their reason to their peers’. If a participant believes the reason stated on their strip is similar to the reason written on their peer’s strip, they should stay together. If they believe their reason is different from the reason written on their peer’s strip, they should walk away and try to find a peer with a similar reason.

Participants will repeat this process until they have formed groups of three or four with similar reasons. If there is a group of participants left over, have them stay together as a group and identify why their statements stand out.

Each group will use chart paper to label why their service members joined the Navy (e.g, education, community, benefits) and share what each of their responses have in common. Groups can also be encouraged to draw a visual representation of their reason.

Each group will present the reason their service members joined. As different groups present, have other groups share if their reason has anything in common with another group’s reason. (Potential categories: adventure, avoiding something, family legacy, education, economic opportunity, etc.)

- Do all of these reasons have something in common?

Discuss the many reasons service members shared why they joined the Navy and how much thought might have been put into these decisions.

- What expectations might these service members have had when they were joining the Navy?
- What could prevent their expectations from being met?
- What would you want to know before joining the Navy?

- Imagine visiting a Navy recruiter. What questions would you ask?
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Activity

Create a Recruitment Poster

Using chart paper and markers, have each group create a recruitment poster for the Navy highlighting the reason they discussed in their small group. The poster should contain imagery and a slogan that might convince someone to join.

Talk to a Veteran or Active Service Member

Have participants speak with active service members or veterans to find out why they joined the Navy. Are their reasons similar to those mentioned in the list generated for this lesson? If not, add a new category!



Lesson Connection

To discuss the nuanced history behind Native American service members in particular and their choice to join the military, please see our lesson: **Debunking Stereotypes of Native American Military Service.**



Additional Resources/References

For more on formal U.S. Navy benefits today:

<https://www.navy.com/what-to-expect/military-pay-and-benefits>



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Documents and Images

Crew Member Quotes

"I joined the Navy primarily to, to travel and to see the world."- Antonio Nibbs, served 1961-1966

"Well, my uncle was in the Navy. And my mother's brothers were all fishermen in Virginia. So, it was in my blood, I guess (laughs). So that's why I chose the Navy, rather than the Army or the others. And I never regretted it." - Richard Johnson, served 1951-1959

"The reason I joined the Navy was to get away from that cold weather there in my hometown. . . I worked in the steel mills, and I just got tired of all that snow, shoveling that snow. And that cold weather. I said – I want to get away from home to see what the other part of the world was like, you know?" - Edward Bell, served 1957-1984

"Well I tried to get deferred, but my mother had three of us boys. . . I went to the Draft Board to try to get a deferral. And they said no, they couldn't defer me because they had already deferred two of my brothers. And that's how I went in, you know?"- Henry Mouzon, served 1943-December 1945

"Well . . . my family was a large family, and I figured that if I go into the Navy, I would be helping my family out because I would be able to make it so that money goes back to my family to take care of my other brothers and sisters."- Eugene Smith, Jr, served 1942-1945

"I must have been around nine or ten years old that I made the decision that that's what I wanted. I wanted to be on submarines, and follow the example of these guys that served during World War II. So that's how I ended up joining the Navy and volunteering for submarine duty."- Cornelius Brown, served 1955-1995

"I had a junior high school teacher – home room teacher – Mr. Robinson. . . in homeroom when we were sitting and had time, he would talk about his days on an aircraft carrier. . .and I sat there in that classroom and it just piqued my interest. I said, I know where I want to go, I know I want to go Navy, and I know I want to be on a carrier."- Errol Kellum, served 1966-1969

"My father was – my parents are Filipino, and my father joined the Navy during World War II. . . So to carry on the tradition, I joined the Navy right after City College of San Francisco, which I was a photography major." - Gofrido Garcia, served 1971-1975; Reserve 1985-2008

"I was tired of school, was tired of going. I wanted to see the world, you know, have an adventure, and I joined the Navy which was something new in our family." - Jose Morales, served 1979-1983

"I joined the Navy because I was in college at the time of the Korean War. . . some of my classmates who were similarly where they should be were drafted. So I figured I should secure my position by joining the ROTC. . . I have hay fever and sensitivities and I always liked the water so I thought I'd join the Navy. . . I had to transfer to Penn State because Penn State was one of the 52 universities at the time that offered the Naval ROTC program."- Louis Ivey, served 1953-1958

"I had an uncle that was in the Navy and I'd seen him when I was smaller and he had on the cracker jacks and I said I really wanna be a sailor. Plus some of the guys I knew from my neighborhood, older guys, enlisted in the Army and the Marines and a couple of them got killed and it wasn't for me."- Tommy Grant, served 1969-2001

"I used to watch the Army recruits. . .and I just made up my mind that I'll do anything to keep from going in the Army. So then I got a thing to enlist in the Navy. And I was fortunate to get exactly what I wanted. In order to duck the draft, I got a chance to enlist for the duration."- Horace Banks, served 1943-1945

"Graham Jackson, when the war started, got a job as a Chief Petty Officer recruiting Black people into the Navy. So, cutting his grass when I wasn't quite 17 years old, he approached me cutting one day and he said "I want you to join the Navy". . . So anyway I went down to the Federal Building at that time to his office and he gave me all the paperwork and signed me up."- John Seagraves, served June 1943-Dec 1945

"If they'd have drafted me, they would've put me where they wanted me, so I volunteered to go into the Navy. . .the Navy just had more things that I liked. I liked the ocean, I liked ships, and I didn't have to be crawling around on the ground."- Levi Murray, served 1943-1945

I always wanted to join the service, it was just what branch. I actually wanted to join the Army first, but they didn't have the job I wanted. . . so I went down to the Navy recruiter. . . he says you can leave in about four days!"- Lance Cobb, served 1989-1995

"Well, I had a choice to go Army or the Navy, and I decided Navy. It was very simple and didn't take very long - they were looking for men."- Theodore Jackson, served October 1943-1945

"[My brother] went off to the Navy, and that just bothered me. . . I constantly had my brother on my mind, so I said to one of my friends, "let's join the Navy!". . . the three of us went in to check it out." - Veronica Cotariu, served 1944-1950

"Mayor Gibson is how I got to OCS. . . it was through a program to get inner city kids to the military. . . I excelled in engineering. . . the Marines wanted me, the Air Force, and I finally chose the Navy because I wanted to travel."- Joseph LaPaix, served 1985-2011

"When I grew up I wanted to see the world. My instinct for continued study wasn't there but I wanted to continue growing up and seeing the world and the best thing was the Navy. Back then, the Navy wasn't just a job, it was an adventure."- George Gelada, served 1980-2000

"After completing nursing school in Rocky Mountain, NC, I went to the VA hospital in Richmond, VA. . . When I reported in 1953, the Vietnam Army Nurses had been called back and reported back in with me, so I was accustomed to talking to military nurses. So after 3 and a half years we all decided, three of us, that we needed to go into the Navy."- Doris Pearce, served 1956-1976

"It was just my friend saying, 'Hey, let's join the Navy, there's a buddy program.' And I was like, alright, I get to be with my best friend through boot camp. That was my inspiration, you know."- Jose Orta, served 1984-1989

"I was visiting with friends at the American embassy in Manila and somehow ran into the American consulate there and he advised me when I turned 18 to come for my draft card. . . for some time I had wanted to leave the islands and just see what the world was like. . . The Navy was so attractive. . . family history as well, with my uncles. So that summer I just went and joined the Navy."- Martin Bravo, served 1961-1967

"Oh, it was not exactly an exciting thing to be doing what I was and the recruiter was talking about how could you could go into the service and you could choose whatever you wanted to do and get all kinds of training and that sounded exciting and I would be helping the war effort too. And I thought I would like to be involved in aircraft in effort too; and I thought I would like to be involved in aircraft some way." - Mildred Evans, served 1943-1945

"I come from a family of service. My great uncle was Navy. He was, I believe, an engineer on an aircraft. My father was a machinist mate, and after he got out he became a seabee in the reserves. My brother was Air Force, retired. And so I followed the family footsteps." - Rebecca Lillie, served 1983-1989

"I don't think I gave the war much thought when I went and joined. I think, like I said, we were pretty much on our way out of Vietnam. At the time, again like I said, women just didn't do that sort of thing. So I never felt for any fear for my safety or anything like that. I joined the service because I needed to grow up and try to get an education. . . I thought that it is an honor to serve your country, I believe." - Margaret Grissinger, served 1973-1978

"I became an RN in '53, and then in '57, I decided that I was going to apply for the three branches of service. It was either going to be Navy, Air Force, or Army. And I wrote a letter and sent them all at the same time. And I decided that the one who responded first, is the one that I would select, and the Navy responded first." - Marion L. Birkhimer, served 1958-1985

"I had looked at the other services and I felt that the Navy had the best as far as it provided ground troops; it had an aviation portion, it had a sea service portion. And it just seemed to be an accumulation of all the other services wrapped up into one place." - Karen Gruber Trueblood, served 1977-2003

"Well, I thought I would like to travel and I hoped to be able to work in a hospital setting taking care of people, and that's why." - Marjorie Burten Van Wert, served 1949-1952

"I ended up joining the Navy partly because my grandfather had served in the Navy, and I remembered hearing his stories about the Navy, him talking about his service. And I liked the idea of being able to travel, see a lot of the world, and I figured maybe the Navy would give me the best opportunity to do that. Also because, I think partly because of who the Navy recruiter was. He was very up-forward and straight with me, where it seemed like a lot of the recruiters were, you know, just trying to get me in the service." - Dana Kapp, served 1977-1997