

Teachers' Day around the world

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Teachers' Days are special days intended to recognize and appreciate teachers. While World Teachers' Day is on the fifth day of October, each country celebrates Teachers' Day on a day significant to their journey of education, or to celebrate the memory of a local educationist. In every region, this appreciation is shown in different ways, drawing from the specific cultures and traditions.

“What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches.” – Soren Kierkegaard



India: Gurudakshina is an age-old tradition of acknowledgment, respect, and gratitude, offered to teachers or gurus by students, after a period of study. The concept of Teachers' Day, however, came to be celebrated with enthusiasm in honour of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second president of India. On the 5th of September, teachers are presented with handmade cards, flowers, and homemade snacks. Sports events are held, where teachers and students get to play together. The students organize dramas, ethnic dancing, and storytelling as a tribute to their teachers. The teachers take the time to share their experiences with the students and are also reminded of what it feels like to be a student.

“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.” – Mark van Doren

Indonesia: Teachers mould the lives they influence. Lessons learned in school remain with students for a long time and are not just restricted to subjects. It is often from teachers that children learn how to question, keep an open mind, have patience and keep learning. In Indonesia, National Teachers' Day is commemorated on the 25th of November, the birthday of the Indonesian Teachers' Association, the PGRI. Though it is not a holiday, celebrations are held in recognition of teachers and the school staff. Teachers get encouragement and support from the community and are shown that their devotion to students is appreciated.



“Teaching should be full of ideas instead of stuffed with facts.” – Anonymous



Vietnam: The Vietnamese Educators' Day is celebrated on the 20th of November. On this holiday, students usually visit their teachers at their homes to offer them flowers and gifts as a means to express their respect. Trips are organized in advance, and often students cook food, prepare artwork and hold parties at their schools. Alumni meetings are held in order for former students to thank their former teachers.

“One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.” – Carl Jung

Thailand: Sometimes teachers just need a day to rest. On January 16th, most schools in Thailand close in order to give the teachers a well-deserved break during the long second term.



China: The Republic of China uses this day to honour teachers' dedication, struggles, and contribution to their students and to the society. Gratitude is shown to teachers, on the 28th of September, in the form of cards and flowers. This date was chosen to commemorate the birth of Confucius, believed to be the model master educator in ancient China. The festival celebration in temples of Confucius includes dancers and drummers.



“Acquire new knowledge whilst thinking over the old, and you may become a teacher of others.” – Confucius

Australia: Here, the last Friday in October of each year is celebrated as the Teachers' Day. As part of the celebrations, teachers who have inspired their school and community are recognized and honoured. Students, parents, and community members come together to acknowledge the importance of competent, qualified, and motivated teachers.



USA: In the USA, National Teacher Day, celebrated on the Tuesday of the first full week of May, focuses on the contributions teachers make to help children succeed in school and in life. The 'teacher appreciation week', serving the purpose of appreciating teachers across the nation, is filled with activities and events intended to bring about greater interaction between teachers and students.

"The task of the excellent teacher is to stimulate "apparently ordinary" people to unusual effort. The tough problem is not in identifying winners: it is in making winners out of ordinary people." – Patricia Cross

Chile: October 16th was chosen as the 'Dia del Profesor' or Teachers' Day to honour the founding of the Teachers' Association of Chile. Students present each teacher with a certificate or a collection of teacher appreciation messages, poems, and drawings.



Gambia: Teachers are often faced with high expectations of providing quality education to meet the economic, social, and developmental needs of a country. In the small country of Gambia, West Africa, Teachers' Day is the day to honour those teachers who pursue their passion under difficult circumstances like wars and make the extra effort to ensure that girls have the opportunity for education. The profession is highly respected and on the 5th of October, schools and the society in Gambia come together to show teachers their gratitude and support.

"The best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book." – Anonymous

Lithuania: Teachers' Day can also be a day for students to understand more about teaching as a profession. In Lithuania, Europe, tradition requires that the teachers not teach on this day. Instead, senior students hold classes for the rest of the school. This provides the opportunity for teachers and students to take a look at the roles of educators and to see what it is like on the opposite side of the classroom. Teachers get to interact with their students outside classrooms and attend a concert performed by the students. Another tradition is the giving of flowers to the teacher as a token of respect and gratitude. And why must only the teachers be appreciated? On the first Saturday of October, the students also thank other members of the staff including the principal and secretary.



"A teacher's purpose is not to create students with his own image, but to develop students who can create their own image." – Anonymous



Turkey: President Mustafa Atatürk who stated that "[A] New generation will be created by teachers." came to be considered a 'Prime Teacher' for introducing to the country the new Turkish alphabet. The 24th of November is thus, a day of significance for the Turkic people.

"Often, when I am reading a good book, I stop and thank my teacher." – Anonymous

Lilly Tomlin had said "I like a teacher who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework." Isn't that what makes a good teacher? Someone who knows how to be fun and firm at the same time, knows a lot about the subject and is yet not afraid to admit uncertainty, knows grades are important but that understanding is more meaningful, and encourages questioning and keeping open minds? So this Teachers' Day, let's take the time to thank our teachers for helping us become the people we are.

This compilation, by Divya Choudary, first appeared in Teacher Plus in September 2011.

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