

## Mother's Day

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### Talking About Mother's Day

Plan a Mother's Day discussion and reminiscence activity with the information below.

#### Props & Preparations

- Print a copy of the [pictures](#) of Julia Ward Howe and Anna Jarvis to pass around during the discussion.
  - Bring in some carnations for the participants.
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### Talking About Mother's Day

#### In the Beginning

Mother's Day began as a spring festival to celebrate "Mother Earth". Then, it became a celebration of "Mother Church". Finally, it became a day to celebrate all mothers.

Perhaps the origin of Mother's Day goes back to ancient Greece, where they held spring festivals in honor of Rhea, the mother of gods. This pagan celebration was linked to the beginning of the growing season and was what some call a celebration of "Mother Earth".

As Christianity spread throughout Europe, the celebration became linked to Easter. Many churches celebrated "Mothering Sunday" on the fourth Sunday of Lent, the forty days leading up to Easter. It was a celebration of Mary, Mother of God. It became customary to offer small gifts or cakes to mothers on this day.

In the 1600s in England, "Mothering Day" was celebrated. This was a day when wealthy families (who employed many servants) gave their servants a day off to return to their homes to visit their mothers. A special cake (called a "mothering cake") was sent along with the servants. Today, Mother's Day is a celebration of all mothers. This idea began with two women—Julia Ward Howe (who wrote the words to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic") and Anna Jarvis.

Howe, a social reformer and poet, wanted a day when mothers could celebrate peace, and she organized a mothers' meeting in Boston each year, starting in 1872. She suggested Mother's Day be celebrated on June 2. She proposed calling it "Mother's Day for Peace" and wrote the first [Mother's Day Proclamation](#).

In 1907, Anna Jarvis, who lived in Philadelphia, persuaded her mother's church in Grafton, West Virginia, to celebrate Mother's Day on the second Sunday in May, which coincided with the anniversary of her mother's death. By the next year, the day was also celebrated in Philadelphia. Jarvis then proceeded to write to ministers, politicians, and businessmen to establish a national Mother's Day. Ironically, she was never a mother herself.



In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson made the official announcement, proclaiming Mother's Day as a national holiday to be celebrated on the second Sunday in May. Today, many countries around the world celebrate Mother's Day, although many on a different day.

### The Carnation and Commercialism

Anna Jarvis's favorite flower was the carnation, and she supplied them to parishioners on Mother's Day. Today, carnations are often worn (or given) for Mother's Day.

What color of boutonniere is worn to church on Mother's Day? What is the significance of the color?

**Answer:** A colored carnation (red or pink) means that a person's mother is living. A white carnation indicates that a person's mother is deceased.

Jarvis and the florist industry ended up disagreeing over the selling of flowers for Mother's Day. An industry publication, *Florists' Review*, encouraged readers to "exploit the holiday" to sell more flowers. In a press release criticizing the floral industry, Jarvis said, "What will you do to route charlatans, bandits, pirates, racketeers, kidnappers, and other termites that would undermine with their greed one of the finest, noblest, and truest movements and celebrations?" When Jarvis disrupted a meeting of the American War Mothers in the 1930s, protesting their sale of white carnations for Mother's Day, she was removed by the police. *Florists' Review* again wrote, "Miss Jarvis was completely squelched". Mother's Day remains, in the United States, one of the best sales days for florists.

In the 1930s, the U.S. Postal Service announced a Mother's Day stamp with the image of *Whistler's Mother* and a vase of white carnations. Jarvis responded by campaigning against the stamp. She persuaded President Roosevelt to remove the words "Mother's Day" but not the white carnations.

Over the years, the greeting card and the floral industries capitalized on Mother's Day. At the end of her life, Anna Jarvis became disenchanted with the commercialism of the holiday and often spoke out against it. In her later years, she lost all of her property, her eyesight, and her health. Friends collectively paid for her fees to a sanitarium, where she died a pauper.

"A printed card means nothing except that you are too lazy to write to the woman who has done more for you than anyone in the world. And candy! You take a box to Mother—and then eat most of it yourself. A pretty sentiment." ~ Anna Jarvis

"I wanted it to be a day of sentiment, not profit." ~ Anna Jarvis

"Arise then, women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts!... We, the women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs..." ~ Julia Ward Howe, promoter of a Mother's Day for Peace

### Discussion Starters

- Is it important to you to receive a gift on Mother's Day?
- Do you think Mother's Day is too commercial?
- How would you describe Anna Jarvis?
- What are your favorite flowers? If you could choose a flower to represent mothers, what would it be?



