

**Fall 2008 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Elementary Level**

Stars, Stripes and Symbols of America: Comparing Our Flag, Past and Present



Thirty-Six Star United States Flag

Color woodcut on linen, between 1865-1867.

Library of Congress Bibliographic record

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97515549/>

OVERVIEW

Overview

In this activity, students will learn about an important national symbol: the American flag. Students will analyze an image of an American flag from the post-Civil War era (1865-7) and compare its details (i.e., the stars and stripes) to those of our nation's flag today. This activity may be extended so that students analyze other national symbols to consider their importance to Americans.

Objectives

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify the American flag as a national symbol
- Analyze details of this symbol
- Compare two different versions of the American flag to understand why this symbol has changed over time

Time Required

One class period

Recommended Grade Range

1-2

Topic/s

Government, Law

Subject

Language Arts, Social Studies

Standards

McREL 4th Edition **Standards & Benchmarks**

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Grades K-4 History

Standard 4. Understands how democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events and symbols.

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OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 3. Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.

Language Arts: Writing

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts: Listening and Speaking

Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Credits

Activity adapted from “Stars, Stripes and Symbols,” a lesson plan created by Sonja Huddleston and Angie Willis, Sheridan Elementary School, Bloomington School District 87, Illinois

PREPARATION

Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity:

American flag (use your classroom’s flag or bring one in)

Thirty-Six Star United States Flag image

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/pga/02800/02834r.jpg>

- Prepare to display the image for discussion either by printing or projecting

Analysis Sheet (see attached)

- Print one copy for each student

Flag Worksheet (see attached)

- Print one copy for each student

(Optional) National Symbols Chart (see attached)

- Print one copy for each student

Resources

Thirty-Six Star United States Flag description and history

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm159.html>

History of Flag Day (June 14) and the American flag

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jun14.html>

The Star-Spangled Banner Web Site, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History (includes image of the original Star-Spangled Banner, circa 1813)

<http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/ssb/>

Primary Sources from the Library of Congress (see attached)

- For reference if extending the activity

National Symbols: Additional Online Resources: (see attached)

- For reference if extending the activity

The Library of Congress

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PROCEDURE

Activity

1. Working with the entire class, explore students' understanding of a symbol by drawing their attention to the classroom's American flag. Ask the following questions to frame the discussion:
 - *Where* else have you seen the American flag?
(e.g., at home, government buildings, on TV, etc.)
 - *When* have you seen a lot American flags in many places?
(e.g., on the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, etc.)
 - *Why* do you think people fly the American flag? *What* does it mean?
(e.g., it means the United States of America, it means our home, etc.)
2. Acknowledge students' responses about the American flag's meaning and introduce the word, "symbol" by writing it on the board. Tell students that the flag is a symbol—something that stands for or represents something else. Reiterate students' responses about what the flag stands for. Tell students that symbols make people feel certain emotions.
 - How does the American flag make you feel? (e.g., proud, happy, etc.)
3. Explain that in this activity, students will be taking a closer look at the American flag, a symbol of our nation, to learn more about how this symbol has changed over time and why.
4. First, focus students' attention on the classroom's flag. Model the observation and analysis process by guiding the entire class in viewing the flag's details. Ask the following questions:
 - What do you see?
(e.g., white stars, blue square, white and red stripes, etc.)
 - What do you *think* you know about this flag?
(e.g., it's old, it's an American flag)
 - What do you *want* to know?
5. Now display the image of the **Thirty-Six Star United States** flag and pass out copies of the **Analysis Sheet**.
6. Working with the entire class, repeat the observation and analysis process modeled above but this time, complete the **Analysis Sheet** together step-by-step while viewing the image. Use the **Analysis Sheet** questions to guide students through the process:
 - What do you see?
(e.g., white stars, blue square, white and red stripes, etc.)
 - What do you *think* you know about this flag?
(e.g., it's old, it's an American flag)
 - What do you *want* to know?

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PROCEDURE (CONT'D)

7. Next, keep the image on display while bringing students' attention back to the classroom's flag as well. Working with the entire class, guide students through a comparison of the two flags. Possible questions include:
 - How is this flag (the image) *different* from our classroom's flag? How is it the *same*?
 - How many stripes are on this flag? How many stripes are on our flag? (count aloud)
 - How many stars are on this flag? How many stars are on our flag? (count aloud)
8. Share the history of the American flag as a national symbol. Explain that both flags are American flags but the one with fewer stars is older; it was made many years ago after the Civil War ended. While the American flag itself is a national symbol, the stars and stripes on it are symbols, too. Tell students that as a nation, we decided to keep the number of stripes the same to honor the original 13 colonies. But we have added a new star to the flag every time a new state joins the union.
 - How many states made up the United States long ago when the older flag was created? (i.e., 36 stars = 36 states)
 - How many states make up the United States today?
9. Conclude by asking students to think about the following questions:
 - How do you think the American flag might change in the future?
10. **(Optional)** Distribute copies of the **National Symbols Chart**. Working with the entire class, guide students in completing the row labeled "American Flag" with information from the class analysis and discussion.
11. Students may complete the **Flag Worksheet** in class or as a homework assignment.

EXTENSION

- Share and analyze with students the portrait of Francis Scott Key and Key's "The Star-Spangled Banner" manuscript.
- Each day of the week, repeat the process of using the **Analysis Sheet** to analyze a different national symbol (e.g., Statue of Liberty) from the **National Symbols Chart**. When the charts are complete, ask students to choose the national symbol they think is most important and explain their choices using information from their charts.

EVALUATION

- Observation of student participation during discussions.
- Evaluation of the completed **Analysis Sheet**.
- Evaluation of the completed **Flag Worksheet**.

Analysis Sheet

Draw a detailed picture of the symbol.

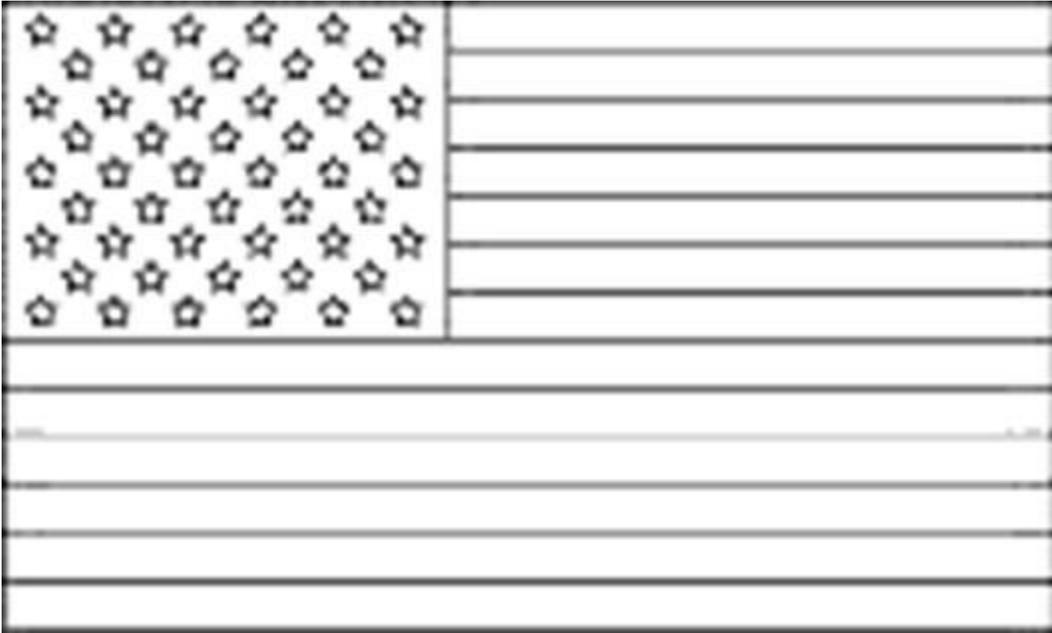


What do you see?

What do you think you know about this symbol?

What would you like to find out about this symbol?

The American Flag



Tell why the American Flag is an important national symbol.

Four sets of primary-ruled writing lines, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line, provided for the student to write their answer.

National Symbols Chart

National Symbol	Important Historical Facts	Details We Observed	Why It Is A Symbol
American Flag			
Great Seal			
Statue of Liberty			
Liberty Bell			

Primary Sources from the Library of Congress

Image	Description	Citation	URL
	<p>Thirty-Six Star United States Flag</p>	<p>Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-DIG-pga-02834 (digital file from original print)]</p>	<p>http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97515549/</p>
	<p>Francis Scott Key's "Star Spangled Banner"</p>	<p>Key, Francis Scott. The Star Spangled Banner. 1840, manuscript. <i>Historic Sheet Music 1800-1922</i>. Performing Arts Encyclopedia. Library of Congress. 27 June 2008. <http://lweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ahas/loc.natlib.ahas.10000019/default.html>.</p>	<p>http://www.loc.gov/item/ahas.100010478</p>
	<p>Portrait of Francis Scott Key</p>	<p>Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Theodor Horydczak Collection [LC-H824-T01-0523 DLC (b&w film dup. neg.)].</p>	<p>http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/thc.5a50172</p>
	<p>The Great Seal</p>	<p>Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-pga-01404]</p>	<p>http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.01404</p>
	<p>Statue of Liberty</p>	<p>Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-122833].</p>	<p>http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c22833</p>
	<p>1900 black and white photo of Liberty Bell</p>	<p>Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection.</p>	<p>http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/det.4a25713</p>

National Symbols: Additional Online Resources

Symbol	Additional Source	URL
American Flag (i.e., The Star-Spangled Banner)	Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History	http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/ssb/2_home/fs2.html
The Great Seal of the United States	U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs	http://www.state.gov/www/publications/great_seal.pdf (Booklet in PDF format)
Statue of Liberty	National Park Service U.S. Dept. of the Interior Statue of Liberty	http://www.nps.gov/stli/
Liberty Bell	National Park Service U.S. Dept. of the Interior Liberty Bell Center	http://www.nps.gov/inde/liberty-bell-center.htm