

Simple Symbols and American Children

Summary

These activities will teach and instill a respect for the American flag, the pledge of allegiance, liberty bell, statue of liberty, the bald eagle, and other patriotic symbols.

Main Core Tie

Social Studies - Kindergarten

[Standard 2 Objective 3](#)

Materials

Symbols and the American Flag

Photos, signs, or a book (I Read Symbols) with pictures of signs and symbols

Classroom American flag

White art paper or cardstock

Marbles

Red and blue paint

Shallow pans or trays

- [American Flag Book](#)

Crayons

Markers

Colored pencils

The Pledge of Allegiance

Pledge of Allegiance poster

A version of *The Pledge of Allegiance*

- *I Pledge Allegiance*

- [Pledge of Allegiance certificates](#)

Photo of each child

The Bald Eagles

- [Bald eagle headdresses](#)

3" x 6" blue construction paper

2" wide strip of heavy paper

Stars cut outs or stickers

Scissors

Glue

Stapler

Black markers

Red paint

Paintbrushes

American Symbols Lotto

- [Lotto game boards](#)

Game markers

- [Picture cards](#)

American Flag Collage

Large paper base for the flag

Blue paint

Sponges

White stars

12" x 6" white strips -- 2 per child

Red and white "treasures"

Glue

Scissors

Additional Resources

Books

- *Across America, I Love You*
, by Christine Loomis; ISBN 0439235901
- *America a Patriotic Primer*
, by Lynn Cheney; ISBN 043945994X
- *America the Beautiful*
, Katharine Lee Bates; ISBN 0439333024
- *Celebrating Patriotic Holidays*
, by Joel Kupperstein; ISBN 1574715747
- *I Am America*
, by Charles R. Smith, Jr.; ISBN 0439740401
- *I Pledge Allegiance*
, by Bill Martin, Jr. and Michael Sampson; ISBN 0763625272
- *I Read Symbols*
, by Tana Hoban; ISBN 0688023320
- *If I Were President*
, by Catherine Stier; ISBN
- *L is for Liberty*
, by Wendy Cheyette Lewison; ISBN 0448432285
- *The Pledge of Allegiance*
, by Francis Bellamy; ISBN 0439216729
- *The Star Spangled Banner*
, by Francis Scott Key; ISBN 0439407672
- *The Statue of Liberty*
, by Lucille Recht Penner; ISBN 0439491452
- *Red, White, Blue, and Uncle Who?*
The Stories Behind Some of America's Patriotic Symbols, by Teresa Bateman; ISBN 0823417840
- *This Land is Your Land*
, by Woody Guthrie; ISBN 0316392154

Videos

American History for Children: United States Flag, Schlessinger Video Productions, ISBN 157225064X

Articles

The Flap Over the Flag, by Bernard A. Weisberger, *American Heritage*, 41, 7.

Additional Media

- [God Bless The USA: A Child's Tribute to America](#)
- [We the People](#)
- *Kids Celebrate America*
, (Turn Up the Music, Inc. 877-777-7523)
- *God Bless the USA: Kids Sing Songs for America*
, (Madacy Entertainment Group, Inc., #MK2 1389)

- *Print Shop Essentials*

, (Broderbund), ISBN 0439334349 (clip art for symbols, shapes, etc.)

Background for Teachers

Children begin at a very early age to learn the meaning of symbols in our culture and environment. Understanding the meaning of some universal symbols, such as traffic signs and signals, handicap logos, gender signs on restrooms, etc., is essential for responsible membership in society. Other signs and symbols are reflective of middle American values and habits: golden arches and other fast food logos; polka dot donut boxes, labeling on media and entertainment products, etc.

Preschool and Kindergarten children learn symbols for alphabet letters and numerals. Many children arrive at school with a firm grasp of these abstract symbols. Other children require time and support to learn these essential literacy and numeric skills. Just as adult support is required for mastery of the early academic skills, teachers need to help children understand that our national symbols "represent thoughts, feelings, emotions and physical objects." Exposure to national symbols helps children develop a sense of patriotism and belonging in their communities and country. Participation and civic involvement are important democratic values that can be enhanced and encouraged. Activities to teach and instill a respect for our flag, the pledge of allegiance, liberty bell, statue of liberty, bald eagle and others are introduced.

Fast Flag Facts for Teachers

A Continental Congress resolution established a flag with 13 stripes, alternating red and white and 13 white stars on a blue field.

As the number of states grew, the flag was becoming too large. Congress voted in 1818 to keep just 13 stripes in recognition of the original 13 colonies and add a new star for each new state. Original versions of the colonial flag included the British Union Jack, which became obsolete with the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

During the Civil War, President Lincoln insisted that no stars be removed for the seceded states. The Union troops fought under the flag containing all of its stars.

Symbols on the flag include: stars representing a new constellation, stripes for each original state/colony, number of stars representing the number of states in the US, the triangular folded flag represents the tri-corner hats worn during the American Revolution.

Historians disagree about the meaning of the three colors, but some suggestions are: Red -- courage, sacrifice, blood shed in wars; White -- purity, peace, hope; Blue -- loyalty, freedom and justice.

During flag ceremonies, the flag is raised swiftly, but lowered slowly.

Important dates:

July 4, 1776 -- Declaration of Independence is signed. A new flag is designed.

June 14, 1777 -- Continental Congress makes the Stars and Stripes America's official flag.

September 13, 1814 -- Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star Spangled Banner".

1916 - Flag Day is unofficially designated as June 14 by President Woodrow Wilson.

August 3, 1949 - Harry Truman signs legislation making National Flag Day on June 14.

Intended Learning Outcomes

2. Develop social skills and ethical responsibility.

Instructional Procedures

Invitation to Learn

Prior to the children arriving at school, display signs and wordless logos around the room. As the children arrive, let them discover the posted items. These displays may include: pictures of road signs, fast food restaurant signs, empty boxes of familiar products, handicap parking labels, etc. As

the children observe the displays, begin a discussion of what each item represents. Include the words symbol and represents (or "stands for") at this stage in the discussion to begin the children's understanding of the concept of symbol.

Instructional Procedures

Symbols and the American Flag

Display a picture or draw a simple symbol on the chalk/ whiteboard. Begin with something universally recognized, such as restroom signs. After establishing the children's schema for symbols, point to the American flag in your classroom. Ask: "What is that?" Most of the children will say that it is the flag. Ask some of the following questions, or other questions to lead the discussion:

- What does it stand for?
- Is this America?
- Where are some of the places you have seen the flag flying?
- What do you notice about the flag?
- What is it a symbol of?
- What colors do you see?

Display the classroom flag near the children's eye level. Spread it out so the children can see all the parts of the flag. Ask the children to identify the colors of the flag. Discuss with the children the suggested meanings of the three colors. Working either with large groups or as a center activity, have the children complete the chart [The Colors of My Flag](#). Put some red tempera paint in one dish and blue paint in another. Place marbles in each dish and roll them around to coat completely with paint. Have the children place their paper, print side down, in the cake pan. Drop a marble onto the paper and move it around by tilting the cake pan. Repeat this with marbles of both colors until the child is satisfied with his painting. These can be mounted and displayed in the classroom, or sent home to share with families.

For an additional center activity, let each child complete [The American Flag book](#). Using the templates, prepare enough books in advance for the class members. Set up a sample of a completed book, or provide support for the children to fill in the blanks. Make crayons, markers, or colored pencils available.

Pledge of Allegiance Words	
Pledge	Promise
Allegiance	Loyalty, faithfulness, devotion
United States of America	Our country. Display a US map that shows all 50 states
Republic	A political unit where people are elected (such as senators) to make decision for the people
Stands	A symbol
Nation	A group of people who work together under one government
Indivisible	Not able to be divided or split apart
Liberty	Freedom. No slavery. Exercising your own judgment and making your own decisions
Justice	Fair treatment for everyone
For all	Every citizen in the United States

The Pledge of Allegiance

Students recite the Pledge of Allegiance from the beginning of their school experience. It is likely that few kindergartners recite it correctly, or with any real understanding of its meaning. Read through the book, *The Pledge of Allegiance*. This book has only the complete text of the pledge,

illustrated with photographs. Share the book, *I Pledge Allegiance* by Bill Martin, Jr. As the book is read, pause to allow discussion about the different words and concepts that are explained. The "Pledge of Allegiance Words" chart provides a quick reference for some explanations. After discussing the definitions of the various words in the Pledge of Allegiance, continue to recite the pledge together daily, carefully emphasizing the "new" words.

Prepare a [Pledge of Allegiance Certificate](#) for each child. Take each child's picture, preferably in front of a flag. Mount the photographs on the certificates, which have been copied onto cardstock. Have each child decorate his/own certificate before sending them home.

The Bald Eagle

Conduct a short discussion about the bald eagle. Display pictures of bald eagles. Share the following information with the children:

- Several other countries used an eagle as their symbol. America's early leaders didn't want to choose a national bird that was used so commonly.
- Benjamin Franklin wanted the turkey, which is native to America, to be named the national bird. Other leaders objected because the turkey was not considered majestic enough to be a symbol of this new country.
- In 1782, Congress chose the Bald Eagle, which is native to America, to be the new country's national bird. It was thought to be regal, strong and unique enough to represent America.

To make the [bald eagle headaddresses](#), give each child the wing and head papers. Cut out wings and heads. Use markers to draw an eye and color the beak on the head. Paint red stripes across the wings (to resemble our flag). Let the paint dry completely. Glue the head to one end of the blue body piece. Glue the body to the middle of the dried wings. Attach the stars to the blue body. Glue or staple the eagle headaddress to the middle of the strip of oaktag. Staple each child's headband to fit their own head size.

American Symbols Lotto

This activity requires the advance preparation of the [lotto game boards](#) and [cards](#). It is most fun to play the game when everyone has a board that is slightly different from other boards. You can make this board by copying several sheets of the picture page and several blank game board pages. Then, glue the pictures in different arrangements on the lotto boards. Laminate the boards for protection. Create a set of picture cards on cardstock also. Laminate these as well. Play the game with a small group. Pass out game markers to each child. Take turns drawing a card. If that national symbol is on a child's game board, he/she covers it with their game marker. As an extension, children can be asked to tell one fact or idea about the symbol before they cover their picture. Play until someone has a row of game markers covering pictures or until someone has "blackout", with every section of the board covered.

American Flag Collage

Before implementing this activity send home a [note](#), asking families to save red and white "treasures" to use on the American flag collage. Collect these items for several days, perhaps a few weeks. Ask the children to watch for red and white things as you've discussed the colors in the flag. They can save bottle caps, fabric, ribbon, Styrofoam packing pieces, buttons, etc. Engage the children in an activity sorting the items by color as they arrive at school. Before having the children work on the flag, prepare the flag paper itself. If using oaktag, glue three sheets along the 36" side creating a flag base of approximately 68" x 36". Measure for the stripes (approximately 2.75"). Beginning at the bottom, draw the lines across the length of the paper. After six stripes, the bottom border of the blue field has been created. Then measure the width of the field and the seven remaining stripes go from the field to the edge of the paper. Work with one small group of children at a time. Begin by letting the group of children sponge paint the blue field. As each successive center group works on the flag, have them stay within a stripe. Encourage them to completely fill in the stripe with the appropriate color.

Let the glue dry thoroughly and display.

Extensions

Curriculum Extensions/Adaptations/ Integration

Discussion of symbols can be extended into other areas of the curriculum. Before or after a session in your school's computer lab, discuss the "symbols" the children use to complete their computer tasks. For example, if the students are working with Kid Pix, they may have to click the mouse on the "KP" that is one of many symbols on the computer's dock. Once in the program, what symbols are present for the children to access the tools they need?

Extend discussions of symbols in the curriculum by helping children to understand that letters are symbols that represent sounds and numerals are symbols that represent numbers.

Kindergarten children can create a predictable chart or class book. Some ideas: "I love America because _____"; "A is for _____, B is for _____"; "I'm proud to be an American because _____."

If you have access to a computer lab and/or mobile writing lab at your school, consider a technology-based project at the end of your study of patriotic symbols. Kindergarten classes can create "An American ABC" book on the computers instead of with paper and pencil. Each child can choose, or be assigned a letter. They can have experience on the computers typing "A is for _____" and illustrating their page of the book. Publish the book for your classroom. Consider making a copy of the entire book for each child to take home. You may want to reduce the page size so you can economize on paper.

Also in the computer lab, children can use the draw tools and stamps to draw symbols. American flags are a simple first experience.

Another project using the computers available in many schools is to create a slide show. Select a fun poem or the text of one of the familiar patriotic songs: America, the Beautiful; The Star Spangled Banner; etc. Also, simply using the text of the pledge of allegiance could be fun for your students. The children can create their own illustrations and record their voices singing or reading that section of the poem/song.

Family Connections

Celebrate the diversity of your school community by inviting parents or other community members into your classroom to share and teach about their own country/culture of origin. Presenters should be encouraged to bring in flags, ethnic clothing, artifacts, maps, etc. Follow the local laws and guidelines about any food that the presenter is allowed to share with students. Invite families to create an individual child's flag or a family flag at home. Send home a letter explaining the activity, giving guidelines, completion date, etc. When these are returned to school, make sure each child has something to display. The teacher may have to provide support at school for some children to complete this task. Alternatively, each child could gather things, bring them to school, and create the flag during a large or small group activity time. In this situation, the teacher can have photographs or artwork available to all the children to include on their flags. When the flags are complete, participate in a parade for parents, office, or other school staff. Don't forget the drums and noisemakers! Display the flags.

Assessment Plan

An anecdotal assessment that all teachers can use is simply an observation during the pledge of allegiance to note whether the children's demeanors change and level of participation increases. Observe an increased awareness of signs and symbols in "normal" classroom/school activities ("Look, there's an arrow in the parking lot!"). Also, children will demonstrate a further comprehension of national symbols in their everyday lives ("David's shirt has a flag on it.") Children can be asked to individually recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Look for an increased awareness of flags and symbols from other cultures. This is particularly relevant if the teacher has invited parents or community members into the classroom to share information about other countries and cultures. Also, during times of world-wide sporting events, children will focus on the flags and the origins of different participants.

After completing the flag activity in the computer lab (see curriculum extensions in the next section), evaluate the children's work. Have they included 13 stripes? Did they select the appropriate colors? Do they represent stars?

Bibliography

Research Basis

DeLoache, J.S. (1995). Early understanding and use of symbols: the model. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 4, 109-113.

Symbols set human thought apart from other creatures. Adults have had so much experience with symbols that we assume everyone interprets them in the same way we do. Participation in any culture requires an understanding of various relevant symbols. Through experience children learn about abstract and representational relationships.

Browne, William P. (2001). Citizenship education: Policy and practice in the elementary grades. *Education*, 94, (2), 149-159.

Although "citizenship training" is a traditional educational goal, it has not been systematically included in elementary school curriculum. "National loyalty, patriotism, and allegiance" can best be developed through the use of rituals and routines in the classroom, such as the Pledge of Allegiance.

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