

LESSON PLAN

THE AMERICAN FLAG: A SYMBOL OF UNIFICATION AND PRIDE



President John F. Kennedy attends Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington National Memorial Amphitheater. November 11, 1963.

Cecil Stoughton. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum,

GRADE

High School

TIME

35-45 minutes

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

Students will learn about the United States flag by exploring its history and how it has become the symbol of unification and pride we know today. Through analysis of Flag Day and National Flag Week Proclamations, students will determine how past presidents have connected the American flag to national events to celebrate patriotism. Finally, students will use the information gathered and put themselves in the shoes of the president to create a Flag Day Proclamation of their own.

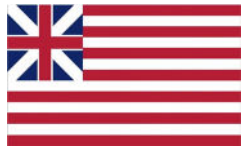
MATERIALS

- [Appendix A](#) | Proclamation 3418 – President John F. Kennedy – Flag Day 1961
- [Appendix B](#) | Proclamation 4378 – President Gerald Ford – Flag Day 1975
- [Appendix C](#) | Proclamation 7573 – President George W. Bush – Flag Day 2002
- [Appendix D](#) | Proclamation 9460 – President Barack Obama – Flag Day 2016
- [Appendix E](#) | Primary Source and Guiding Questions Handout

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HISTORY OF FLAG DAY

Flag Day can trace its history back to the Revolutionary War. In 1775, colonists fighting for their independence from Britain were doing so under many different banners and flags which led to confusion and disorganization. In June 1775, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to establish a unified fighting force called the Continental Army; however, members quickly realized the new military must have one symbol to stand behind and represent this new group.



The original flag had 13 stripes representing the thirteen colonies with a Union Jack in the upper left corner. This flag design was very similar to Great Britain's and officials worried it would weaken confidence for the revolutionary cause; therefore, they turned their efforts towards creating a new symbol of American freedom. According to legend, in 1776 General George Washington and Delegates Robert Morris and George Ross met with Philadelphia upholsterer Betsy Ross to request a flag designed with thirteen red and white stripes and thirteen five-pointed stars.

On June 14, 1777, the Second Continental Congress paused briefly while writing the Articles of Confederation to pass the following resolution on the United States flag:

“Resolved, the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white, that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation.”

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson declared that June 14 of each year would be Flag Day in which the nation should celebrate this symbol of freedom and pride. Congress did not pass legislation until 1949 officially establishing June 14 as Flag Day throughout the country. President Harry Truman signed this into law with an added requirement that the President of the United States issue a flag proclamation every year. On June 9, 1966, Congress authorized National Flag Week to occur during the week of June 14 annually. President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1966 Flag Day Proclamation declared this week-long observance would extend the opportunity for all Americans to observe and honor the flag.

CURRENT FLAG DESIGN

Since 1777, there have been 27 different official designs of the United States flag. Each new flag represented the addition of one or more states to the Union as the country expanded westward. A 49-star flag was created after Alaska became a state on January 3, 1959. This flag was used for only one year as Hawaii was admitted to the Union on August 21, 1959.

In 1958, Ohio high school student Bob Heft, created a design for a new flag with 50 stars representing each state and 13 stripes for the thirteen colonies as part of an American History class project. His design included 50 stars to reflect the ongoing discussion surrounding the possible statehood of Alaska and Hawaii. He was given a B- for his project with his teacher commenting that the project did not have the correct number of states (48) for 1958.

Heft spent the next two years conducting a campaign through letters and phone calls to the White House to bring attention to his new flag design. Heft's congressman passed the flag design to President Eisenhower who selected

Heft's design and on July 4, 1960, the student and the President stood side-by-side in a flag-raising ceremony at Fort McHenry as the new 50-star flag was raised for the first time. The ceremony's location had special meaning as the location where the Star-Spangled Banner Flag was flown on September 14, 1814, after American troops defeated the British during the War of 1812 and inspired Francis Scott Key to write *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Afterward, Heft's teacher reconsidered his grade, raising it to an A, stating "I guess if it's good enough for Washington, it's good enough for me." Beginning with John F. Kennedy, each United States president has been elected under the current 50-star, 13-stripe flag which has become a symbol of pride, freedom, democracy and patriotism.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How has the history of the United States flag contributed to establishing it as a symbol of unification?
2. How have presidential proclamations connected the importance of the flag to national pride?
3. In what ways is the United States flag used to maintain its symbolism and help future generations of Americans understand the history and significance of the flag?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to analyze primary and secondary sources to acquire information to answer historical questions.
2. Students will be able to explain the history and symbolism of the United States flag.
3. Students will be able to evaluate and synthesize key ideas from primary sources to develop new understanding about historical events.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

[TEKS | C3 standards](#)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Have students read and discuss the [Background Information](#) section.
 - a. This can be done as a large group, in small groups or individually.
2. Divide the class into four groups and distribute one presidential proclamation ([Appendices A-D](#)) to each group for students to read and analyze.
3. Using the Primary Source Analysis and Guiding Questions Handout ([Appendix E](#)) have students review their presidential proclamation.
4. Each group will discuss the proclamation they analyzed using the notes they took on Appendix E as a guide.
5. After all proclamation analyses have been shared, as a large group, discuss:
 - a. What similarities did you notice? (i.e., wording, events mentioned, requirements, etc.)
 - b. What differences did you notice?
6. Activity: Students assume the role of the president. They will write a brief Flag Day Proclamation. They must include, at minimum, the following points:
 - a. One statement about the origin of the United States flag.
 - b. Two statements about how the flag has been used in history.
 - c. One statement that includes the date (June 14) of Flag Day.
 - d. One new way in which they proclaim the flag will be used to help citizens maintain a sense of pride in the flag.
7. Optional Discussion Activity: Flag Day in the 21st Century
 - a. Compare President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama's proclamations. These presidents were the first of the 21st century and served one after another.
 - i. What are the similarities between the two proclamations? Differences?
 - ii. What historical events do each mention?

TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TEKS)

US HISTORY

§113.41 (c) (21) (B) describe how American values are different and unique from those of other nations.

§113.41 (c) (28) (A) analyze primary and secondary sources such as maps, graphs, speeches, political cartoons, and artifacts to acquire information to answer historical questions.

ART LEVEL 1

§117.302 (c) (1) (A) consider concepts and ideas from direct observation, original sources, experience, and imagination for original work.

§117.302 (c) (1) (D) make judgements about the expressive properties such as content, meaning, message, and metaphor of artwork using art vocabulary correctly.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND READING

§110.36 (c) (4) (G) evaluate details read to determine key ideas.

§110.36 (c) (4) (H) synthesize information from two texts to create new understanding.

§110.36 (c) (5) (E) interact with sources in a meaningful way such as notetaking, annotating, freewriting, and illustrating.

§110.36 (c) (8) (A) analyze the author's purpose, audience, and message within a text.

§110.36 (c) (10) (B) compose informational texts such as explanatory essays, reports, and personal essays using genre characteristics and craft.

C3 FRAMEWORK

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

APPENDIX A

Proclamation 3418 Display of the Flag at the United States Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia

June 12, 1961

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

WHEREAS the joint resolution of Congress of June 22, 1942, entitled “Joint Resolution To Codify and Emphasize Existing Rules and Customs Pertaining to the Display and Use of the Flag of the United States of America,” as amended by the joint resolution of December 22, 1942, 56 Stat. 1074, contains the following provisions:

“SEC. 2 (a) It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flagstaves in the open. However, the flag may be displayed at night upon special occasions when it is desired to produce a patriotic effect.

* * * * *

“SEC. 8. Any rule or custom pertaining to the display of the flag of the United States of America, set forth herein, may be altered, modified, or repealed, or additional rules with respect thereto may be prescribed, by the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, whenever he deems it to be appropriate or desirable; and any such alteration or additional rule shall be set forth in a proclamation.”; and

WHEREAS the battle between the United States forces and the forces of the Japanese for possession of the island of Iwo Jima, in the North Pacific, was one of the most significant and most costly battles of World War II; and

WHEREAS victory in that battle was achieved by our forces after a heroic and prolonged struggle; and

WHEREAS the raising of the American flag during that battle over Mt. Suribachi on February 23, 1945, symbolizes the courage and valor of the American fighting forces in World War II; and

WHEREAS the United States Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, portrays the actual raising of the American flag on Mt. Suribachi;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOHN F. KENNEDY, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim that the flag of the United States of American shall hereafter be displayed at the United States Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, at all times during the day and night, except when the weather is inclement.

The rules and customs pertaining to the display of the flag as set forth in the joint resolution of June 22, 1942, are hereby modified accordingly.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States of America to be affixed.

DONE at the City of Washington this twelfth day of June in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and sixty-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and eighty-fifth.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

By the President:

Dean Rusk

Secretary of State

*John F. Kennedy, Proclamation 3418—Display of the Flag at the United States Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia
Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/237156>*

APPENDIX B

Proclamation 4378 – Flag Day 1975

May 28, 1975

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Two hundred years ago, American minutemen raised their muskets at the Old North Bridge. What Ralph Waldo Emerson called “the shot heard around the world” rang out. The American Revolution had begun. Two years later, while the outcome of the Revolutionary War remained in doubt, the Continental Congress met in Philadelphia on June 14, 1777, and approved the following resolution:

“Resolved, that the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white: that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.”

That short and unadorned declaration gave birth to our flag. With the addition of thirty-seven stars, and after two centuries of history, the flag chosen in Philadelphia is our flag today, symbolizing our commitment as a people to freedom, equality, and independence.

To commemorate the adoption of our flag, the Congress by a joint resolution of August 3, 1949 (63 Stat. 492, 36 U.S.C. 157), designated June 14 of each year as Flag Day and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation calling for its observance. The Congress also requested the President, by joint resolution of June 9, 1966 (800 Stat. 194, U.S.C. 157a), to issue annually a proclamation designating the week in which June 14 occurs as National Flag Week and call upon all citizens of the United States to display the flag of the United States on those days.

This year, Flag Day is an especially historic occasion, since it is also the Bicentennial birthday of the United States Army. Two hundred years ago, on June 14, 1775, the Continental Congress adopted resolutions which in effect established the military units of New England as the official national army. By this action, the Continental Army was created, and the Nation’s military service was born. The U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps were established later that same year by the Continental Congress.

It is appropriate, as our Nation launches its Bicentennial commemoration, that the United States flag, first flown two centuries ago, be displayed together with an ensign bearing the official American Revolution Bicentennial Symbol set on a white field, which is designated as the official Bicentennial Flag.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate the week beginning June 8, 1975, as National Flag Week and I call upon the appropriate officials of the government to display the National Flag on all government buildings during that week. The heads of all government departments and agencies are also authorized and requested to provide, as they deem appropriate, for the flying of the official Bicentennial Flag, on government buildings, military installations, naval vessels, and other places where the United States flag is flown, during that period and for the remainder of the year 1975 and the entire year of 1976. I urge all Americans to observe Flag Day, June 14, and Flag Week of this year by flying the Stars and Stripes from their homes and other suitable places.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-eighth day of May, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred ninety-ninth.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerald R. Ford". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the left of a vertical line.

Gerald R. Ford

*"Flag Day and National Flag Week" of the William J. Baroody Files.
The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

APPENDIX C

Proclamation 7573 – Flag Day 2002

June 7, 2002

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The American flag is a beacon of hope, a symbol of enduring freedom, and an emblem of unity. Many have given their lives in its defense, and countless men and women have worked to ensure that Old Glory continues to stand for the ideals of freedom, justice, and equal opportunity for all. Our flag symbolizes the purpose and resolve of our Nation, first expressed by our Founders who triumphed against great odds to establish this country.

Today, as we face the challenges of a new era, our flag reminds us that freedom will prevail over oppression and that good will overcome evil. Following the attacks of September 11, Americans embraced a renewed sense of the meaning and purpose of our flag. The unforgettable images of our Nation's colors flying defiantly over the debris of the World Trade Center inspired our country with a healing hope, uniting our people in purpose and consoling those who had suffered great loss. At the Pentagon, our collective resolve to rebuild and move forward. And earlier this year, during the Opening Ceremonies at the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, Americans, joined by peace-loving people from around the world, paid tribute to the tattered flag that had been recovered from the ruins of the World Trade Center.

As we reflect on what our flag represents, we recall the words of President Woodrow Wilson, who said just weeks before the onset of World War I: "My dream is that, as the years go on and the world knows more and more of America, it...will turn to America for those moral inspirations which lie at the basis of all freedom...that America will come into the full light of the day when all shall know that she puts human rights above all other rights, and that her flag is the flag, not only of America, but of humanity."

The flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write our National Anthem 188 years ago still energizes and inspires the American spirit. Since September 11, we have seen our Nation's flag appear everywhere – on cars to always remember those who lost their lives and to remain unremitting in the pursuit of justice.

Today, in Afghanistan and around the world, brave men and women are serving under our flag, fighting to preserve freedom and win the war against terrorism. All Americans are profoundly grateful for their service and their sacrifice. We also recognize and commend the contributions of our veterans who have bravely defended our Nation's founding principles throughout our history. The image of six marines raising the flag on the top of Mount Suribachi at Iwo Jima will always remind us that the struggle for liberty is a story of courage, sacrifice, and commitment to the unshakeable belief in freedom's promise.

On Flag Day, we remember the struggles and successes for which our flag stands. And we look to the flag as an everlasting symbol of our commitment to a world of peace, a Nation of principle, and a people of unity.

To commemorate the adoption of our flag, the Congress, by joint resolution approved August 3, 1949, as amended (63 Stat. 492), designated June 14 of each year as "Flag Day" and requested that the President issue an annual proclamation calling for its observance and for the display of the Flag of the United States on all Federal Government buildings. The Congress also requested, by joint resolution approved June 9, 1966, as amended (80 Stat., 194), that

the President annually issue a proclamation designating the week in which June 14 occurs as “National Flag Week” and calling upon all citizens of the United States to display the flag during the week.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim June 14, 2002, as Flag Day and the week beginning June 9, 2002, as National Flag Week. I direct the appropriate officials to display the flag on all Federal Government building during that week, and I urge all Americans to observe Flag Day and National Flag Week by flying the Stars and Stripes from their homes and other suitable places. I also call upon the people of the United States to observe with pride and all due ceremony the days from Flag Day through Independence Day, also set aside by the Congress (89 Stat. 211), as a time to honor America, to celebrate our heritage in public gatherings and activities, and to publicly recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of June, in the year of our Lord two thousand two, and the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-sixth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. W. Bush", with a stylized flourish at the end.

George W. Bush

Chief Executive, & Bush, G. W., 02-14975 Flag Day and National Flag Week, 2002 40139-40140 (2002). Washington, D.C.; Presidential Documents. Retrieved 2023, from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2002/06/12/02-14975/flag-day-and-national-flag-week-2002>.

APPENDIX D

Proclamation 9460 – Flag Day 2016

June 10, 2016

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Two hundred and forty years ago, a small band of patriots declared independence, proclaiming in one voice that we are free to determine our own destiny and carry out the work of self-governance. Driven by their unyielding spirit and drawing inspiration from the Stars and Stripes, a string of 13 Colonies, later expanded to become a united 50 States. Throughout our history, the American flag has steadfastly served as an emblem of this great experiment in democracy. On Flag Day and during National Flag Week, we pledge our allegiance to the banner that has served as a guiding symbol on our Nation's journey, and we celebrate the hope it inspires in the American people.

With hand over hearts, Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs have long saluted Old Glory and honored its legacy. Our flag persists as a powerful representation of freedom and opportunity. Waving high above capitol buildings and courthouses, military bases and embassies across the globe, and on the distant surface of the moon, it calls on each of us to remember our obligations to the Republic for which it stands and to carry forward the unwavering optimism that defines us. America endures because of the courage of servicemen and women who serve under this standard, and our veterans are forever draped in the red, white, and blue when they are laid to rest. Wherever the flag lies or flies its message is clear: We rise and fall together, as one Nation and one people.

The American flag invokes pride in our citizens and hope in those who come to our shores, in search of a brighter tomorrow. In recognition of the ways, it has embodied our ideals and sustained our Nation, let us pay tribute to the Star-Spangled Banner and continue striving to create a more perfect and indivisible union – with liberty and justice for all.

To commemorate the adoption of our flag, the Congress, by joint resolution approved August 3, 1949, as amended (63 Stat. 492), designated June 14 of each year as “Flag Day” and requested that the President issue an annual proclamation calling for its observance and for the display of the flag of the United States on all Federal Government buildings. The Congress also requested, by joint resolution approve June 9, 1966, as mended (80 Stat. 194), that the President annually issue a proclamation designating the week in which June 14 occurs as “National Flag Week” and call upon citizens of the United States to display the flag during that week.

NOW, THEREFORE, I BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim June 14, 2016, as Flag Day and the week beginning June 12, 2016, as National Flag Week. I direct the appropriate officials to display the flag on all Federal Government buildings during that week, and I urge all Americans to observe Flag Day and National Flag Week by displaying the flag. I also call upon the people of the United States to observe with pride and all due ceremony those days from Flag Day through Independence Day, also set aside by the Congress (89 Stat. 211), as a time to honor America, to celebrate our heritage in public gatherings and activities, and do publicly recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of June, in the year of our Lord two thousand sixteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fortieth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barack Obama', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Barack Obama

Chief Executive, & Obama, B., 2016–14343 Flag Day and National Flag Week, 2016 39171–39174 (2016). Washington, D.C.; Presidential Documents. Retrieved 2023, from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/06/15/2016-14343/flag-day-and-national-flag-week-2016>.

APPENDIX E

Primary Source Analysis and Guiding Questions

Use the questions below to guide your analysis of the primary source.

MEETING AND GREETING THE PRIMARY SOURCE

Type (check all that apply)

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Email | <input type="checkbox"/> Press Release |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chart | <input type="checkbox"/> Patent | <input type="checkbox"/> Presidential Document |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speech | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement | <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional Document |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram | <input type="checkbox"/> Identification Document |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Court Document |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | |

Write 2-3 sentences describing the document. Pretend the person you are explaining it to cannot see the document. (Think about characteristics like handwritten vs. typed, one or more than one author, stamps, markings, or anything unique about the document).

BASIC SOURCE PARTS

Complete the right side of the table for the primary source.

What is the title of this document?	
What is the date of this document?	
Who was the author / creator?	
Where was it from?	
What is the document's purpose?	

MAKING SENSE OF THE PRIMARY SOURCE

Write 3-5 sentences describing what this primary source is about.

Who was the intended audience of this primary source?

USE AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Why was this document created?

What does this primary source say about the time period it was written in?

What specific events and/or people are mentioned in this primary source?

How does the President discuss the importance of the American Flag and its symbolism?