



Stars and Stripes Forever: **American Flag Facts** **for Senior Students**

Some American Symbols

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Questions to look for before the lesson:

- What is a symbol?
- What does the symbol, the American flag, stand for?
- Why do countries have flags?
- Why are flags important to countries?
- How did the design of our American flag emerge to its present stage?
- What do other countries' flags look like?

The Pledge of Allegiance

- The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the [national flag](#). The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the [United States of America](#). The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed by [Francis Bellamy](#). The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and formally adopted by Congress as the national pledge in 1942. The Pledge has been modified four times since its composition, with the most recent change adding the words "under [God](#)". The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and formally adopted by Congress as the national pledge in 1942. The Pledge has been modified four times since its composition, with the most recent change adding the words "under God" in 1954. [Congressional](#) The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and formally adopted by Congress as the national pledge in 1942. The Pledge has been modified four times since its composition, with the most recent change adding the words "under God" in 1954. Congressional sessions open with the recital of the Pledge, as do government meetings at local levels, meetings held by the [National Exchange Club](#). The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and formally adopted by Congress as the national pledge in 1942. The Pledge has been modified four times since its composition, with the most recent change adding the words "under God" in 1954. Congressional sessions open with the recital of the Pledge, as do government meetings at local levels, meetings held by the National Exchange Club, [Knights of Columbus](#). The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and formally adopted by Congress as the national



Did you know...

... that the original **Pledge of Allegiance** did not contain the phrase "of America"?

In 1923, the words were added to avoid confusion among immigrants as to which country they were pledging their allegiance! The pledge was officially amended again on June 14, 1954, by a joint resolution of Congress approved by President Eisenhower, to read "one nation under God." But no matter how it has changed over the years, the Pledge has remained a time-honored salute to the American flag, one of our most cherished national symbols.

The American Flag



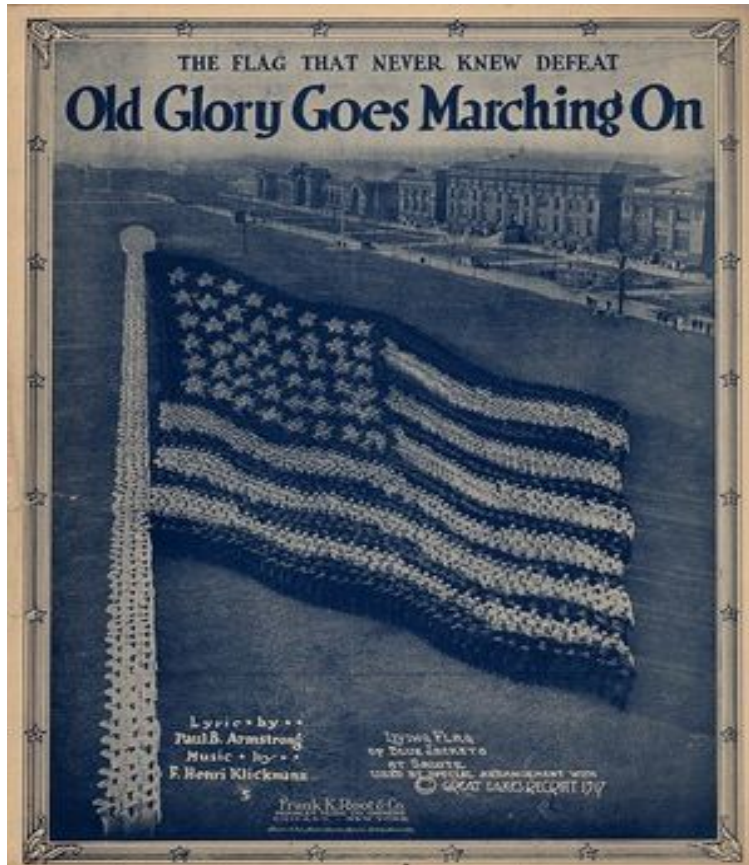


The stripes on the flag

The red and white stripes represent each of the original 13 colonies. The first "Stars and Stripes" had 13 stars and 13 stripes.

The U.S. Congress declared on June 14, 1777: "The flag of the United States will be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white [and] . . . the union [canton] be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

The colors of the flag



The only specific reference to the three colors comes from a report by the Secretary of the Continental Congress, Charles Thomson.

Mr. Thomson said: "White signifies purity and innocence; Red, hardiness and valour; and Blue, vigilance, perseverance and justice."

Other American writers have suggested that red stands for blood shed fighting for our country, white symbolizes loyalty, and blue, the unity of our citizens bound together as one nation. The colors also echo the colors of the British flag, and the original drafts of the flag included the Union Jack in place of the section now containing the stars.

The stars on the flag

The number of stars on the flag has always represented the number of states in the Union.

The original flag had 13 stars—one for each of the 13 original colonies (Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina and Rhode Island). It then rose to 15 when Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) were added; 20 with the admission of Tennessee (1796), Ohio (1803), Louisiana (1812), Indiana (1816) and Mississippi (1817); and 21 with Illinois (1818). In 1818, Congress passed The Flag Act, which stipulates that the flag will always have 13 stripes, and that stars will be added for new states each July 4 only. From that point on, the flag changed frequently:

Number of Stars State and Year Admitted to Union

23	Alabama (1819) and Maine (1820)
24	Missouri (1821)
25	Arkansas (1836)
26	Michigan (1837)
28	Florida and Texas (both 1845)
29	Iowa (1846)
30	Wisconsin (1848)
31	California (1850)
32	Minnesota (1858)
33	Oregon (1859)
34	Kansas (1861)
35	West Virginia (1863)
36	Nevada (1864)
37	Nebraska (1867)
38	Colorado (1876)
43	North Dakota (1889), South Dakota (1889), Montana (1889), Washington, (1889) and Idaho (1890)
44	Wyoming (1890)
45	Utah (1896)
46	Oklahoma (1907)
48	New Mexico and Arizona (both 1912)
50	Alaska and Hawaii (both 1959)



Flag talk

- The flag may be alternately called
- a "**jack**" (also a reference to naval flags),
 - an "**ensign**" (used by sailors referring to the flag on their ship),
 - "**standard**" (used by a military officer or soldier; a person carrying the flag is called a standard bearer);
 - and "**colors**" (a man or woman asked to serve in the military is "called to the colors" and the "colors are raised" each morning).

Nicknames for the American flag are "**Old Glory**," the "**Stars and Stripes**," and the "**Star-Spangled Banner**."

Vexilology is the study of the history of flags. A person engaged in this pursuit is called a vexilologist.

Flag dates

July 4, 1776: The Declaration of Independence is signed. A new flag with stars and stripes is designed.

June 14, 1777: Congress passes a law making the Stars and Stripes America's official flag.

Sept. 13, 1814: Francis Scott Key writes "The Star-Spangled Banner" after the British attack on Fort Mchenry in Baltimore, Maryland.

1818: Congress passes the Flag Act, which declares that the American flag will always have 13 stripes. Stars will be added to the canton to reflect new states only on July 4.

1892: Francis Bellamy writes the Pledge of Allegiance.

1916: President Woodrow Wilson proclaims June 14 as (unofficial) Flag Day.

1942: Congress passes the Flag Code, which lists the rules and proper etiquette for handling the American flag.

Aug. 3, 1949: President Harry Truman signs congressional legislation making June 14 National Flag Day.

The legend of Betsy Ross

(1752-1836)

Betsy Ross (January 1, 1752 – January 30, 1836) is widely credited with making the first American flag. There is, however, no credible historical evidence that the story is true.

Research conducted by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History notes that the story of Betsy Ross making the first American flag for General George Washington entered into American consciousness about the time of the 1876 centennial celebrations. In 1870 Ross's grandson, William J. Canby, presented a paper to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in which he claimed that his grandmother had "*made with her hands the first flag*" of the United States. Canby said he first obtained this information from his aunt Clarissa Sydney (Claypoole) Wilson in 1857, twenty years after Betsy Ross's death. Canby dates the historic episode based on Washington's journey to Philadelphia, in late Spring 1776, a year before Congress passed the Flag Act.

In the 2008 book *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Making of an American Icon*, Smithsonian experts point out that Canby's recounting of the event appealed to Americans eager for stories about the revolution and its heroes and heroines. Betsy Ross was promoted as a patriotic role model for young girls and a symbol of women's contributions to American history.



This line of enquiry is further explored by award-winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in a 2007 article "How Betsy Ross Became Famous: Oral Tradition, Nationalism, and the Invention of History." Ross biographer Marla Miller points out, however, that even if one accepts Canby's presentation, Betsy Ross was merely one of several flag makers in Philadelphia, and her only contribution to the design was to change the 6-pointed stars to the easier 5-pointed stars.

The Star-Spangled Banner



O! say can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last
gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the
perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly
streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still
there;
O! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream:
'Tis the star-spangled banner, O! long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country, should leave us no more?
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps'
pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

O! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation.
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n rescued
land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a
nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust;"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

Interesting Images

- **Flag House
Kent, CT 2003**

The idea to paint his house as a flag came to Kevin Sabia in a dream. He is in the photo wearing a flag shirt. Several WTC memorial and Ground Zero reconstruction proposals included large buildings with American flags on them. While those who associate the use of monumental flags with 20th century Fascism and Nazism may find these flag buildings troubling, and others simply find them to be tasteless – Sabia's neighbors did, one can also see these flag buildings as the natural outcome of the common use of facades for corporate advertising. It seems to me that what we get when we dress a private home with the American flag is the icon par excellence of the American Dream.



- Photographs © Jonathan Hyman
Jonathan Hyman Photography Collection



**Firefighter Chan Rivera
with Towers Tie
Grahamsville, NY 2006**

Standing there proudly and shot heroically from below, Chan Rivera would not be recognized as a firefighter by his outfit. If we met him on the street in his white shirt and tie showing the flag and the Twin Towers, we may think he is a patriotic salesman, local politician, or some kind of religious leader. Those who have followed the evolution of post-9/11 iconography will not be surprised by the confluence of these figures.

**Flag, Eagle, Towers:
Levittown Mural
Levittown, NY 2002**

An icon of its own time, the modular and stripped down town of Levittown serves as backdrop for this highly distilled and powerfully abstracted image of three key 9/11 memorial elements: the heroes – represented by police and firemen and often standing as placeholders for the Twin Towers themselves, the flag, and the eagle.



