

Important Symbols in Our Lives

A symbol is something that represents an idea that is important and familiar to us. For example, a nation's flag is a symbol of a country. When you see it, you may think of the ideas and values that are important to the people in that nation.

What are some symbols that represent the United States? Where have you seen these symbols? What do you think of when you see them?

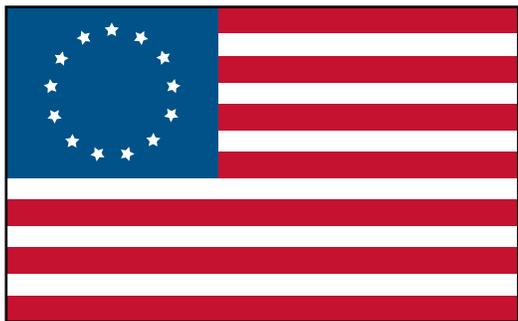
Talk with your classmates about U.S. symbols and make a list of those symbols together. For each symbol, discuss where you have seen it and what you think of when you see it. Write your answers in the boxes. Then discuss your ideas with your classmates.

Symbol that represents the United States	Where have you seen this symbol?	What do you think of when you see this symbol?

The American Flag

The first American flag became official in 1777. The first flag had 13 stripes and stars to represent the 13 original states. Those states were colonies before the colonists declared independence from Great Britain in 1776. The colonists fought the British because they wanted self-government and freedom to make their own decisions.

Over the years, our flag has changed depending on the number of states in the country. There have been various versions of the flag. Today our flag has 13 red and white stripes to represent the 13 colonies. The 50 stars on the flag represent the 50 states. Every year on June 14, we recognize the American flag on Flag Day.



The first official flag of the United States from 1777.



The U.S. flag today.

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Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. Why does the flag have 13 stripes? _____
2. Why does the flag have 50 stars? _____



Discuss these questions with your class.

- What do you think of when you see the American flag?
- Where do you usually see the flag?
- What are different ways that the flag is used?

Pledge of Allegiance

When Americans say the Pledge of Allegiance, they are promising loyalty to the flag and the United States. It is a tradition for American citizens to stand, face the flag, and put their right hand over their heart while they say the Pledge of Allegiance. Children say the pledge every morning in most public schools.

There are many important ceremonies where we display the American flag and say the Pledge

of Allegiance. For example, at a naturalization ceremony, new citizens say it to show loyalty to their new country.

The original Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy. Say the pledge with your classmates.

***I pledge allegiance to the Flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands,
one Nation under God, indivisible,
with liberty and justice for all.***



*A young boy pledging allegiance at a naturalization ceremony in 1962.
Courtesy of the USCIS Historical Library.*

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Answer this Civics Test question.

1. What do we show loyalty to when we say the Pledge of Allegiance? _____



Discuss these questions with your class.

- In your native country, do people say a pledge to their flag?
- Do you know the Pledge of Allegiance by heart?

Our National Anthem

The words in our national anthem are about the American flag. The name of the national anthem is “The Star-Spangled Banner.” This title means that the flag is covered in stars. In this song, “banner” is another word for flag.

“The Star-Spangled Banner” was written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key. He witnessed a battle in the War of 1812 when the United States was at war with Great Britain. On the morning after the battle, Key saw that the American flag was still flying. Then he was sure that the Americans had won the battle. That experience inspired him to write “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Today we sing the national anthem at important events and ceremonies.



In “The Star-Spangled Banner,” by Percy Moran, Francis Scott Key points at the flag flying over Fort M’Henry. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-6200.

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Answer this Civics Test question.

1. What is the name of the national anthem? _____



For more information on The Star-Spangled Banner and Francis Scott Key, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/star-spangled-banner>.

The Statue of Liberty

The Statue of Liberty is on Liberty Island in the Hudson River, between New York and New Jersey. It is one of the most well-known symbols of American freedom. The statue was a gift from France in 1886 to recognize the friendship between France and America. The Americans built the base (or pedestal) and the French built the statue. The statue and the pedestal together are about as tall as a 22-story building.

The Statue of Liberty has several symbolic features. The woman, Liberty, is holding a tablet or book. On the tablet is the date July 4, 1776, written in Roman numerals. On this date, the Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. The seven spikes on the statue's crown symbolize the seven continents and oceans of the world.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, millions of immigrants saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time when they arrived by boat from Europe. At that time, most of these immigrants had to go through Ellis Island near the Statue of Liberty to process their papers. People began to feel that the

statue was a symbol of hope for their future in a new country. Today, the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and democracy for Americans and many people around the world.



*Ellis Island.
Courtesy of the USCIS
Historical Library.*



*An immigrant family looking at the Statue of Liberty from a ship
in New York Harbor.
Courtesy of the USCIS Historical Library.*

Answer this Civics Test question.

1. Where is the Statue of Liberty? _____



For more information on the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, visit www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm and www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm.

National U.S. Holidays

There are 10 national U.S. holidays. Most local, state, and federal government buildings are closed on these federal holidays. Public schools and banks are generally closed too. These holidays honor important events or people in U.S. history. For example, we commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence on the Fourth of July. This date is also called Independence Day. Many people celebrate this holiday by marching in parades, having a picnic, and watching fireworks.



Independence Day fireworks in Washington, DC.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-highsm-04694.

Look at the list of national U.S. holidays below. Which person or event do Americans commemorate when we celebrate these holidays?

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| New Year's Day _____ | Labor Day _____ |
| Martin Luther King, Jr. Day _____ | Columbus Day _____ |
| Presidents' Day _____ | Veterans Day _____ |
| Memorial Day _____ | Thanksgiving _____ |
| Independence Day _____ | Christmas _____ |



Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. When do we celebrate Independence Day? _____
2. Name two national U.S. holidays. _____



Discuss these questions with your class.

What is your favorite holiday and why? How do you celebrate it?

Does your native country have holidays that are similar to Thanksgiving or Independence Day?

Civics Test Questions—American Symbols and Celebrations

Read the test questions and write the answers. Take turns practicing them with your partner.

1. What do we show loyalty to when we say the Pledge of Allegiance? _____
2. Where is the Statue of Liberty? _____
3. Why does the flag have 13 stripes? _____
4. Why does the flag have 50 stars? _____
5. What is the name of the national anthem? _____
6. When do we celebrate Independence Day? _____
7. Name two national U.S. holidays. _____