AMERICAN CIVIC HOLIDAY RESOURCES

FLAG DAY
JUNE 14, 2024

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Flag Day is celebrated on June 14th and commemorates the adoption of our flag by the Second Continental Congress on June 14th, 1777. President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed June 14th as Flag Day in 1916, and Congress declared June 14th as National Flag Day in 1949, which was signed into law by President Harry Truman. Flag Day is an opportune time to reflect on our national symbol, the American flag, and its resonance in the civic educational landscape and key questions:

- How can our flag express pride and love of country?
- How can it unite us as fellow citizens?
- How has the flag been interpreted by some as an expression of patriotism and others as nationalistic and exclusionary?

Learning more about these ideas is a sure-fire way to deepen one's understanding of the role that national symbols, such as the American flag, play in expanding discourse and dialogue around themes such as national identity, civic belonging, and the history that our flag represents in its majesty and meaning. The accompanying resources will offer various anchors for learning about the flag and addressing some of its history and complexity. We invite your students to reflect on these ideas and to lean to their opportunities for celebration and introspection.

Source 1: Murphy, Thomas. & Moran, Percy (1917) The Birth of Old Glory, Pennsylvania Philadelphia, 1917. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

According to legend, in 1776, George Washington commissioned Philadelphia seamstress Betsy Ross to create a flag for the new nation. Scholars, however, credit the flag's design to Francis Hopkinson, who also designed the Great Seal and the first coin of the United States. Even so, Ross most likely met Washington and certainly sewed early American flags in her family's Philadelphia upholstery shop. To date, there have been twenty-seven official versions of the flag, but the arrangement of the stars varied according to the flag-makers' preferences until 1912, when President Taft standardized the then-new flag's forty-eight stars into six rows of eight. The forty-nine-star flag (1959-60), as well as the fifty-star flag, also have standardized star patterns. The current version of the flag dates to July 4, 1960, after Hawaii became the fiftieth state on August 21, 1959 (Library of Congress).

Questions for Discussion:

1. The painting is titled “The Birth of Old Glory” and is named after an American sea captain, William Driver, who coined the phrase for the American flag he flew while at sea. Do you think this nickname is an apt title for the American flag? Why or why not? Can you think of another suitable name to reference the flag? Why did you select this title?
2. What about the history of the flag’s evolution can serve as a metaphor for American progress in creating “A More Perfect Union”?
3. How does this painting highlight the concept of Republican Motherhood, that women played a significant role in cultivating civic virtue and values to the next generation?
4. This painting incorporates a cross-section of American society. How so? Why do you think this adds meaning to what it represents?
5. Abraham Lincoln references the language of birth, similar to the title of this painting, in his iconic Gettysburg Address: “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” In considering how the Civil War offered a “New Birth of Freedom” for America, how does the title of this painting assume a timeless value for our nation over the course of our storied history?

Source 2: Schnauber, Howard 1994. I Am the Flag. Fort Collins Public Library Local History Archive, Oral History.

Howard Schnauber is the author of the patriotic poem "My Name is Old Glory," later renamed "I Am The Flag," and a World War II and Korean War veteran who received four Purple Hearts.

My name is Old Glory.
I fly atop the world's tallest buildings.
I stand watch in America's halls of justice.
I fly majestically over institutions of learning.
I stand guard with power in the world.
Look up and see me.

I stand for peace, honor, truth, and justice.
I stand for freedom. I am confident.
I am arrogant. I am proud.
When I am flown with my fellow banners,
My head is a little higher,
My colors a little truer.
I bow to no one!
I am recognized all over the world.
I am worshipped - I am saluted.
I am loved - I am revered.
I am respected - I am feared.

I have fought in every battle of every war for more than 200 years.
I was flown at Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Shiloh and Appamatox.
I was there at San Juan Hill, the trenches of France, in the Argonne Forest, Anzio, Rome and the beaches of Normandy.
Guam, Okinawa, Korea and KheSan, Saigon, Vietnam know me.
I was there. I led my troops.
I was dirty, battleworn and tired,
but my soldiers cheered me and I was proud.

I have been burned, torn and trampled on the streets of countries
I have helped set free. It does not hurt for I am invincible.
I have been soiled upon, burned, torn and trampled in the streets of my country.
And when it's done by those whom I've served in battle - it hurts.
But I shall overcome - for I am strong.
I have slipped the bonds of earth and
stood watch over the uncharted frontiers of space from my vantage point on the moon.
I have born silent witness to all of America's finest hours.
But my finest hours are yet to come.
When I am torn into strips and used as bandages for my wounded comrades on the battlefield,
when I am flown at halfmast to honor my soldier,
or when I lie in the trembling arms of a grieving parent at the grave of their fallen son or daughter,

I am proud.
I am the flag of the United States of America.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What aspects of the poem best capture the essence of the flag's symbolism and history?
2. What do you think the author meant when he wrote about the flag, "I am confident. I am arrogant. I am proud"? When can the flag embody these varying qualities?
3. Which additional attributes would add to the ones that the author shared, "I stand for peace, honor, truth and justice. I stand for freedom."? Which virtues does the flag exude in your view?
4. After sharing the many national historic milestones that the flag has endured, the author writes, "I have born silent witness to all of America's finest hours. But my finest hours are yet to come." Do you agree with the assertion that America's finest hours are ahead? How do you think that this generation can help pave the way for this bright future?

Source 3: Wilson, Woodrow. (June 14, 1917) Address on Flag Day. Excerpts.

My Fellow Citizens:
We meet to celebrate Flag Day because this flag which we honor and under which we serve is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than that which we give it from generation to generation. The choices are ours. It floats in majestic silence above the hosts that execute those choices, whether in peace or in war. And yet, though silent, it speaks to us. —speaks to us of the past, * of the men and women who went before us and of the records they wrote upon it. We celebrate the day of its birth; and from its birth until now it has witnessed a great history, has floated on high the symbol of great, events, of a great plan of life worked out by a great people. We are about to carry it into battle, to lift it where it will draw the fire of our enemies. We are about to bid thousands, hundreds of thousands, it may be millions, of our men. the young, the strong, the capable men of the nation, to go forth and die beneath it on fields of blood far away, —for what? For some unaccustomed thing? For something for which it has never sought the fire before? American armies were never before sent across the seas. Why are they sent now? For some new purpose, for which this great flag has never been carried before, or for some old, familiar, heroic purpose for which it has seen men, its own men, die on every battlefield upon which Americans have borne arms since the Revolution?

These are questions which must be answered. We are Americans. We in our turn serve America, and can serve her with no private purpose. We must use her flag as she has always used it. We are accountable at the bar of history and must plead in utter frankness what purpose it is we seek to serve.

For us there is but one choice. We have made it. Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way in this day of high resolution when every principle we hold dearest is to be vindicated and made secure for the salvation of the nations. We are ready to plead at the bar of history, and our flag shall wear a new luster. Once more we shall make good with our lives and fortunes the great faith to which we were born, and a new glory shall shine in the face of our people.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How do you think the historical context played a role in President Wilson establishing Flag Day in 1917? Where in the text above can this be inferred?
2. How does President Wilson speak to a sense of civic obligation to one's country? Can you select a line or two from the text above that best captures this idea?
3. How does the flag connect us as a nation across time and place?
4. What do you think President Wilson meant when he said, "We are ready to plead at the bar of history, and our flag shall wear a new luster?" How do you envision that our flag can assume a new luster in 2024?