

Unlocking Symbolism and Meaning in Civil War Flags

GRADES: 3-5

LESSON DURATION: 1.5 SESSIONS

LESSON INTRODUCTION:

Civil War flags were the most recognizable symbols of the ideals for which each side fought. Often, women hand-stitched banners and presented them to the men going off to war. Regiments carried flags and banners into battle as a representation of who they were and what they believed in.

In this lesson, your students will ponder why a flag was so much more than simply colored cloth on a pole. They will learn what symbolism means, analyze the symbols in Civil War-era flags, evaluate the sacrifices people made for these symbols, and create their own flags with their own symbols on it.



GOAL: To consider the meaning and importance of flags and symbols during the Civil War and in our lives today.

OBJECTIVES:

The student will comprehend the meaning of symbolism by picking out symbols in their lives.

TSW identify symbols on a Civil War flag and analyze their meaning.

TSW evaluate the importance of flags as symbols and create their own flag.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS:

3rd Grade

3.1.tpi.5. Create an original piece of work that represents a specific culture, reflecting how different cultures use symbols to communicate with each other.

5th Grade

5.4.04 Recognize how Americans incorporate the principles of the Constitution into their lives.

c. Explain selected patriotic symbols and landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, the White House, and political symbols such as the donkey and the elephant.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Red, white, blue, or other colored felt
- Wooden dowels
- Gold/Silver star stickers
- Scissors, glue

HOOK/SET:

1.) Ask the students to take out a sheet of paper and number it to five leaving space between each number. Then have them write down five things that are important to them. It can be anything: God, family, freedom, school, friends, pets, nature, etc. Next have them draw a brief picture in the space below each word.

2.) Have students share with the class the things they listed. What pictures or symbols did they draw for each word? Hold a discussion on symbolism. Define the word at dictionary.com. Express that the pictures are symbols of the things that are important to them.

PROCEDURES:

3.) Examine three flags on the [civilwarshades.org](http://www.civilwarshades.org) web site. Discuss ways that they are similar. Have students relate what symbols they see on these maps. Then write them on the board. Symbols your student should notice include: white stars, blue background, red stripes, white stripes, eagle, words. Students should then guess which flags are Confederate and which are the Union flags.

<http://www.civilwarshades.org/the-flag-of-the-south/>

<http://www.civilwarshades.org/abel-streight-brigade-banner/>

<http://www.civilwarshades.org/u-s-flag-given-to-susan-brownlow/>

4.) Have students conduct web research to determine what the symbols mean.

5.) Use this link to learn about the symbols of the flags.

<http://www.wtv-zone.com/civilwar/flags.html>

<http://www.visit-gettysburg.com/flags-of-the-civil-war.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/flags/civilwar.htm>

6.) How are the Confederate flags and Union flags alike? Do they have similar meanings? Express that this indicates the similarities between these two American armies and that they both believed in many similar ideals.

6.) Evaluate the importance of flags during the Civil War. Students should read the introduction on the *Capturing the Flag* theme page of the web site.

Then split the class into two groups. Have one group read about Antoinette Polk's flag and the other read about Susan Brownlow's flag.

Antoinette Polk

<http://www.civilwarshades.org/capturing-the-flag/antoinette-polk/>

Susan Brownlow

<http://www.civilwarshades.org/capturing-the-flag/susan-brownlow/>

7.) Lead a discussion about what the students have read. Who were these young women? Why did the flags become such precious symbols to them? Both are Union flags but are they both Union sympathizers? Why or why not? Explain that not only do flags have symbols on them but they also are symbols by themselves. For Antoinette, the banner was a symbol of her bravery during the War. For Susan, the flag was a symbol of her courage and determination to stay with the Union.

8.) Now that they have learned about symbolism and what the flags meant as symbols to civilians during the war, have your students consider the list of symbols they created at the beginning of the lesson. Are there any symbols they want to change, add, or take off their list?

9.) Give the students a couple of minutes to re-evaluate their symbols.

10.) Now explain that they are going to make their own flag. This flag symbolizes their own experiences in life and what is important to them. Have them think about the symbols and what they could use to put on their flag that symbolizes the things that are important. For family, they could use a picture of their family. For sports, they could use a logo or sticker. Etc.

11.) For homework have the students collect these symbols and bring them back to school. Be sure to have fabric on hand to create their flag and the symbols.

12.) For a flag making template, visit this web site. http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-54463_19268_20778-51826--,00.html

13.) Once completed, have your students display their personal flags in a classroom exhibit.

SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT:

Use a rubric to determine how well students participated in the flag making activity. In order to evaluate their use of personal symbols on their flags, ask the other students if there are any symbols that they don't recognize—have individual flag makers discuss those meanings or choice of symbols. Determine how well each student understands symbols and their meaning to society.

Have students write a story about themselves and their flag similar to the stories of Antoinette Polk and Susan Brownlow.