



The History of Flag Day

Author: National Constitution Center

About this Lesson

This lesson highlights one of the Center's biggest civic holidays – the birthday of the American flag. Using the video, “The History of the U.S. Flag”, hosted by Terry Ruggles and produced by Drexel University and the Philadelphia Flag Day Association, this lesson encourages students to take a closer look at the American flag and its meaning.

Activity

Have students discuss the history of the flag in small groups. What do they already know? What do the colors and the shapes symbolize?

Have them watch the online film, “The History of the U.S. Flag”, on the Center’s website, then discuss the following questions.

1. What new things did you learn?
2. Who do you think designed the first flag? Is this debatable or just a short answer? Why was Flag Day created?
3. Why do we remember Flag Day? We don’t get a day off for it, so what is the importance of the day? In what ways is Flag Day still relevant, if at all?
4. There are lots of rules surrounding the flag. We don’t let it touch the ground, we retire old flags through dignified burning, and we salute the flag as it is hoisted and lowered. Additionally, the American flag should always be higher than other flags on the same pole, and it should be in the center position in a panoply. We honor tragedies and death by putting the flag at half-mast. Why do we honor these rules? Why is a scrap of cloth with a certain pattern on it that we call a flag so important? Do symbols matter? What is a symbol? Think about something in your life that you say, do, think, or own that symbolizes something important.
5. Is it legal to burn the American flag as a sign of protest? (In *Texas v. Johnson*, 1989, the Supreme Court ruled that it is legal to burn the American flag as a sign of protest. It is protected as free speech under the First Amendment). Discuss this in groups. Would you be offended if someone burned the American flag? Do you think burning the American flag counts as free speech? There have been attempts to pass amendments to ban the burning of American flags, but they all have failed. Would you have voted for or against such an amendment? Are there other national symbols that should be protected from destruction? (Liberty Bell, Washington Monument, Presidential Seal) What other thoughts do you have about this?
6. After the discussion, write a reflection about what you think the flag means for the country and what you think about flag burning and why.