

We the People

Native Americans and the Flag

OVERVIEW

Theme Introduction

In this unit, our theme is “We the People.” Who is an American? And who gets to decide? How have our rights and privileges changed over time, and have some Americans historically had more rights than others? We’ll explore these questions and more.

Blog Post

[Native Americans and the Flag](#) with Bob Genheimer, George Rieveschl Curator of Archaeology at Cincinnati Museum Center

Guiding Questions

As students read the blog post, invite them to consider the following questions:

- In what ways is a nation’s flag a powerful symbol? How can it mean different things to different groups of people?
- What are some reasons Native American groups may have worn or displayed the American flag symbol, despite a history of conflict with the nation’s founders?
- How did American symbols appear in Native American artwork? What were they made of, and how did they appear?
- What primarily caused conflict between white settlers and Native Americans during the late 1700s?

Key Vocabulary

- **Patriotism:** Support of one’s nation.
- **Solidarity:** Unity or agreement of feeling or action.
- **Resistance:** Opposing and challenging authority, control or tradition.
- **Symbolism:** The use of symbols to represent ideas.



Fringed bag with handle, Ojibwe, ca. 1880-1890, Cincinnati Museum Center

ACTIVITIES

Beadwork Artistry

Recommended for grades 4-8

The blog post highlighted the United States flag in Native American beadwork from the late 1800s. In this activity, students will practice using the grid-like structure of beadwork to create recognizable symbols.

Ask students to study the flag images on the clothing and accessory examples in the blog post. Invite them to compare the beadwork images to images of the U.S. flag at that time (see below). Ask them to discuss their observations:

- Are any of the beadwork flags completely accurate representations of our flag at that time? (Hint: How many stripes and stars did the U.S. flag include when each artwork was created?)
- If the beadwork isn't 100% accurate to the flag at that time, how do we still recognize it as a U.S. flag?
- How does beadwork help or hinder creating the U.S. flag in full detail?

Distribute a sheet of graph paper to each student. Describe how graph paper is similar to beadwork in that it uses vertical and horizontal rows. Ask each student to choose a well-known symbol or logo (see links below for inspiration) that they could recreate in the style of beadwork by shading squares of graph paper that represent beads. Set the limitation that each square must include only one color (i.e. no diagonal lines). Once students have completed their designs, invite them to share their "beadwork" image with the class and ask others to identify the logo or symbol they represent. Then discuss how easy or challenging it was to represent a symbol in this format.

Links:

- Flag timeline: <https://www.ushistory.org/betsy/flagfact.html>
- Sites for logo ideas:
 - General logos:
 - <https://www.graphicdesignaire.ie/graphic-design-blog/top-101-most-famous-logos-of-all-time-ranked>
 - https://www.vistaprint.com/hub/worlds-most-famous-logos?srsltid=AfmBOor8KHG62xAV4B6BRjCZ-biQNws7UygUKXt4J08CSE74xZW5ao_U
 - Sports logos: <https://www.creativebloq.com/news/best-sports-logos-all-time>
 - Social media logos: <https://webdesignerdepot.com/16-social-media-logos-that-standout-from-the-crowd/>
 - Superhero logos: <https://www.tailorbrands.com/blog/superhero-logos>
 - Road symbols: https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/services/pulications/fhwaop02084/us_road_symbol_signs.pdf

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Signs for Sale

Recommended for grades 5-9

The blog post mentions several reasons that Native American groups beaded the American flag symbol into clothing, bags and other products. One reason is that artists hoped to make these items appealing to non-Native buyers. In this activity, students will experiment with symbolism to appeal to group identity.

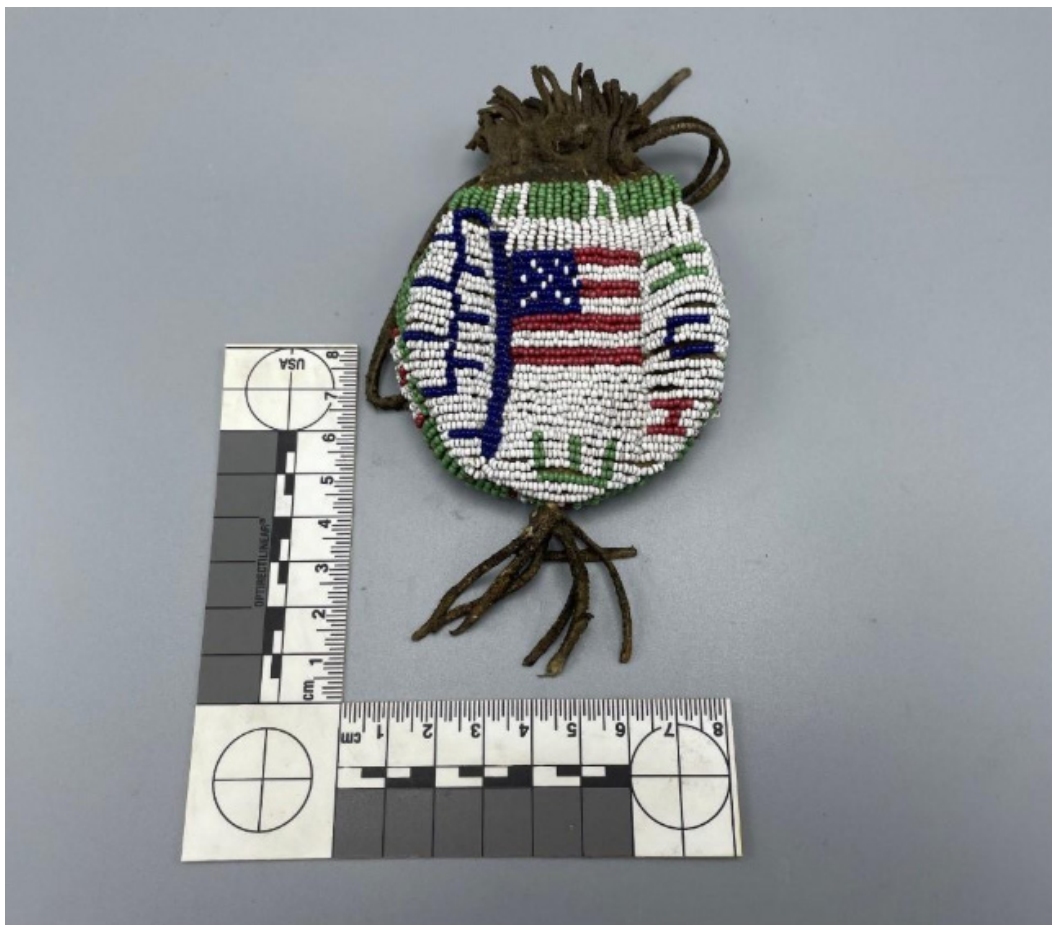
Ask students why flags are powerful symbols. Consider national flags or even flags for sports teams. Use any of the following prompts:

- What purposes do flags serve? When and where do we display them?
- What do flags represent?
- What feelings do flags arouse? Do those feelings change depending on whether you are a member of the group they represent?

Remind students that flag symbolism can appeal to consumers' feelings of patriotism. Students can practice this technique by designing and marketing an item for a group of people from a different school culture.

Split students into small groups. Ask them to imagine that they are entrepreneurs who want to make a profit by selling signs for another school to display at a sporting event. Invite each group to choose a rival school and consider symbols that would create feelings of solidarity and pride for that group. Ask each group to design three signs to market at the sporting event. Invite students to present their signs to the class, answering the following questions:

- What messages or images did you include on your signs?
- How do those symbols or slogans connect to the other school's sense of identity?
- Do you think the signs with specific symbolism would sell better than generic signs?



Fringed and beaded pouch, Lakota, ca. 1895, Cincinnati Museum Center

Flag Symbolism

Recommended for grades 6-10

The blog post mentions that for many individuals, the American flag evokes a strong sense of patriotism and identity. For others, its symbolism may be more complicated. In this activity, students will review reasons that Native American groups used flag imagery before considering current uses and meaning.

Remembering the blog post, review some of the reasons Native Americans displayed the American flag in the 1800s. Use the prompts below:

- In the early days of our nation, do you think the U.S. flag evoked feelings of shared identity, patriotism and solidarity for all Americans? Why or why not?
- What are some ways and reasons that Native Americans used the flag – and other American symbols – throughout the 1800s?
- Do you think that the meaning of the flag has changed over time for groups of people who struggled to achieve the full suite of American rights?

Invite students to consider and share places or times in their lives that they display the American flag or see others displaying the flag. At home? On clothing or items that they own? At events? At buildings? Potential follow-up questions include:

- What is the purpose of the flag's display in these places or times? What is it meant to represent or inspire?
- Why do you display the flag? What does it mean to you, personally? What feelings does it evoke?

Review that at the conclusion of the blog post, the author refers to the United States flag as a “powerful symbol – of identity, of resistance and of belonging.” That phrase includes three possible words to describe the meaning of the flag symbol to individuals or groups. Ask students to reflect on the discussion so far and to decide on three words that they would use to describe what the American flag means to them. Ask students to write a brief reflection on how those words represent what the American flag symbolizes for them. Allow them to share their reflections if desired.



Boy's rawhide vest, Lakota, ca. 1895, Cincinnati Museum Center



STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

- **OH History 4.3:** Various groups of people have lived in Ohio over time including American Indians, migrating settlers and immigrants. Interactions among these groups have resulted in cooperation, conflict and compromise.
- **OH Economics 6.13:** The fundamental questions of economics include what to produce, how to produce and for whom to produce.
- **KY 5.G.HI.2:** Analyze how and why cultural characteristics diffuse and blend with migration and settlement.
- **KY 8.H.CH.1:** Explain the role changing political, social and economic perspectives had on the lives of diverse groups of people in the Colonial Era.
- **KY HS.UH.CH.1:** Examine the ways diverse groups viewed themselves and contributed to the identity of the United States in the world from 1877-present.