

Symbols of American patriotism

Pre-reading

1. Vocabulary *Match the synonyms and then underline the words in the text.*

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. to immortalize | a) supposedly, allegedly |
| 2. vigilance | b) to occur with great violence |
| 3. valor | c) watchfulness, attentiveness |
| 4. purportedly | d) position |
| 5. to rage | e) to memorialize, commemorate |
| 6. tattered | f) courage, bravery |
| 7. stance | g) trouble, danger |
| 8. distress | h) torn |

2. Vocabulary *Match the English to the German. Then underline the words in the text.*

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. no other than | a) behaupten |
| 2. at some point | b) völlig unbrauchbar |
| 3. to make a claim | c) sich ins Zeug legen |
| 4. role model | d) kein anderer als |
| 5. turning point | e) Wendepunkt |
| 6. beyond repair | f) sich um etwas/jmd. scharen |
| 7. to go all out | g) irgendwann |
| 8. to rally around | h) Vorbild |

3. Writing *Choose three words/phrases from the two exercises above. Write six descriptive example sentences using the words and phrases.*

Now read the texts.

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Part One:

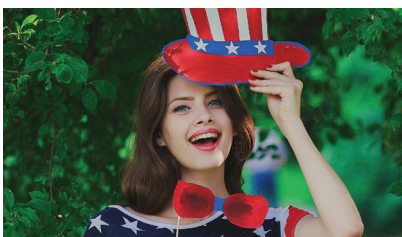
The flag of the United States of America has many nicknames: Old Glory, Star-Spangled Banner, the Stars and Stripes and simply the Red, White and Blue. It's pretty easy to guess where the last two nicknames come from, but what about the others? To understand the flag, its nicknames and its importance, learn a little about the history first.



Many school children in the US learn that the first flag was designed and sewn by one Betsy Ross, a seamstress from Pennsylvania, on order of none other than General George Washington. While this story is appealing to American patriotism, it is most likely not true. Ross was, indeed, a flag maker like many other women at the time of the Revolutionary War (1775–1783). And she did perhaps at some point meet George Washington at church. However, it wasn't until 1870, more than 30 years after her death, that her grandson made the claim that ultimately made her famous. Since then Betsy Ross has been immortalized on a postage stamp and in the name of a bridge in Philadelphia. Despite the uncertainty of the legend, she is considered a patriotic role model and exemplary for women's contributions to American history.

In any case, the US flag contains several symbols. The first is the blue field in the upper left corner. It is said to stand for vigilance, perseverance and justice. Another interpretation is that it is the blue of heaven and represents loyalty and faith. Originally on the blue field there were 13 white stars representing the 13 colonies which existed in 1777, the year in which the flag was adopted by the Continental Congress. The stars symbolized a new constellation, a new nation. As more states joined the Union, stars were added.

Today there are 50 stars for the 50 states. The last two stars were added in 1959, representing Alaska and Hawaii. There are 13 alternating red and white stripes. For practical reasons the top and bottom stripes are red – the darker color doesn't show the dirt as much. The number of stripes represents the original 13 colonies. The color white stands for purity and innocence and red for hardiness and valor. Another interpretation on the choice of colors is that these are the same colors as the Union Jack of England. In fact, when the US flag was first adopted, the colors were given no official meaning.



This is the wrong way to celebrate the flag.



This is the proper way to fold the flag.

4 Research Find out what the colours and shapes on other national flags mean. Or what about the Olympic flag with its five rings?

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Part Two:

The nickname “Old Glory” purportedly comes from the sea captain William Driver, who gave the flag on his ship this name. The same flag played a role in the Civil War. Driver lived in Tennessee, a Confederate state, and had to keep his flag hidden during the war. When the Union Army entered Tennessee, Driver took his Old Glory to the state capitol where it was flown to symbolize the defeat of the Confederates.

The nickname “star-spangled banner” comes from a poem written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key. The United States was once again at war with Great Britain. The War of 1812, which was fought – among other reasons – because the US felt Britain was interfering in its international trade, lasted for 2½ years. Near the end of the war there was a battle near Baltimore, Maryland, which marked a turning point and the eventual victory for the United States. The battle raged through the night and in the morning as the British troops were retreating, Francis Scott Key witnessed the flag tattered but still flying. This inspired him to write what would become the official national anthem of the United States 117 years later – “The Star-Spangled Banner”. The first verse is sung at military events, the beginning of every public sporting event, orchestral concerts and in many other situations. It is tradition to stand up, take off your hat and put your right hand on your heart while singing.

5 Discussion *What do you think – should people be required to stand, put their hand on their heart and sing along when the national anthem is played?*

6 Listening *There are two other songs which are considered “unofficial” national anthems – “My Country ’Tis of Thee” and “America the Beautiful”. Listen to these two songs and “The Star-Spangled Banner”. Why is each song suitable to be the national anthem? Which one would you choose?*

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Part Three:



Since the American flag is such a strong patriotic symbol, it is taken very seriously. This means there are not only traditions but also rules and regulations surrounding the flag.

One tradition that a lot of people from outside the US have heard about is the Pledge of Allegiance. This is a salute, oath or promise that is spoken in front of the flag, usually in the same stance as when singing the national anthem. It is often recited by school classes in the morning

before lessons begin. The pledge has an interesting history. The man who originally wrote it, Francis Julius Bellamy, sold American flags to public schools in connection with subscriptions to a youth magazine. To increase sales and to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the so-called New World, he designed a patriotic program for schools and the pledge was part of it. It underwent changes over the years and today it reads like this:

*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.*

The most important rule regarding the flag is to treat it with respect. Flying it upside down is a sign of disrespect and should only be done as a distress signal. Burning a flag at a political demonstration is definitely disrespectful; however, there are times when the Stars and Stripes are purposely burned. If a flag has done its duty and has reached the end of the road, i.e. is dirty or torn beyond repair and not fit to serve as a symbol of the United States, a special flag burning ceremony can be held to retire the flag. Here are some other rules to be observed:

- The flag should never touch the ground.
- If the flag of the United States is flown on the same flagpole with other flags, it should be on the top.
- The flag should be raised briskly but lowered slowly and ceremoniously.
- The flag should be taken down before it gets dark unless it will be illuminated.
- There is a special way to fold the flag so that it is a triangle at the end.

7 Research Do you know of any other rules for flags?

8 Research Do you know of other countries with strong traditions surrounding their flag?
What are they?

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Part Four:

As if a national anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance and the flag rules weren't enough, there is also a national Flag Day in the United States. There are different accounts regarding the origin of Flag Day, but its history goes back to the late 1800s. The US Congress made it official in 1949 when it designated June 14 of each year as National Flag Day. This is the day when the flag was adopted by the Continental Congress in 1777.



There are patriotic parades with lots of flag waving on Memorial Day (May 31), Flag Day (June 14) and Independence Day (July 4).

People don't necessarily have a free day from work or school for Flag Day; it depends on where you work and which state you live in. Flag Day is commonly celebrated by flying the Stars and Stripes. Many American homes come equipped with a flagpole in the front yard or a flagpole holder attached to their house. Businesses almost always have a place to fly a flag. City celebrations on this day perhaps include a flag-raising ceremony and a parade is often held. You could look at Flag Day celebrations as a warm-up for Independence Day on July 4 when communities go all out with huge parades, festivities and fireworks displays.

John Hartvigsen, the president of the North American Vexillological Association (vexillology is the study of flags) explains why the flag is so important to Americans. "Our flag has become a symbol above politics. It is the symbol of that which unites us. It's very important for us to find what unites us." He goes on to say that in a way the flag replaces a monarchy. Citizens of Great Britain (of course not all of them), for example, rally around their royal family. Since the United States doesn't have this, the people need a replacement. This became clear after the American Revolution and after the Civil War unity became an even more important issue.

9 Comprehension *Give headings to the four parts of the text.*

10 Discussion *Based on what you've read here, have a discussion about patriotism in the United States. Compare it to patriotism you have experienced in other countries.*

11 Writing *Write your own definition of patriotism.*

Lösungen/Lösungsvorschläge

1 1. e), 2. c), 3. f), 4. a), 5. b), 6. h), 7. d), 8. g)

2 1. d), 2. g), 3. a), 4. h), 5. e), 6. b), 7. c), 8. f)

4 Pierre de Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, designer of the Olympic Rings, explained their meaning like this: "A white background, with five interlaced rings in the centre: blue, yellow, black, green and red ... is symbolic; it represents the five inhabited continents of the world, united by Olympism, while the six colors are those that appear on all the national flags of the world at the present time."

6 "My Country 'Tis of Thee" was written in 1831. It celebrates the landscape, people, patriotism and history of the United States. The last verse is religious in nature, asking for God's continued protection and favor.

"America the Beautiful" was first written as a poem in 1893. It wasn't until the early 1900s that the poem was paired with a melody. This song is preferred by some because it doesn't include any war imagery as in "The Star-Spangled Banner" and it is much easier to sing.

The first verses of both of these "alternative anthems" are most commonly known and sung. Both their melodies are also relatively easy to sing.

7-8 **India:** Khadi or hand-spun cloth is the only material allowed to be used for the flag, and flying a flag made of any other material is punishable by law with imprisonment up to three years, besides a fine.

Saudi Arabia: The flag is never flown at half-mast.

Uruguay: Damaged flags are disposed of by the army.

Australia: If a flag is damaged, it can be "destroyed privately and in a dignified way such as cutting it into small unrecognizable pieces, placing it in an appropriate sealed bag or closed container and then putting it in the normal rubbish collection."

Bangladesh: The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally but always aloft and free. The preferred method of disposal of a damaged flag is burial.

9 Part One – The History of the Flag


Part Two – Nicknames for the Flag

Part Three – How to Treat the Flag Responsibly

Part Four – Celebrating Flag Day

Links


Lyrics "My Country 'Tis of Thee":

<https://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/patriotic/my-country-tis-of-thee/index.htm> 


Lyrics "America the Beautiful":

<https://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/patriotic/america-the-beautiful/index.htm> 

An interesting article entitled "Why Americans Are So Crazy about the Flag":

<https://people.howstuffworks.com/culture-traditions/national-traditions/why-americans-love-display-flag.htm> 

Another viewpoint on the origins of American patriotism:

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/how-progressives-should-celebrate-flag-day_b_7581176.html 

Perhaps your students have heard about the professional football players in the US who refused to stand and instead kneeled for the national anthem before games to protest police brutality and racial inequality. Here's a look at how patriotic symbols can divide instead of unite:

<https://www.amny.com/news/nfl-players-kneeling-during-national-anthem-how-colin-kaepernick-started-a-movement-and-why-1.14287523> 