

Symbols of the Nation

Students will learn what a symbol is and why symbols are used. They will learn symbols of both America and of South Dakota, as well as the significance behind these symbols.

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify a selection of national symbols.
2. Students will be able to explain the meaning of selected national symbols.
3. Students will be able to list and describe state symbols and the meanings behind them.
4. Students will be able to use multiple resources to research and identify state symbols.

Standards:

- K-12.H.2 Students will analyze and evaluate the impact of people, events, ideas and symbols upon history using multiple sources.
- 1.C.1.1 Identify primary symbols of the United States.
- 2.C.1.1 Explain, in written form, through speech, or through the use of technology, the meaning behind our national symbols.
- 3.C.1.1 Research and explain the meaning behind South Dakota's symbols.

Materials:

- "Design Your Own Flag" Worksheet
- Colored pencils/crayons/markers

Step 1: Introduction

Start with the definition of a symbol.

Symbol:

- a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.
- a mark or character used as a conventional representation of an object, function, or process. (Source: Oxford Languages).

Talk about symbols they may have seen on a day-to-day basis (i.e. symbols for sports teams, stores, brands, etc.). Symbols can be literal or abstract.

Literal example: the walking person on the crosswalk sign tells you when it is safe to walk across the road.

Abstract example: A heart shape symbolizes love, and our heart, even though that is not how heart actually looks.

Once you have established what a symbol is, possibly using more examples found in the classroom, you can move on to the topic of symbols of America.

Step 2: Exploration

Begin the discussion by talking about America as a country, and how a country is a collection of all different people united as one. Transition this to a discussion about American symbols. There are many countries in the world, and the symbols that each country picks helps distinguish them from other countries.

You can add others, but the American symbols suggested to focus on are: the U.S. flag, the Statue of Liberty, the bald eagle, the Liberty Bell, Mount Rushmore, and the Pledge of Allegiance. At the end of this document is an index for teachers going in-depth about each symbol; it's history, what it represents; and why it was chosen.

From there you can move on to South Dakota's state symbols. Fun discussion suggestions are why they were chosen, and perhaps have the class vote on what they would've have picked.

Step 3: Activity

Using the "Design Your Own Flag" worksheet, students will create a flag with symbols they think are representative of themselves. Encourage them to think about different symbols, pictures, colors, etc., and to be expressive.

If resources allow, have students look up each element they add to their flag and write down on a separate sheet what it means and why they feel it applies to them. Example: student makes the background blue, blue represents calm, and they feel they are a calm and collected person.

Step 4: Apply

Encourage students to look around and find symbols in their day-to-day life. Have them think about the meaning behind these symbols. Ideally students will recognize how often symbols are used in everyday life. Activity suggestion: have this be a journaling assignment.

Index

History and explanation for each symbol. Provided separately is a PowerPoint with images of each of these symbols.

American Symbols

U.S. Flag: The flag's 13 alternating red and white stripes represent the 13 original colonies. Its 50 white stars on a blue field represent the 50 states. The colors on the flag represent; Red: valor and bravery; White: purity and innocence; Blue: vigilance, perseverance, and justice. (SOURCE) Flag Resolution of June 14, 1777, stated, "Resolved: that the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation." Executive Order of President Eisenhower dated August 21, 1959, provided for the arrangement of the stars in nine rows of stars staggered horizontally and eleven rows of stars staggered vertically. (*Facts about the United States Flag / Smithsonian Institution (si.edu)*)

Statue of Liberty: "Frenchman Edouardo de Laboulaye had the original idea for the statue around 1865. He recognized the United States as a nation that honored freedom, liberty, and democracy. De Laboulaye saw the symbolic gift as a way to honor the United States and to reflect his wish for a democracy in France. De Laboulaye commissioned a young sculptor, Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, to design the sculpture. Years later, Bartholdi completed a design for a colossal statue in the shape of a goddess upholding the torch of liberty, which he entitled, "Liberty Enlightening the World." The design was accepted and the Franco-American Union was created in order to raise money for this joint project of two nations: the French were to design and assemble the statue while the Americans were responsible for the statue's pedestal. Gustave Eiffel designed the statue's internal framework in 1879. Constructed in France between 1875 and 1884, the copper statue "Liberty Enlightening the World" arrived in New York on June 17, 1885 in 214 specially built wooden cases.; Liberty's image and symbolic meanings have continually changed since her dedication on October 28, 1886. During the late 19th century, one of the largest periods of immigration in American history, Liberty stood as a "Mother of Exiles," and provided thousands of immigrants with their first visual representation of America, liberty, and freedom. Throughout the 19th century, political instability, religious persecution, unstable economies, and vast unemployment prompted many Europeans to leave their homelands to take their chances on a better life in the United States. On the final stretch of their journey, as immigrants made their way into New York Harbor and to Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty served as a colossal symbol of freedom and opportunity for all newcomers to the United States." (New York: Statue of Liberty National Monument (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)). "The torch is a symbol of enlightenment. The Statue of Liberty's torch lights the way to freedom showing us the path to Liberty. Even the Statue's official name represents her most important symbol "Liberty Enlightening the World". The Statue's current replacement torch, added in 1986, is a copper flame covered in 24K gold. It is reflective of the sun's rays in daytime and lighted by 16 floodlights at night. The original torch was removed in 1984 and is currently inside the Statue of Liberty Museum. The tablet of law, held in the Statue's left hand, has the date of American Independence July 4, 1776, written on it in Roman numerals (July IV, MDCCLXXVI). The rays

represent a radiant halo, also called an ‘aureole.’” (*Frequently Asked Questions About the Statue of Liberty - Statue Of Liberty National Monument (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)*)

Bald Eagle: The bald eagle’s role as a national symbol is linked to its 1782 landing on the Great Seal of the United States. Shortly after the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress gave Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams the job of designing an official seal for the new nation. However, the three Founding Fathers failed to come up with a design that won Congress’ approval, as did two later committees that were given the task. In mid-June 1782, the work of all three committees was handed over to Charles Thomson, the secretary of Congress. Thomson chose what he thought were the best elements of the various designs and made the eagle—which had been introduced by artistically inclined Pennsylvania lawyer William Barton in a design submitted by the third committee—more prominent. (Since ancient times, the eagle has been considered a sign of strength; Roman legions used the animal as their standard, or symbol.) Thomson also recommended that the small, white eagle used in Barton’s design be replaced with an American bald eagle, and Congress adopted this design on June 20, 1782. (Contrary to legend, there’s no evidence Ben Franklin protested to Congress about the choice of the bald eagle and lobbied for the turkey, although in a 1784 letter to his daughter he did label the bald eagle “a bird of bad moral character.”) As the design went on to appear on official documents, currency, flags, public buildings and other government-related items, the bald eagle became an American icon. (*How Did the Bald Eagle Become America’s National Bird? - HISTORY*)

Liberty Bell: The Liberty Bell bears a timeless message: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof". From Signal to Symbol: The State House bell, now known as the Liberty Bell, rang in the tower of the Pennsylvania State House. Today, we call that building Independence Hall. Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly Isaac Norris first ordered a bell for the bell tower in 1751 from the Whitechapel Foundry in London. That bell cracked on the first test ring. Local metalworkers John Pass and John Stow melted down that bell and cast a new one right here in Philadelphia. It's this bell that would ring to call lawmakers to their meetings and the townspeople together to hear the reading of the news. Benjamin Franklin wrote to Catherine Ray in 1755, "Adieu, the Bell rings, and I must go among the Grave ones and talk Politicks." It's not until the 1830's that the old State House bell would begin to take on significance as a symbol of liberty. The Crack: No one recorded when or why the Liberty Bell first cracked, but the most likely explanation is that a narrow split developed in the early 1840's after nearly 90 years of hard use. In 1846, when the city decided to repair the bell prior to George Washington's birthday holiday (February 23), metal workers widened the thin crack to prevent its farther spread and restore the tone of the bell using a technique called "stop drilling". The wide "crack" in the Liberty Bell is actually the repair job! Look carefully and you'll see over 40 drill bit marks in that wide "crack". But, the repair was not successful. The Public Ledger newspaper reported that the repair failed when another fissure developed. This second crack, running from the abbreviation for "Philadelphia" up through the word "Liberty", silenced the bell forever. No one living today has heard the bell ring freely with its clapper, but computer modeling provides some clues into the sound of the Liberty Bell. The Inscription: The Liberty Bell's inscription is from the Bible (King James version): "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the

Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof." This verse refers to the "Jubilee", or the instructions to the Israelites to return property and free slaves every 50 years. Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly Isaac Norris chose this inscription for the State House bell in 1751, possibly to commemorate the 50th anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges which granted religious liberties and political self-government to the people of Pennsylvania. The inscription of liberty on the State House bell (now known as the Liberty Bell) went unnoticed during the Revolutionary War. After the war, abolitionists seeking to end slavery in America were inspired by the bell's message. The Meaning: The State House bell became a herald of liberty in the 19th century. "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof," the bell's inscription, provided a rallying cry for abolitionists wishing to end slavery. The Anti-Slavery Record, an abolitionist publication, first referred to the bell as the Liberty Bell in 1835, but that name was not widely adopted until years later. Millions of Americans became familiar with the bell in popular culture through George Lippard's 1847 fictional story "Ring, Grandfather, Ring", when the bell came to symbolize pride in a new nation. Beginning in the late 1800s, the Liberty Bell traveled across the country for display at expositions and fairs, stopping in towns small and large along the way. For a nation recovering from wounds of the Civil War, the bell served to remind Americans of a time when they fought together for independence. Movements from Women's Suffrage to Civil Rights embraced the Liberty Bell for both protest and celebration. Pennsylvania suffragists commissioned a replica of the Liberty Bell. Their "Justice Bell" traveled across Pennsylvania in 1915 to encourage support for women's voting rights legislation. It then sat chained in silence until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Now a worldwide symbol, the bell's message of liberty remains just as relevant and powerful today: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof" (*The Liberty Bell - Independence National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)*).

Mount Rushmore: Carved 1927 – 1941. Initial idea behind Mount Rushmore was to encourage tourists to visit South Dakota. Artist Gutzon Borglum expanded it beyond that idea, wanting to create a memorial to celebrate the first 150 years of American history. Each of the presidents on the mountain are symbols of an element of American history: George Washington represents the *birth* of the nation, Thomas Jefferson represents the *expansion* of the nation (Louisiana Purchase during his presidency), Abraham Lincoln represents the *preservation* of the nation through the Civil War, and Theodore Roosevelt represents the *development* of the nation (growing as a world power and the construction of the Panama Canal).

The Pledge of Allegiance: The Pledge of Allegiance was written in August 1892 by the socialist minister Francis Bellamy (1855-1931). It was originally published in *The Youth's Companion* on September 8, 1892. Bellamy had hoped that the pledge would be used by citizens in any country. In its original form it read: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." In 1923, the words, "the Flag of the United States of America" were added. At this time it read: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." In 1954, in response to the Communist threat of the times, President Eisenhower encouraged Congress to add the words "under God," creating the 31-word pledge we say today. Bellamy's daughter objected to this alteration. Today it reads: "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." Section 4 of the Flag Code states: The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: "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.", should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. When not in uniform men should remove any non-religious headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Persons in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute." The original Bellamy salute, first described in 1892 by Francis Bellamy, who authored the original Pledge, began with a military salute, and after reciting the words "to the flag," the arm was extended toward the flag. Shortly thereafter, the pledge was begun with the right hand over the heart, and after reciting "to the Flag," the arm was extended toward the Flag, palm-down. In World War II, the salute too much resembled the Nazi salute, so it was changed to keep the right hand over the heart throughout. (*The Pledge of Allegiance* (ushistory.org))

South Dakota Symbols

Source: Symbols of South Dakota | State Symbols USA.

<https://statesymbolsusa.org/states/united-states/south-dakota>

State Flower: American Pasque; “Designated 1903. Pasque (or pasqueflower) is a solitary tallgrass prairie flower that grows wild throughout South Dakota. Also called the May Day flower, prairie crocus, wind flower, Easter flower, and meadow anemone, the lovely lavender pasque is one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring, often before the winter snows have thawed. Pasque flowers were used as a medicine by Native Americans for centuries. The pasque flower is a member of the buttercup family and is highly toxic.”

State Tree: Black Hills Spruce; “Designated 1947. The beautiful short-needled white spruce tree is one of the dominant trees of the vast boreal forest that reaches from the northeastern United States across Canada to Alaska. Adopting the Black Hills spruce as the official state tree of South Dakota was not without controversy. First introduced by the Joint Committee on Horticulture, the idea met with opposition from some that felt the cottonwood (the state tree of Nebraska) would be a more suitable choice as the state tree symbol (because of its widespread distribution throughout South Dakota). Others felt the juniper (or cedar) would be the best tree to represent the state. Motions for the cottonwood and juniper were both voted down and finally a joint committee was named to weigh and consider the options for a state tree. The committee nominated the Black Hills spruce for South Dakota's tree symbol, and their report was accepted by both the House and Senate.”

State Animal: Coyote; “Designated 1949. In South Dakota, the coyote is found in the greatest numbers in the Black Hills and along the Missouri River and its tributaries. The howl of the coyote is known as "the song of the west" (one of the few wild animals whose vocalizations are commonly heard). The coyote has a range of distinctive sounds it uses to communicate with pups and other adults including barks, yips, howls, yelps and huffs.

State Bird: Ring-necked Pheasant; “Designated 1943. A ring-necked pheasant is also featured on the U.S. Mint's South Dakota quarter. Ring-necked pheasants prefer to walk or run, flying

only when disturbed or pursued by a predator. These birds were introduced to the United States from Asia in the 1880's. They forage on the ground for waste grain, other seeds, and insects.”

State Flag: “The state flag of South Dakota features the great seal on a blazing sun in the center against a field of sky blue. The words ‘South Dakota’ appear above the seal and the official state nickname appears below; ‘The Mount Rushmore State.’ South Dakota flags that are designed for indoor and display use have a golden fringe on three sides. The symbols on the great seal of South Dakota represent the state's commerce, industry, and natural resources. ‘Under God the People Rule’ (South Dakota's state motto) appears at the top of the inner circle, which has a background of sky and hills. In the foreground, a steam ship navigates a river running through agricultural and industrial land. The outer circle of the seal bears the words ‘State of South Dakota,’ ‘Great Seal,’ and ‘1889’ (the year South Dakota became a state).”