

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT**  
*Flags of the American Revolution*  
*From Chris Brooks*

Grade – 8

Length of class period: 50 minutes

Inquiry: How do flags show the values of the society or group that they represent?

Objectives: Students will use deductive reasoning skills to evaluate and interpret the possible meaning of the use of design, symbols and color of a flag.

Students will connect the past and the present through a common culture that has evolved in American society.

Materials: Photocopies of Flags (with color printer) Images attached

Graphic Organizer for group work - attached

Construction Paper, Markers, Rulers (Flag making materials)

Activities: (Set up classroom into small groups (3-5 students per group. Each group should have a recorder to fill out graphic organizer.)

- 1.) Teacher will initiate the lesson with a warm-up group discussion. The questions below will be on the board. Students in their groups will brain storm ideas for possible responses. The teacher will then ask for each group's spokesperson to report their ideas.

Do we associate a certain color with certain ideas, emotions, etc.? What about symbols?

- 2.) Each group will then be given a flag to interpret and a graphic organizer as a method for each group to record their ideas.)

- 3.) Teacher will monitor and offer guidance to the groups as necessary during the discussion phase.

- 4.) Teacher will then lead the discussion, as the each group reports on their flag and the group's interpretation of that flag.

- 5.) Wrap up the discussion with what they all had in common and what they found to be different.

Assessment: Students will each create a flag that is representative of their family, school, town, or other group. It will be their choice. With each flag, they will write a paragraph

explaining their flag and the meaning of the colors, symbols and design that they used

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards:

2.3 Create various forms of written work to demonstrate an understanding of history and social studies issues.

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

FLAGS (Make larger color copies and then laminate for future use.)



Albany Congress



Connecticut Dragoons



Rhode Island Regiment



Regimental Battle Flag



South Carolina



Bucks of America (Massachusetts unit almost entirely African American)



Albany Congress



Allen's Green Mountain Boys



First Naval Ensign Flag



First Traditional Flag (Betsy Ross Flag)

You may want to provide the students with information about each flag after they have finished their interpretations or you may use the information to give them clues during the group work.

FLAG INTERPRETATION

NAMES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

FLAG DESCRIPTION	COLOR	DESIGN ELEMENTS	SYMBOLS	WORDS
MEANING				



## Flags of the American Revolution

The first flags adopted by our colonial forebears were symbolic of their struggles with the wilderness of the new land. Beavers, pine trees, rattlesnakes, anchors and various other insignia were affixed to different banners with mottoes such as "Hope," "Liberty," "Appeal to Heaven," or "[Don't Tread on Me.](#)"

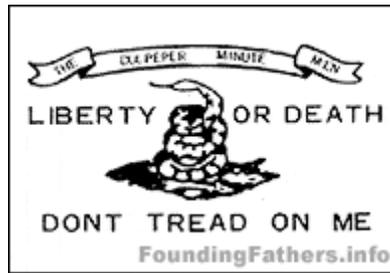
In the early days of the [Revolution](#), there were colonial and regimental flags by the score. The Boston Liberty flag, consisting of nine alternate red and white horizontal stripes, flew over the Liberty Tree, a fine old elm in Hanover Square in Boston, where the Sons of Liberty met.



Still another was a white flag with a green pine tree and the inscription, "An Appeal to Heaven." This particular flag became familiar on the seas as the ensign of the cruisers commissioned by General Washington, and was noted by many English newspapers of the time. [Available from [FlagLine.com.](#)]



Flags with a rattlesnake theme also gained increasing prestige with colonists. The slogan "Don't Tread on Me" almost invariably appeared on rattlesnake flags. A flag of this type was the standard of the South Carolina Navy. Another, the Gadsden flag, consisted of a yellow field with a rattlesnake in a spiral coil, poised to strike, in the center. Below the snake was the motto, "Don't Tread on Me." [Available from [FlagLine.com.](#)]



Similar was the Culpepper flag, banner of the Minutemen of Culpepper (now spelled Culpeper) County, Virginia. It consisted of a white field with a rattlesnake in a spiral coil in the center. Above the rattlesnake was the legend "The Culpepper Minute Men" and below, the motto, "Liberty or Death" as well as "Don't Tread on Me." [Available from [FlagLine.com](http://FlagLine.com).]

In December of 1775, an anonymous Philadelphia correspondent wrote to Bradford's Pennsylvania journal concerning the symbolic use of the snake. He began the letter by saying:

I recollected that her eye excelled in brightness that of any other animal, and that she has no eye-lids. She may, therefore, be esteemed an emblem of vigilance. She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders. She is, therefore, an emblem of magnanimity and true courage.

It was probably the deadly bite of the rattler, however, which was foremost in the minds of its designers, and the threatening slogan "Don't Tread on Me" added further significance to the design.

For more of the story of the [rattlesnake flags of early America](#), [click here](#).



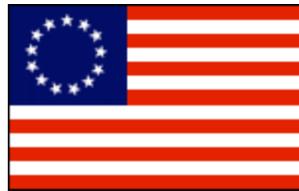
The Moultrie flag was the first distinctive American flag displayed in the South. It flew over the ramparts of the fort on Sullivan's Island, which lies in the channel leading to Charleston, South Carolina, [when the British fleet attacked](#) on June 28, 1776. The British ships bombarded the fort for 10 hours. But the garrison, consisting of some 375 regulars -- and a few militia, under the command of Col. William Moultrie, put up such a gallant defense that the British were forced to withdraw under cover of darkness. This victory saved the southern Colonies from invasion for another two years.

The flag was blue, as were the uniforms of the men of the garrison, and it bore a white crescent in the upper corner next to the staff, like the silver crescents the men wore on their caps, inscribed with the words "Liberty or Death." [Available from [FlagLine.com](http://FlagLine.com).]



The Maritime Colony of Rhode Island had its own flag, which was carried at Brandywine, Trenton, and Yorktown. It bore an anchor, 13 stars, and the word "Hope." Its white stars in a blue field are believed by many to have influenced the design of our national flag. [Available from [FlagLine.com](http://FlagLine.com).]

The Army preferred its regimental flags on the battlefield instead of the Stars and Stripes. A popular form of the U.S. flag that was used in battle had the obverse (front) of the Great Seal in the canton.



The Army also used the Stars and Stripes with 13 stars in a circle. The Stars and Stripes was officially used in Army artillery units in 1834, and in infantry units in 1842. [Available from [FlagLine.com](http://FlagLine.com).]

## **Next: The Gadsden Flag | American Flag Home Page**

**Buy an historic American flag**

Note: Our information on the history and traditions of the American flag is based on primary source materials from the Federal Consumer Information Center.



