

# FLAG SONGS AND ANTHEMS

**Level: High School  
(grades 9-12)**



*Marie Drake and Elinor Dusenbury with Franklin Butte (at piano) singing sheet music to Alaska's Flag. ASL 001-3831*

## Background

Benny Benson's 1927 award-winning flag design inspired Marie Drake, the secretary to the Commissioner of Education, to compose a patriotic poem to accompany the flag as the Alaska territory moved toward statehood. Years later, in 1938, Elinor Dusenbury composed music for the poem, so that singing a flag song could further inspire Alaskans to continue to actively pursue statehood status. It would take another 21 years before President Eisenhower proclaimed Alaska the 49<sup>th</sup> state of the United States.

## Summary

Students research flag songs and anthems used around the world in different historical contexts. They listen to diverse anthems/flag songs, including Alaska's flag song, and consider the connections between songs, flags, and national character and image. They then write lyrics for another verse of Alaska's flag song which reflects the current character of the state.

## Estimated Time

150 minutes (3 class periods) + homework/research time

## In this activity students will focus on the following:

### Alaska Content Standards

#### English/Language Arts

- A.7 Communicate ideas using varied tools of electronic technology
- B.3 Relate what is heard to the world and other experiences

#### Arts

- B.7 Explore similarities and differences in arts of world cultures
- C.2 Examine historical and contemporary works of art

## Activities

### Step One: Music research and listening

- Individually or in small groups, research national and/or regional flag songs and anthems, using the Internet, records, CD-ROMs and/or CDs. (Students might want to choose the country of their ancestors, a country they would like to visit someday, or one that interests them for some other personal reason.)
- When each student or small group has located several samples from different locations and/or time periods, they should record them and bring the recorded songs to class so that others in the group or class can listen to them. At the same time, each student or group should also select one personal musical favorite, to use later as a counter-point, to compare with the flag song.

### Step Two: Compare and contrast, discuss musical selections

- In small groups, and then as a class, discuss the emotions that certain songs/anthems evoke, considering the following questions:
  - How do they make you feel?
  - What is the difference between a flag song and an anthem?
  - Which songs/anthems are best remembered?
  - What is it about the musical quality of them that makes them memorable?
  - Does the anthem of a country reflect what you know about the people and cultures of that place? If not, why not?
  - What culture(s) does the song seem to reflect?

- Each individual or small group should then play its song of choice for the rest of the group. After each song is played, have a brief discussion, considering the musical features of the song.
- Compare and contrast each group's pair of songs, the flag song or an anthem, and the song of choice. Describe the differences.
- Listen to the recording of *Alaska's Flag*, sung by Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer, while looking at the flag of Alaska. Note and discuss as a group the degree to which the song refers to the symbols in the flag.
- Listen to one of the sample flag songs/anthems and look at the flag from that region or country. To what degree do the references in the songs refer to the symbols on the flags of other regions/countries? Which of the samples seemed to have the strongest connections between the music, the visual symbol, and what is known of the country itself?

### Step Three: Compose a new song for Alaska

- Examine the sheet music/lyrics of Alaska's flag song. Read page 15 of the exhibit catalog which describes the origin of the lyrics to Alaska's flag song.
- Individually or in pairs, compose another verse for Alaska's flag song. The original poem was written sixty years ago when the state was much different. Students should make the new poetic verse reflect what they think are key characteristics of the state today.

OPTION: Compose a musical adaptation of Alaska's flag song, adding the new lyrics, and perform for the class.

NOTE: In the 1960s Carol Beery Davis wrote a second verse to Alaska's flag song at the suggestion of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood. In 1986, then Representative, Fran Ulmer sponsored House Bill 117 adopting the second verse. The verse passed the House, but stalled in the Senate. For a copy of the words and more information go to:  
[www.gov.state.ak.us/ltgov/history/Alaska'sflag.html](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/ltgov/history/Alaska'sflag.html)

## Assessment

Present new poetic verse to peers, explaining its symbolism.

## Materials/Resources

- Audio equipment (for classroom listening)
- Access to CD players or computers so that students can use Internet resources
- Copy of lyrics to Alaska's Flag song (See back of exhibit catalog or [www.gov.state.ak.us/ltgov/historyAlaska'sflag.html](http://www.gov.state.ak.us/ltgov/historyAlaska'sflag.html))
- Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001.

## Websites

CopCity

[www.copcify.com/anthems](http://www.copcify.com/anthems)

Click on Anthems and Flags of Nations of the World American Flag, US Anthem, State Flags, Patriotic Songs  
[www.imagesoft.net/flags/usstate1.html](http://www.imagesoft.net/flags/usstate1.html)

Flags of the World

[www.fotw.net/flags/index.html](http://www.fotw.net/flags/index.html)

This is a complete website about flag history around the world, run by volunteers of the Vexillological Association.

## Vocabulary

**anthem** n. A song or hymn of praise or gladness

**vexillology** n. Study of flags