

MINTING A SYMBOL FOR ALASKA

What is a good symbol for Alaska today?

Level: Middle School (grades 6-8)



*Seal of the territory of Alaska
Courtesy: Alaska State Archives*

Background

In 1997 Public Law 105-124 authorized the U.S. Mint to initiate a national program "to provide for a 10-year circulating commemorative coin program to commemorate each of the 50 States." The short title for this law is the 50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act.

Summary

Students create a narrative and graphic design that represents modern Alaska. They may then enter it in the statewide competition for the upcoming "Alaska" quarter, as part of the U.S. Mint's 50 State Quarters Program.

Estimated Time

90 minutes + homework or silent reading time (15 minutes)

In this activity students will focus on the following:

Alaska Content Standards

Arts

- A.1. Participate in the visual arts
 - A.4. Demonstrate creativity and imagination for innovative thinking
 - C.1. Know criteria used to evaluate the arts, including craftsmanship, function, organization, originality, technique, theme
 - C.3. Accept and offer constructive criticism
 - D. 2. Discuss what makes an object a work of art
- ##### English/Language Arts
- A.4. Write well to inform, and clarify thinking
 - B.1. Comprehend meaning from written text and visual information

Assessment

Ask students to write a short reflective piece "What have you learned about strong graphic designs?"

Activities

Step One: Read and recall

- Have students read page 8 from the exhibit catalog as a homework assignment, or as a silent reading task, and be ready to discuss the flag contest.
- Ask the students to recall all that they know about the rules of the contest that Benny entered in 1927.
- Ask students who have entered contests in the past (e.g. bookmark or poster contests) to share what that experience was like, what they remember about it.

Part Two: Design a coin and explain it

- Introduce the contemporary contest for the design of the Alaska quarter. Consult the U.S. Mint Internet site, www.usmint.gov. (Go to 50 states commemorative quarters program.)
- Read aloud and/or print off the description of the State Quarters program so that students become familiar with the program and why it exists. Show samples of some of the new state quarters, minted over the last four years, for the students to examine. Have the students check the US mint website and figure out which states' quarters will be released next.
- Print and copy for the class the "Design Criteria," which outline the quarter contest rules. A key concept for the program is that designs are meant to "honor the unique history, traditions and symbols" of the states.
- Read (or have students read) the contest rules. Go over the criteria for the design selection (e.g., that the flag design may NOT be used for the quarter), listing them again on the board as a reminder.

- Brainstorm ideas about what makes a strong design (design elements of balance, proportion, etc.) and what symbols might represent Alaska today.
- From the website, explain the process that is in place for the selection of each quarter. Have the students figure out when the Alaska quarter will be minted and when the governor must decide on a process. Ask them who they think would be a good liaison with the U.S. Mint to decide on the state's selection process. Brainstorm ideas about how the state's design could be selected.
- After discussion and the recording of ideas, ask each student to draft a design for the reverse side of the quarter.
- Each student then gets feedback on his/her design from one other student, in terms of the design elements the class has already identified.
- Each student should have the opportunity to revise his/her design after receiving feedback from peers.
- Each student should write a narrative that describes the design and what it represents. The writing should be focused on fulfilling the design criteria.

Part Three: Display and evaluate designs

- Display the designs and have the class (and others, if desired) vote on the top 3 or 4 designs, given the contest criteria and the class's list of design elements.
- Prepare the finalists for submission to the state contest .

Extension Activity

Have the students write a letter to the Governor, suggesting a fair process for selection of the design for the Alaska quarter.

Materials

- Drawing paper
- Pencils, pens, perhaps fine point markers
- Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001. Page 8

Resources

US Mint: www.usmint.gov./mint_programs/50sq_program/index.cfm?action=criteria

Design Criteria for 50 States Commemorative Coin Program

The 50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act provides for designs to be submitted in accordance with the design selection and approval process developed by and in sole discretion of the Treasury Secretary. Because it is important that the nation's coinage and currency bear dignified designs of which the citizens of the United States can be proud, the Act further requires that the Secretary shall not select any frivolous or inappropriate design and no head-and-shoulders portrait or bust of any person, living or dead, and no portrait of a living person may be included in the design.

Guidelines for submission

- Designs shall maintain a dignity befitting the nation's coinage.
- Designs shall have broad appeal to the citizens of the state and avoid controversial subjects or symbols that are likely to offend.
- Suitable subject matter for design concepts include state landmarks (natural and man-made), landscapes, historically significant buildings, symbols of state resources or industries, official state flora and fauna, state icons (e.g., Texas Lone Star, Wyoming bronco, etc.), and outlines of the state.
- State flags and state seals are not considered suitable for designs.
- Consistent with the authorizing legislation, the states are encouraged to submit concepts that promote the diffusion of knowledge among the youth of the United States about the state, its history and geography, and the rich diversity of our national heritage.
- Priority consideration will be given to designs and concepts that are enduring representations of the state. Coins have a commercial life span of at least 30 years and are collected for generations.
- Inappropriate design concepts include, but are not limited to, logos or depictions of specific commercial, private, educational, civic, religious, sports, or other organizations whose membership or ownership is not universal.
- The United States Mint's current position is to accept text only descriptions of each State's design concept. Actual drawings and depictions will be rendered by the United States Mint.