

# CREATE A CLASSROOM FLAG

*What is the story behind the flag contest?*

**Level: Intermediate (grades 3-5)**

## Background

Flags are important to people because they represent important ideas and a sense of place. Flags communicate information and ideas through the size, shape, colors and symbols used. The United States flag uses stripes to represent the thirteen original colonies. It uses stars to show the 50 states united together into one country. States and territories display their flags in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C.

In 1926 the Territory of Alaska did not have a flag. Alaska's Territorial Governor, George Parks, decided that Alaska needed a flag. A flag would help the rest of the United States remember that Alaska was trying to become a state. A contest was held and over 140 students in grades 7-12 created designs to represent Alaska. Seventh grader Benny Benson submitted the winning design. When Alaska became a state in 1959, the territorial flag became our state flag. Even today, Alaska's flag is recognized as one of the best flag designs in the world. (NAVA website, flag contest, 2001)



## Summary

Students read part of the exhibit catalog and learn about the 1927 Alaska Flag Contest. Students create their own criteria for a meaningful classroom flag and conduct a classroom flag contest.

## Estimated Time

60 minutes - reading & discussion  
30 minutes - contest discussion & rules  
1 week suggested for actual contest

**In this activity students will focus on the following :**  
Alaska Performance Standards at Benchmark 2  
Reading

1. Use a combination of skills to read and comprehend text
10. Identify themes in texts and connect to personal experiences

## Alaska Content Standards

### Government/Civics

E.4. Establish, explain & apply criteria in evaluating rules and laws

### History

- B.2. Understand the factors that have shaped the history of the state, U.S. and world
- B.3. Recognize that historical understanding is relevant and valuable
- B.4. Understand historical patterns

## Activities

### Step One: Predict and question

- Display the Alaska Flag where the class can see it. Tell the students "We will be learning the Story of Alaska's flag. [optional] After we have learned the facts about Alaska's flag we can have our own flag contest and create a flag that represents our classroom."
- Make three large charts (on butcher paper) to record students' ideas and answers. (See K-W-L Guide)
  1. Title the first chart "What we know." Ask the students what they already know about the history of Alaska's flag. Record the students' ideas. (Sample answers might be: Benny Benson, North Star; blue, gold, Benny was an Alaska Native, etc.)
  2. Title the second chart "What we want to know." Ask the students what they would like to know about Alaska's flag. Record the students' questions. Leave room for an answer to be written later. (Sample answers might be: Why did Benny's flag win? How many entered? What did they win? How did the judges choose? Etc.)
  3. Title the third chart "What we learned." Tell the students that we will fill in the last chart after we read about Alaska's flag.

- Review the vocabulary list and introduce or review the words before reading. (See vocabulary.)
- Tell the students that, as they read, they will locate facts from the text to see if what they thought they already knew about the flag is true. They will find the answers to their questions about what they wanted to know. Encourage students to write down brief notes on a piece of paper divided into three columns as they read to help them remember the facts. (See K-W-L Guide)

### Step Two: Read and Discuss

- Read pages 7-12 from the exhibit catalog that explain the Alaska flag contest. Depending on the reading ability of the students, you may choose to read it aloud.
- Work together to correct and add information on the three charts the class made earlier.
- Have the students recall (or find in the text) the rules for the contest. Add them to the chart "What we learned" or make a separate chart called "Alaska Flag Contest Rules" (See Alaska Flag Contest Rules, 1927.)
- Discuss: Which rules made sense? Which rules should be rewritten? Encourage the students to defend their answers with examples from their own experiences.
- Look at some of the other flag entries (pages 20-21). Ask the students, "If you were the judge, would you have chosen a different flag design?" Have the students explain their answers and defend the design they like best.

### Step Three: Classroom Flag Contest

- Have the students discuss, "What is special or important about our classroom that should be shown in our flag? What makes a good flag?" Are there rules from the Alaska's flag contest that they would like to follow? (NOTE: The rules from the catalog do not include criteria for what would make a good flag.) What other rules would help someone design a flag and help a judge select the best flag? What things make one flag design better than another?
- Write the contest rules in enough detail to help guide the judges.
- Select judges. Discuss, "who will be the judges," "what special skills are needed for someone to be a judge," and "how the judges will make the final decision."
- Conduct the contest (advertise the contest with the rules, give the judges the designs, etc.) Allow enough time so that students have a chance to create a good design. At least 1 week is recommended.

- After the designs have been judged and the final selection has been made, choose a way to celebrate the winner. (e.g. Display all of the top designs, have a parent volunteer make the winning design in cloth and display it, etc.)

The North American Vexillological (study of flags) Association, NAVA, has created a simple booklet: *Good Flag, Bad Flag: How To Design A Great Flag* that lists 5 basic principles of flag design. A free copy of the booklet with examples of good and bad flag design is available at the website [www.nava.org/gfbf/gfbf-1.htm](http://www.nava.org/gfbf/gfbf-1.htm)

### NAVA's Five Basic Principles of Flag Design:

- Keep it simple. The flag should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory.
- Use meaningful symbolism. The flag's images, colors, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes.
- Use 2-3 basic colors. Limit the number of colors on the flag to three, which contrast well and come from the standard color set.
- No lettering or seals. Never use writing of any kind or an organization's seal.
- Be distinctive or be related. Avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections.

### Assessments

If the class has a classroom flag contest, students write or tell about the importance of setting up rules before a contest and discuss any problems encountered during the process of judging.

If the class is not going to have a classroom flag contest, have students write or tell what they have learned about the Alaska state flag. Check to see that they correctly know the date of the contest, the creator, the symbolism for the design (Big Dipper for strength, blue for forget-me-not flower, and North Star for northern most part of the United States), and can express an opinion about the selection of the flag (answers will vary).

### Materials

- An Alaska flag (as large as possible)
- Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001. Pages 7-12 (The 'Twilit Twenties' and the birth of Alaska's Flag). Pages 20-21 (List of Entries) 34 of the original 142 are available
- Chart paper and markers
- Make charts or overheads as needed (samples provided):
  1. K-W-L Guide
  2. Five Basic Principles of Flag Design
  3. Alaska Flag Contest Rules, 1927

## Resources

*Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag.* This is a downloadable flag design guide available at [www.nava.org/gfbf/gfbf-1.htm](http://www.nava.org/gfbf/gfbf-1.htm)

Crampton, William. *Flag*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. ISBN 0-394-822255-2. The Eyewitness series provides clear information and photography to beautifully illustrate the topic. In this book, students will discover the story of flags and banners close up – their history, their meanings, and how they are used.

Jeffries, David. *Flags*. New York: A Franklin Watts Library Edition, 1989. ISBN 0-531-100008-1. This easy-to-read fact book provides simple overviews and clear illustrations about the main topics in the study of flags.

## Vocabulary

**'Twilit Twenties'** n. The 1920s; a period of time when things were dark (in the sense that Alaska wasn't a state and the people had very limited ability to make laws for themselves) but were starting to get brighter-referring to the time just before dawn

**territory** n. A part of a country that does not have full rights

**territorial governor** n. The person appointed by the President of the U.S. to govern or rule a territory

**territorial seal** n. An official symbol of a territory; Alaska's seal was designed by Governor John Kinkead and redesigned by Governor Walter Clark, it showed the northern lights, icebergs, Alaska Natives, mining, fishing, agriculture, fur seals and a railroad.

**American Legion** n. A community-service organization; members must have had active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces; chartered in 1919 by the U.S. Congress. Website: [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

**symbol** n. An object used to represent something abstract

K-W-L Charts are graphic organizers that are useful for determining students' prior knowledge or experience; identifying what they want to know about a new concept, story, or information to be shared; and then determining what was learned after the lesson has been presented.

# K-W-L CHART

## KNOW - WANT TO KNOW - WHAT I LEARNED

Fold paper into three equal columns

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ I am studying: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What I know

2. What I want to know

3. What I learned

# FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FLAG DESIGN

Source: The North American Vexillological Association

1. Keep it simple. The flag should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory.
2. Use meaningful symbolism. The flag's images, colors, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes.
3. Use 2-3 basic colors. Limit the number of colors on the flag to three, which contrast well and come from the standard color set.
4. No lettering or seals. Never use writing of any kind or an organization's seal.
5. Be distinctive or be related. Avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections.

Reference: *Good Flag, Bad Flag: How To Design A Great Flag*, a downloadable flag design guide [www.nava.org/gfbf/gfbf-1.htm](http://www.nava.org/gfbf/gfbf-1.htm), The North American Vexillological Association (NAVA)

## ALASKA FLAG CONTEST RULES, 1927

Source: Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag (page 8)

- Designs must be submitted by Territorial school children, grades 7-12
- Use cardboard, plain paper, or drawing paper 8 1/2 x 11 inches
- Use ink or color
- Write name, age and address on reverse (back) of entry
- Due: March 1, 1927
- Local board of 4 judges (one member of American Legion, school superintendent, principal or teacher, and one citizen of the town) selects 10 best designs and sends them to Juneau to the Final Awards Committee.