

# BENNY BENSON

## THE BOY WHO DESIGNED ALASKA'S FLAG

*How did Alaska get its flag?*

Level: Primary (K-2)

### Background

Benny Benson, an Alaska Native seventh grader from the Jesse Lee Mission Home in Seward, won the Alaska Flag Contest in 1927. His simple but elegant design was selected from 142 entries. Benny's life changed forever as he became a famous Alaskan within the state and across the country.

*Benny's original entry is in the Alaska State Museum collection. III-0-410*



### Summary

Children hear the story of how Benny Benson entered and won the Alaska flag contest in 1927. Children practice listening skills and demonstrate their understanding about the origins of Alaska's flag through a performance. As an option, they may collaborate and perform with middle school students who write a play based on Benny's story.

### Estimated Time

40 minutes to do the pre-reading, reading of the text, and the retelling.

Allow a week to practice and perform the play (Option 2).

**In this activity students will focus on the following :**  
Alaska Performance Standards at Benchmark 1

Reading

- 2.b Use a variety of strategies to support comprehension
- 4.a Retell or dramatize a story after reading it
- 4.b Restate information after reading a text

### Alaska Content Standards

English/Language Arts

- B.1 Comprehend meaning from written text and oral and visual information by applying a variety of reading, listening and viewing strategies
- C.2 Organize a project
- C.5 Work on a collaborative project, taking responsibility, sharing workloads, incorporating individual talents and perspectives, working effectively and evaluating the work of self and others

### Activities

#### Step One: Before reading

- Hold up the book cover and read the book title. Ask the children "What do you think this book will be about?" Record student responses. Tell the students you'll read the book and they should listen to see if what they thought really happens in the story.
- Discuss the concept of a flag designer to elicit children's prior knowledge and build on the concept of a person who creates designs.
- Display the Alaska flag in front of the class. Ask the children if any of them have ever heard of Benny Benson or how Alaska got its flag. Tell the children that this book will let them know the "true story."

#### Step Two: During reading

- Read the book *Benny's Flag* to the class, showing them the illustrations as you read. Point out interesting facts and vocabulary on each page. Also answer any questions that the children might have as you read.

#### Step Three: After reading

##### Option 1: Storytelling

(If older students are not available to do a play, this option will help the children review the story.)

- Have each child work with a partner or a small group to retell the story of Benny Benson to students in another class. The children can either use the "Picture Cards" provided or create pictures themselves. Students should retell the main ideas in the correct order. (See Picture Cards.)
- Record (audio or videotape) the children's storytelling performances and share with parents and others.

### Option 2: A Benny Benson play with older students

(This could be done with the middle school students who are working on the Steps to Statehood activity)

- Have middle school partners or buddies re-read the story of Benny and the flag to individuals or pairs of children. Tell the group that the middle schoolers have written a short play about Benny and that the class is going to act in the play. Explain how they must listen and follow the directions of the older students, so that the play can be performed in public. (SEE Steps to Statehood activity.)
- Assist the middle school students as they rehearse the play with the younger children. Make sure that each child understands what he/she is supposed to do in the performance.
- Invite all parents to attend a performance of the play. Serve star sugar cookies and juice after the play. (SEE Famous Stars activity for a cookie recipe.)

### Assessment

Children should be able to retell the story in sequence of how Benny Benson designed Alaska's flag and include at least two or three main ideas.

### Materials and Resource

- A copy of the book *Benny's Flag*
- Picture cards

### Vocabulary

**baton** n. A rod twirled by a drum major

**dormitory** n. A building with many rooms for sleeping and living in

**glacier** n. A mass of ice and snow moving slowly down a valley or mountain

**mast** n. A tall vertical spar used to support sails

**Mission Home** n. A home that provides shelter and schooling

**mukluks** n. Boots made of animal skin, usually seal or reindeer

**northernmost** adj. The farthest north

**parka** n. A heavy, hooded jacket

**pledge** n. A promise or an agreement

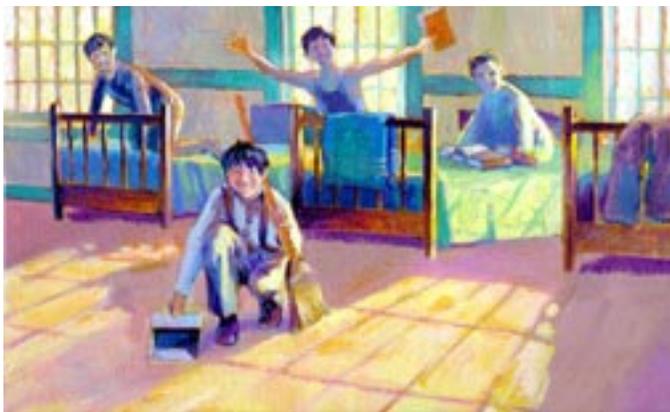
**sleigh riding** v. To ride in a sleigh, which is a light vehicle on runners, for travel on snow

**twinkly** adj. To twinkle or sparkle

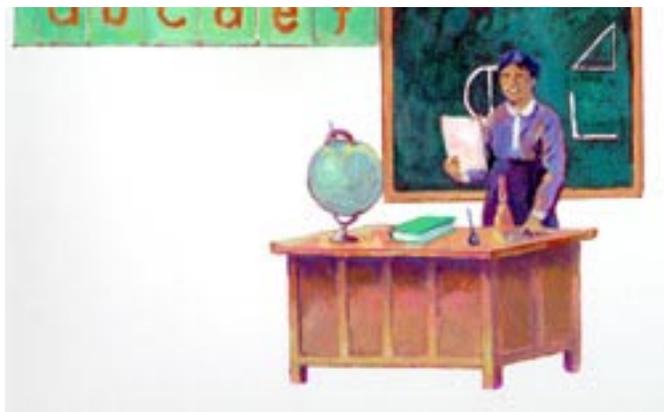
**uniform** n. All the same, as in clothing

# PICTURE CARDS

Directions: Print the cards (use a color printer if possible.) Cut them apart and have the children take turns putting them in the correct order. The children can use the cards to tell another child the story.



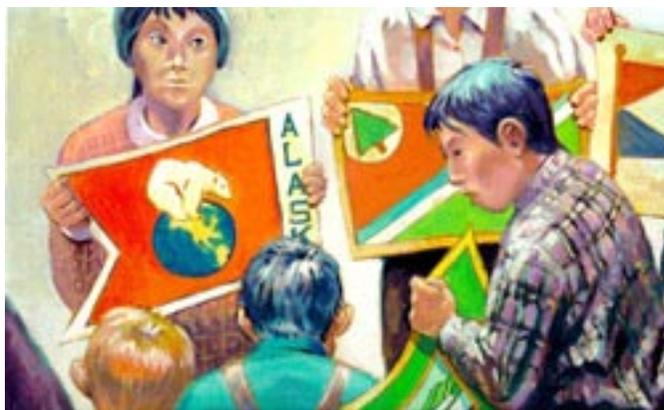
Benny in Mission Home dormitory



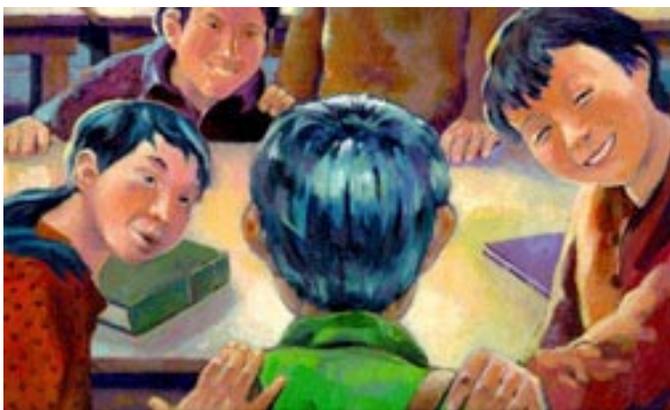
Contest is announced



Getting ideas about Alaska



Students share their entries



Benny wins the contest



Flag is made and Benny is in the parade

