

FLAGS: SYMBOLS OF PLACE

What does a flag show us?

Level: Primary (K-2)

Background

Flags tell us about a place and the people who live there by the symbols used in the design. Benny Benson, the designer of Alaska's flag, explained what his design meant to him: "The blue field is for the Alaska sky and the forget-me-not, an Alaskan flower. The North Star is for the future state of Alaska, the most northerly in the Union. The Dipper is for the Great Bear—symbolizing strength." The Alaskan environment has many strong symbols.



An illustration by Jim Fowler from the book *Benny's Flag*.

Summary

Children explore the meaning of symbols through activities relating to images suitable for Alaska. They make Alaskan flags to take home and display.

Estimated Time

30 minutes per day, for 3 days.
(Step Three may take longer, depending on the options selected by the teacher.)

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

1 Count and model one-to-one correspondence

Alaska Content Standards

English/Language Arts

A.4 Write to describe

A.6 Use visual techniques to communicate ideas

B.1 Comprehend meaning from written text and oral and visual information by applying a variety of reading, listening and viewing strategies

B.2 Reflect on, analyze and evaluate a variety of oral, written and visual information and experiences

B.3 Relate what he/she views, reads and hears to practical purposes in his/her own life, the world outside and to other texts and experiences

History

A.5 Understand that history is a narrative told in many voices

B.2 Understand the people who have shaped the history of the state

Activities

Step One: Find and count flags.

Identify symbols.

- Where do we fly a flag? Take a walk through the school and have the children find as many flags as they can. Count the flags. Are they all the same? If not, what are the differences? Which one is the flag for Alaska? How many Alaska flags can we find in school? Have a brief discussion about why people display flags. See if they can name other places where a flag is displayed. (Answers may include post office, town/village hall, etc.)
- Back in the classroom, explain that flags have designs called *symbols*. Symbols picture something that people really like about a place or represent a place or a thing. There are also symbols called *logos*, that represent a place or a thing (like the golden arches, which stand for McDonalds). Ask the children to name other symbols or logos of things that they see around them.
- Look at the designs on pages 20-21 that Benny and the other children drew for the Alaska flag contest in the *Eight Stars of Gold* exhibit catalog. Ask, "What things are on those flags?" "How do they remind you of living in Alaska?"
- Using a globe or a map of the United States, find the state of Alaska noting how far north it is and other details (depending on the ages of the children and their level of understanding).
* Note: This only works on maps where Alaska is in its correct location, not as an insert in a corner.

Step Two: Brainstorm, draw and write.

- In pairs or small groups, have children brainstorm ideas about other symbols for Alaska. (With K – 1 children do this activity brainstorming ideas about their neighborhood/town/village first and then generalize to the state.)
- Ask what things they know about living in the Alaska environment? Have an adult or one member of the group, write the list of ideas.
(OPTION: Make a Venn diagram with one circle that include "Things I see in Alaska" and a second circle that contains "Things I see in other places.")
- Have each pair or group share its ideas with the class. Post the lists of ideas.
- Each child can now choose a symbol that he/she thinks best represents the state of Alaska. Once each student has chosen a symbol, have him/her illustrate their symbols, using crayons, markers, or colored pencils.
- On the back of their "new" flag designs, children should dictate/write why they think it is a good symbol for Alaska.
- Display the new alternative flag designs around the room.
- Option: Children could create a mural of Alaska symbols, with each child contributing the design/symbol he or she has chosen and drawn.

Step Three: Create a flag.

- Have each child look at the State flag. Children can make their own copies of the Alaska flag to take home. Variations by grade level: Kindergarten — use a large piece of blue construction paper and star stickers to make a flag, counting the eight stars as they attach them. First grade — use tempera paints to color a paper flag, counting the stars as they paint. Second grade — use rectangular pieces of blue felt or fabric and attach either pre-cut stars or stars they cut from yellow felt or fabric, using a cardboard template of a star to trace.
- Before the children take their flags home, talk about where they might display their flag, introducing the idea of flag etiquette which they will learn more about when they are a little older. (See Flag Etiquette activity.)
- Make star-shaped sugar cookies (recipe follows) using the star template or a star cookie cutter . Use yellow food coloring in the dough before baking, or sprinkle with sugar dyed yellow with food coloring. After the cookies are baked, have the children arrange them on a cookie sheet—covered with blue construction paper—in the shape of the Big Dipper and North Star, like the Alaska flag.

Activity ideas contributed by Kathy Neilson, Literacy Specialist, Mendenhall River Elementary School.

Assessment

Children can explain what a symbol is and give two examples of symbols that they see in their lives or have created to symbolize how they feel about Alaska.

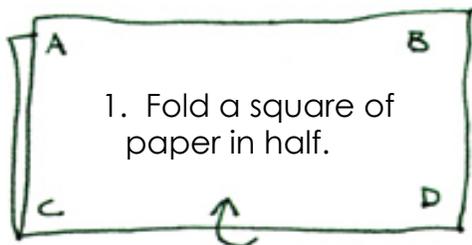
Materials and Resources

- Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001.
- Alaska Flag, as large as possible, so the whole class can see it
- Globe or map of the United States, including Alaska in its proper location
- Blue construction paper and star stickers (K)
- Drawing paper, blue and yellow tempera paint (Grade 1)
- Blue and yellow felt, glue, cardboard star template, scissors (Grade 2)
- Ingredients for sugar cookies (see below) and a star cookie cutter

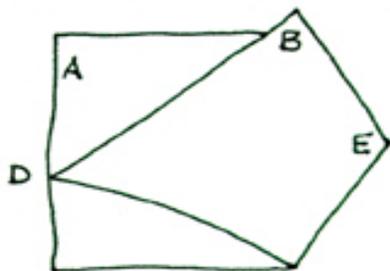
Vocabulary

constellation n. A set of fixed stars

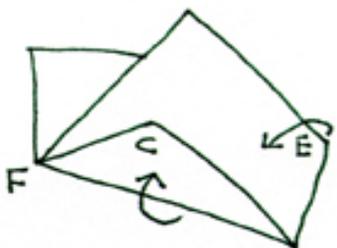
To Make a Star with Five Points



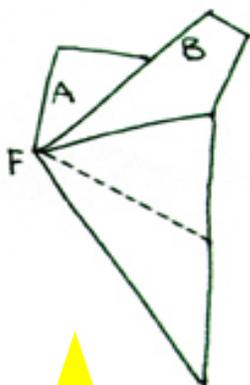
1. Fold a square of paper in half.



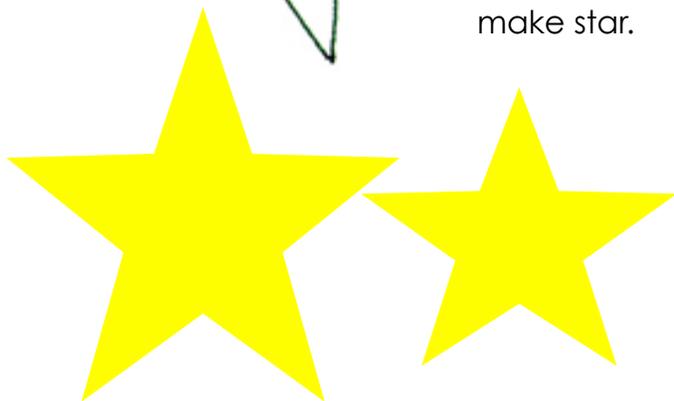
2. Fold corner D to a half-way point between A and C.



3. Fold corner C up. Fold corner E over to F.



4. Cut through all layers along dotted line. Unfold shaded area to make star.



Star Sugar Cookie Recipe

Contributed by Nancy DeCherney
of Juneau, co-author of
The Fiddlehead Cookbook

"I grew up using the Betty Crocker Traditional Sugar Cookie recipe, and it seems durable and serviceable."

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup shortening (*we used shortening back then, now I use all butter*)
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt

1. Cream the shortening, or butter, together with the sugar in a large mixing bowl. Add in the eggs and vanilla and beat until smooth.
2. Sift the flour, baking powder and salt together, and stir into the creamed mixture. Mix it just until it is all smooth. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour. (*This part is very hard for kids - I will attest to that. It also decreased the overall number of cookies, as there is a tendency to "check" on the dough in the refrigerator during that time.*)
3. Heat oven to 400°F.
4. Roll out the dough to 1/8 inch thick on a lightly floured board. Cut into star shapes and place on an ungreased baking sheet.
5. Bake 6-8 minutes, until cookies are delicately browned on the edges. Remove from the oven, and remove from the baking pan immediately, to cool on a rack or towel.