

# HONOR THE COLORS

*Iowa's Civil War Battle Flags*

Learn more at:  
[www.iowaflags.org](http://www.iowaflags.org)

## The Study of Flags

### **GRADE LEVEL:**

1, 4-5, 10-11

### **TIME NEEDED:**

Grade 1 = 1 class,  
Grades 4-5 and 10-11 = 3-4 classes

### **MATERIALS:**

1. Posters of flags of the world, historical American flags, Civil War flags, pictures of different kinds of flags.
2. Handouts from the State Historical Society of the parts of flags.
3. Classroom flags of the United States and the Iowa state flag.

### **GOALS/OBJECTIVES/STUDENT OUTCOMES:**

- Learn basic information on flags, their history and parts.
- Understand different kinds of flags and their various uses.
- Recognize some flags are important symbols.
- Understand the creation and meaning of the flag of the United States and the flag of Iowa.
- Understand the significance of Iowa's Civil War Battle Flags
- Design and create a personal symbolic flag to display in the classroom.
- Identify a topic, identify resources, read, research and analyze information
- Work cooperatively with others in researching and presenting a flag topic.
- Develop and present a group oral report on their topic.
- Summarize and analyze their group presentation and participation.



STATE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY of  
IOWA



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### **BACKGROUND:**

The dictionary description of a flag is “a piece of cloth, usually rectangular, of distinctive color and design, used as a symbol, standard, signal or emblem.” A symbol is “something that represents something else.” A national flag symbolizes a country. A state flag symbolizes a state. Flags can be powerful symbols. Think of the national flag draped over a coffin or the feeling from seeing photographs of the flag raised on Mt. Suribachi in the Battle of Iwo Jima or the flags shown in memory of 9-11.

The colors of the American flag are the same colors as in the British Union Jack. The Secretary of the Continental Congress, Charles Thomson said “White symbolizes purity and innocence; Red, hardiness and valour; and Blue, vigilance, perseverance and justice.”

The number of stars represents the number of states in the Union. The red and white stripes represent the original 13 colonies. The Stars and Stripes became the official flag on June 14, 1777. Iowa did not adopt a state flag until 1921. Iowa National Guard regiments stationed in World War I and along the Mexican border requested one to designate their units. The state's Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) decided to create a banner and a winning design was submitted by Dixie Cornell Gebhardt of Knoxville in 1917. She explained the blue stripe stood for loyalty, justice and truth; the white for purity; and the red for courage. On the white center stripe is an eagle carrying in its beak blue streamers with the state motto: “Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.” The state name IOWA is printed in red letters below the eagle. When displayed with the U.S. flag, state flags must be flown below the national one.

There are many other kinds of flags besides the national symbols. Many cities have flags. Organizations like the Olympics, the Red Cross, the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts have flags. Flags are also used as messages like a red flag for danger, a white flag for surrender or even a pirate flag of warning. There is an International Code of flags used for signaling. Each flag represents a letter in the alphabet with a different colorful design. Flags are also used for decorations at celebrations or memorials.

Flags have been used for over 4000 years. The study of flags is called “vexillology” from the Latin word “vexilloids” which means “guide.” The first vexilloids were poles with carved tops used to guide soldiers. Fabric was added to the poles around 2000 years ago. Pieces of woven fabric were sewn together and decorated with paint or embroidery. Different colors and designs had meanings. Heraldry developed from these designs to help knights and foot soldiers distinguish friend from enemy in the confusion of battle. Soldiers looked for their various flags in a battle to be able to tell how the fight was going and where their fellow soldiers were located. Flags directed the movements of the soldiers

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and identified their group to leaders in the distance.  
(Background continued)

Over time, military units were represented by their own flags. They meant more to the soldiers than simple guides. Since the establishment of the United State Army in 1785, the US regular infantry regiments carried their own colors or flags. They did not carry the national flag since it was felt that no one unit should carry the national honor into battle. The colors gave them a group identity. The soldiers felt the flags represented their honor and pride. They were often made by home towns and women in the community and given with great ceremony as gifts to the units, so they also symbolized home and family. During the Civil War, a soldier was honored for saving his unit's colors or for capturing enemy colors. If a flag was lost in battle, so were the regiment's position, identity and honor. By the 1840s, the national flag was carried by the infantry with the regimental number or title printed on one of the white stripes. If the flag was lost, only the regiment's honor was lost and not the national honor. When a regiment fought with great bravery and distinction at a battle, they were allowed to have the name of the battle painted directly on their flag. Battle honors made the flags even more important.

In 1894, the Adjutant General called for the flags of Iowa's Civil War regiments to be marched to the State Capitol and enclosed in exhibit cases by the legislative chambers. They were moved temporarily during a 1904 fire in the Capitol and placed in rotunda cases on the first floor in 1905. Spanish-American and World War I flags joined them later. These rare artifacts represent the service and sacrifice of thousands of Iowans. They are endangered by years of display and neglect. Sunlight, smoke and heavy gauze used to support each flag has caused damage, some of it severe, if left unchecked, the damage eventually would have become greater than what the flags suffered in battle. In the 1990s, civic groups including the Sons of Union Veterans encouraged the state to provide conservation care to these flags. After a study directed by the Legislature, and support from the General Assembly and the Governor's office, the Iowa Battle Flag Project began in 2001. Nearly 217 Civil War Flags are in great need of extensive conservation efforts to save and exhibit them for future generations. On average, it takes conservators up to 240 hours to preserve a flag, and up to 4,000 stitches per side are individually and carefully cut by hand to remove the gauze. The average cost to stabilize a single flag is \$4,800. The museum plans to rotate flags in and out of public exhibits as they are preserved and prepared for display.

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### **PROCEDURE:**

#### **Class #1**

- Learn basic information on flags and the parts of flags.
- Discuss different kinds of flags and symbolism.
- Discuss and identify flag topics for future presentation.
- Create a personal flag to display in the classroom – this can be assigned homework.

#### **Class #2**

(An extra class period can be set aside for research and preparation)

- Set up personal flags in a display around the classroom
- Decide which flag topics will be researched and form cooperative groups. Assign a future time for presentations. Set a time limit for presentations depending on the age of the students, the complexity of the topic and the number of students in a group. Review the elements of successful research and sources of information.
- Students should be aware of the different group's topics and told to think of questions for each presentation.
- Students meet with their group to go over notes and decide on the format of their presentation and if it will include pictures or drawings.
- Research their subject, using the library and computers, reading, taking notes and outlining.

#### **Class #3**

- Guests can be invited to hear presentations.
- Presentations are given followed by a brief question and answer time. Other students are encouraged to ask questions and have a brief discussion.
- After the presentations are finished, ask the class if they were surprised by any of the information and were interested in learning more about a certain topic.
- Each group hands in a folder with their combined study notes, outlines, presentation notes and a review of their project and presentation.
- They could meet with their teacher to go over this material or the teacher could examine it privately.

### **ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOMES:**

- Contributions to class discussion and asking questions.
- Cooperation/teamwork skills.
- Research, writing and oral presentation skills.
- Amount of participation in projects and creativity.
- Completion of cooperative group assignment.

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### **EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS:**

Most of the activities listed under procedures can be adapted to meet the learning needs of most students at various ages.

- Personal flags can be designed to represent themselves, their family, their class or their school.
- Research and projects could focus on flags connected to the development of the United States from colonial and Revolutionary War flags to the first national flag.
- Many countries claimed parts of North America. A project could include the different flags that have flown over North America.
- Focus on the Star Spangled Banner, facts about the national flag, state flag, flags of different countries, or various kinds of flags. Copies of flags from around the world could be displayed to represent the ancestral backgrounds of students in the class.
- Each flag has a specific meaning and a unique history. A project could explain the symbolism of colors, size, and design.
- Students studying the Civil War would prepare for a visit to the State Historical Building to see the exhibit and Battle Flags. Iowa regiments and their flags could be tracked to follow their service during the Civil War.
- Focus on Color Guards who were entrusted with the flags of the regiment.
- Explore the different kinds of flags carried in the Civil War and the Confederate flags.
- Older students (12 or older) working on a presentation on a particular flag or on preservation could arrange for a visit to the Iowa Battle Flag Preservation Lab to hear stories of the flags and view them up-close.
- The Iowa Battle Flag preservation video that discusses the history of the project and the significance of the flags could be shown in class.
- Focus on the history of the battle flags and the grass roots support for their care.

\*\* *The Iowa Battle Flag Preservation website is at <http://www.iowaflags.org/>*

\*\* *The National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution has a website section on the science of preservation and their special conservation laboratory built to accommodate the Star-Spangled Banner treatment.*

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## **RESOURCES**

### **Elementary:**

Herman, John. **Red, White, and Blue ( All Aboard Reading Level 2 )**. Grosset & Dunlap, 1998.

Kent, Deborah. **The Star Spangled Banner**. Chicago: Children's Press, 1995.

Lewis, Wendy Cheyette. **F is for Flag ( Reading Railroad Books )**. Grosset & Dunlap, 2002.

Spier, Peter. **The Star Spangled Banner ( Reading Rainbow Books )**. Dragonfly Books, 1992.

### **Secondary and Adult:**

Corcoran, Michael. **For Which It Stands: An Anecdotal History of the American Flag**. Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Gunter, Scot M. **The American Flag 1924-1977**. New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990.

Katcher, Phillip. **Confederate Flags of the Civil War ( Battle Ready Series )**. Raintree Pub., 2003.

Katcher, Phillip. **Union Flags of the Civil War ( Battle Ready Series )**. Raintree Pub., 2003.

### **Adult:**

Bown, Deni. **Ultimate Pocket Flags of the World**. Dorling Kindersley, November, 1997.

Cannon Jr., Devereaux. **The Flags of the Confederacy, An Illustrated History**. Pelican Pub. Co., October, 1994.

Cannon Jr., Devereaux and Pardue, Larry (Illustrator). **The Flags of the Union, An Illustrated History**. Pelican Pub. Co., May 1994.

Devereaux, Eve. **Identifying Flags, The New Compact Study Guide and Identifier**. Book Sales, 1998.

**Eyewitness Handbooks: Flags**. Dorling Kindersley, June, 1999.

Znamierowski, Alfred. **Flags Through the Ages, A Guide to the World of Flags, Banners, Standards and Ensigns**. Lorenz Books, September, 2000.

Znamierowski, Alfred. **The World Encyclopedia of Flags, The Definitive Guide to International Flags, Banners, Standards, and Ensigns**. Lorenz Books, December, 1999.

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### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS:**

*(This lesson plan may be used to meet the following academic standards)*

#### **National History Standards:**

**Topic 3 - The History of the United States: Democratic Principles and Values and the Cultures Who Contributed to its Cultural, Economic and Political Heritage.**

1. Understands how democratic values came to be and how they have been exemplified by events and symbols.

#### **National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards:**

##### **Theme II: Time, Continuity and Change**

Human beings seek to understand their historic roots and to locate themselves in time. Such understanding involves knowing what things were like in the past and how things change and develop – allowing us to develop historic perspectives and answer important questions about our current condition.

#### **Des Moines Public Schools Standards:**

##### **Art**

Grade 1: Design. Drawing.

Grades 4 & 5: Appreciation. Design. Drawing.

##### **Language Arts**

Grades 4th & 5th: Writing. Study Skills

##### **Reading**

Grade 4: Writes a summary.

Grade 5: Writes a summary. Is able to draw conclusions.

##### **Social Studies**

Grade 1: Recognize important symbols of American Democracy

Grade 4: Researches and presents an oral report. Locates and uses appropriate information.

Grade 5: Recognizes trends in the growth and development of the United States.

##### **Social Skills**

Working in a group.

##### **Thinking Skills**

Analyze, compare and contrast, make decisions, acquire and use research and library skills.

##### **Secondary Grades - U.S. History**

Grades 10-11: Era 3 - Revolution and the New Nation, Std. 3

Grades 10-11: Era 5 - Civil War and Reconstruction, Std. 2

##### **Secondary Grades - Flag Conservation and Preservation, Scientific Inquiry**

The nature of matter and its relationship to chemical changes.

Grades 9-11: Interactive Science, Chemistry

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## A CIVIL WAR "NATIONAL" FLAG

**Stripes:** 7 red and 6 white / **Height:** 6 feet (Cavalry 2' 3") / **Width:** 6 feet 5 inches (Cavalry 2' 3")

### Canton

Contains stars representing each state in the Union

### Unit Designation

### Fly End

The end that moves in the wind, it may be "V" notched on cavalry flags

### Hoist End

(Lead Edge)  
Where the staff is attached

### Pole Sleeve

Cloth tube in which the staff is held

### Fringe

### Battle Honors

Lists the battle in which the regiment participated



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## A CIVIL WAR "REGIMENTAL" FLAG

**Height:** 6 feet (Cavalry 2' 3") / **Width:** 6 feet 5 inches (Cavalry 2' 3")

### Standard Issue

Arch of stars at top. The eagle talons hold an olive branch and clutch of arrows.. E. Pluribus Unum ribbon in the eagle's beak.

### Fly End

The end that moves in the wind, it may be "V" notched on cavalry flags

### Hoist End

(Lead Edge)  
Where the staff is attached

### Fringe

### Pole Sleeve

Cloth tube in which the staff is held

### Design/Seal

Usually a coat of arms for infantry and cavalry, crossed cannons for artillery

### Unit ID Ribbon

Name of the regiment listed here.

