

Promise Of Liberty:

American Symbols

Thematic Question:

How can we see American values in both symbols and documents?

Find lesson PowerPoint here:

<file:///C:/Users/amccomb/Downloads/POL%20Symbols.pdf>

Overview

Learning symbols is crucial for kids as it builds the foundation for communication, literacy, and abstract thinking, helping them understand the world by linking concrete images to abstract meanings, enabling them to express needs, make choices, develop vocabulary, and eventually read and write. Symbols provide context, bridge language gaps, and allow for processing information, fostering independence, and deeper comprehension beyond literal words.

Goals

Students will be able to:

- Identify meaning to American symbols
- Utilize symbols in communication and understanding

Suggested Grades

Recommended grades K-4

Pre-Visit Lesson and Discussion

Depending on the student, this may be an introduction to symbolism. Use the following to explore symbols and gauge your student's understanding.

Symbolism is the practice of using something visible, such as objects or words, to represent the abstract or invisible, such as an idea or trait.

For example, what does this symbolize?



Restroom

What does this symbolize?



Stop

What does this symbolize?



United States of America

This one is a little bit more complex. What colors do we see? What could those colors represent? How many stars? How many stripes? What could those represent?

Educator's answers

Colors do have meaning, but at the end of the day these colors were mostly likely chosen because they were the colors used in the settler's previous country England.

50 stars for 50 states, 13 stripes for 13 original colonies (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia)

American Symbols

First, ask students what symbols or images do they think of when they think of America? This could be presidents, monuments, plans, animals, really anything! Then, use the following to take a closer look at some specific American Symbols and what they mean. You are welcome to use as many of the following as you see fit for your classroom. The activity can work with one symbol or ten.

Bald Eagle and the Great Seal – Great Seal established 1782

- Since ancient times, the eagle has been considered a sign of **strength**
- Roman legions used the animal as their standard, or symbol.
 - Ben franklin called it a “a bird of bad moral character.” in a 1784 letter to his daughter
- **Olive branch- strength to bring peace**
- **Arrows- strength to bring war**



North American Bison - national mammal as of 2016

- The bison, like the bald eagle, has been a symbol of America for its **strength, endurance, dignity, and healthy landscapes and communities** reflecting the pioneer spirit of our country.
- For thousands of years, Native Americans hunted bison and relied heavily upon them for their survival. Every part of the bison was used for some purpose; nothing ever went to waste. This mammal not only provided food, but also clothing and shelter. Their bones and horns were also made into tools. For many tribes, the bison was and still is central to their way of life.
- More on the Great Buffalo Slaughter (content dependent on understanding levels) - <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/great-american-buffalo-slaughter>



Liberty Bell- opened as a bell tower in 1752

- Symbolizes **loud pride in the new nation**
- Bears a timeless message: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof"
- Abolitionists, women's suffrage advocates and Civil Rights leaders took inspiration from the inscription on this bell.



Statue Of Liberty – unveiled in 1886

- Symbolizes **freedom, abolition, enlightenment, welcome**
- A torch represents **progress**. Rather than promoting violence or chaos, he wanted to give Lady Liberty a **peaceful** appearance.
- The rays of her crown represent a halo (or aureole). They radiate forward like the sun — another way in which Lady Liberty enlightens the world. It's not a random number either. There are seven rays on the crown, to represent both the seven continents and the seven seas of the world.
- Lady Liberty's feet are surrounded by a broken shackle and chains. It shows her as a goddess free from oppression and servitude, very much reflecting the recent abolition of slavery in the country at the time of her opening.



National Flower Rose - designated as the official flower and floral emblem of the United States of America in 1986.

- The rose is a symbol of love, beauty, war, and politics all over the world.
- The rose grows naturally throughout North America, blooming in several colors, including red, pink, white, or yellow, and can have a wonderfully rich aroma.



Ask students, what is their favorite symbol and why? After this lesson, what other American Symbols can they think of? Why do you think symbols are so important for people?

During Visit Activity

Ask students to assign these symbols to the documents on display at the Peoria Riverfront Museum. Each document represents something like the symbols previously outlined. See if you can find any of these symbols in the gallery (not every document is just words).

Post Visit Activity

Ask students to assign positive ideas and values (like strength, beauty, friendship) to themselves and their lives. What images could they assign symbolism to? Prompt students to make and draw a symbol of their life by showing one of their own.

For example, the Peoria Riverfront Museum Engagement Team is committed to the education and inspiration of every guest. Our symbol could be a wise owl, or a bright light bulb.