

A Flag for Your Planet

Activity M9

Grade Level: 5–12



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What’s This Activity About?

If one day humans land on other worlds in our solar system, they are likely to carry traditions from Earth with them, including the idea of a local flag or anthem. In this activity, students apply their knowledge of other planets and moons and think of flags or anthems for them. If they spend a little time learning about flags on Earth before they do this activity, this is a natural link with classes in geography and history.

What Will Students Do?

Students, depending on their ages, can draw or construct a flag for a particular world, and can be asked to incorporate their astronomical knowledge of the world they are given into the flag. An extension encourage them to come up with an anthem for their world.

Tips and Suggestions

- Many students are not well versed in the flags of other countries and thus it helps to have some colorful reference books or a computer with web resources at hands. The last page of the activity gives suggestions.
- If you are going to use this activity as an art project, it’s useful to get a wide range of materials, paper, cardboard, cloth, buttons, ribbons, foil, colored tape, etc., so students can be as creative as possible.

What Will Students Learn?

Concepts

- Other planets in the solar system
- Other worlds have other conditions

Inquiry Skills

- Imagining
- Comparing
- Organizing
- Communicating

Big Ideas

- Diversity
- Interdisciplinary approaches

A Flag for Your Planet

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Someday, when people have begun to live on other planets or their moons, these worlds might develop their own flags. In this activity, your task is to design a flag for another world. You can draw the flag with colored markers or make a construction, using the materials that are available at your table.

There are no set rules for how to design your flag. The flag might remind people of the world it represents or highlight some of its most spectacular features. (For example, Mars has some of the tallest most spectacular volcanoes in the solar system, while colonies on Saturn's moons could have great views of the planet's spectacular ring system.)

Think about what color the flag background and symbols should be. Do you want the colors to be connected with the color of your world, such as rusty red for Mars or a rocky grey for the Moon? If they are available, look at a book of flags or an almanac with flags in it for some examples of flags of different countries or states on Earth. (See the resources page at the end for suggestions.)

If you picked a world with no solid surface to stand on (such as Jupiter or Neptune), you might discuss how you will display your flag? Is a flag without a flagpole OK? What would be some ways to show the flag that don't involve having solid ground?

Further Activities

1. An Anthem for Your Planet

Now that your world has a flag, doesn't it need an anthem? An anthem is the official song, something that tells the universe why your world is special. If you or your group are musical, or just like to make up songs, try your hand at making words and even perhaps music for your world's special anthem.

A web site with anthems for different countries is: <http://www.national-anthems.net> (also see: <http://www.national-anthems.info>) For an example of a "rap song" about the planets, written by a professional astronomer (but not a threat to any real rap artists) see: <http://www.astro.umass.edu/~arny/rap.html>

2. Who Will Own the Moon or the Planets?

In the old days, when explorers planted a flag, they were usually claiming the territory for the country they represented. Sometimes wars were fought when two or more countries wanted the same desirable territory.

Do we want the same thing to happen when we explore the Moon, or the planets and their satellites? Or are we ready to regard these other worlds as the territory of all humanity?

In 1967, the U.S. and many other countries put together the Outer Space Treaty, which says "...outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or other occupation, or by any other means." This means that no country can claim another world for itself. 96 countries have officially ratified this treaty and 27 others have signed it.

How do the students or program participants feel about this? Suppose that one of your grandchildren or great grandchildren gets to go to another world that has a surface to stand on (not all the planets have solid surfaces). Should they be able to own land there, just as people can own land on Earth? Or should these other planets be jointly owned by all of humanity? These are interesting topics to think about as we move into the second century of the space age.

Resources for Flags

Some Books on Flags

Znamierowski, Alfred: *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*. 2010, Southwater.

Smithsonian Handbooks: Complete Flags of the World, 5th ed. 2008, Dorling Kindersley.

The Firefly Guide to the Flags of the World. 2003, Firefly Books.

Bednar, Silvie *Flags of the World*. 2009, Abrams. A book for ages 9–12.

Web Sites

Flags of the World: <http://www.fotw.net/flags/>

An amazing site with more than 9100 pages about flags and more than 16,400 images of flags, maintained by dedicated volunteers interested in “vexillology”, the study of flags.

The Flag Detective: <http://www.flags.av.org/flags/>

This site allows you to figure out an unknown flag by the elements of its design. It’s also great as a way of learning about the different elements that go into flags.

World Flags Database: <http://www.flags.net/>

A nice basic site in which each country’s flags are accompanied by information about that country.

Quinn Flags and Banners: <http://www.quinnflags.com/>

Big commercial site selling flags from all over the world. Has illustrations of many different types of flags, from countries, states, military organizations, religious groups, sports, etc.

Suggestion for a Mars Flag:

<http://www.astrosociety.org/education/publications/tnl/66/flag.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Mars

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