



Words of Patriotism: The Pledge of Allegiance

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Introduction

As I walk past the outside of schools, police stations, fire stations, courthouses, national monuments, state parks, and many other buildings in America there is a common symbol waving through the air in front of each one: an American flag. What exactly does this flag represent? Millions of school children each day place their right hand over their heart, look at a flag with pride in their eyes, and in unison they begin saying the words, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America...” Staring at the flag and learning the words of the Pledge of Allegiance has been a tradition for American school children dating back as early as 1892.

For students at my school, however, this is not a daily tradition. As the school bell rings, my students scatter through the halls making their way to their classrooms to instantly begin instruction. No morning announcements, no recitation of the pledge of allegiance. As we prepared for Memorial Day, I asked the students how they celebrate the day. One student raised his hand and said, “We usually barbecue at my house, but why do we see so many flags on that day? Are the flags shown to let us know it is a holiday?” As I began to explain to him why we see flags on Memorial Day and the importance of the flag, I made reference to the Pledge of Allegiance. “The Pledge of Allegiance, what’s that?” he asked. My mind began to wonder. How could I have been with these students all year and not known the majority of them had no clue what the pledge of allegiance was? I could also assume they did not know the meaning of the words. They were not aware of the meaning of the flag. They were clueless about these patriotic symbols. As a school we had failed to teach them these concepts.

I have taught at Randolph Elementary School for six years and will continue in the fall. I am currently a first grade general education teacher. During the course of a day I give my students instruction in the areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. I usually have between twenty-eight and thirty-two students in my classroom. Randolph is located on the south side of Chicago in the Englewood community. As a Literature and Writing Academy, Randolph offers a comprehensive gifted program to students in Grades 1-3. We use Guided Reading to ensure that all students receive differentiated instruction in Reading. Randolph students have daily access to our 3 mobile Internet labs, our newly added classroom lab and iPads.

We have 500 students in grades K-8. Over 98% of our students qualify for free/reduced lunch. Students who receive free/reduced meals are provided breakfast and lunch. If those students participate in after school

programming, they are also given a snack after school. 95% of our student population is African American and 4.6% of the students are of Hispanic descent. We have a substantial number of families who are displaced, residing with family members, friends, or in shelters. The school is located in a high crime area. Englewood is ranked 4th among Chicago's 77 community areas for violent crime reports.

Rationale

Within my classroom every year I have noticed that the students have become consumed with the issues they face in their everyday lives such as gang violence, single parent homes, and living in poverty. Things like the Pledge of Allegiance and the rights of citizens have gone unnoticed. Because of the separation of the Church and State my school no longer requires students to say the Pledge of Allegiance, even though the words "under God" are a very small part of the pledge. Most of the students come from homes where their parents do not see the value in exercising their right to vote and have a sense of hopelessness. Often times when speaking to my students, I have heard them say we do not have any rights and nobody cares about us in Englewood. I want my students to learn they are all citizens and play an important role in the world and their community.

In order to teach students these lessons I plan to use the Pledge of Allegiance as the framework for my unit. The words of the pledge lend themselves to views of what it means to be patriotic. As a class we will dissect the words to determine what those written words mean to us. We will pay close attention to the words *pledge*, *flag*, *oneration*, *liberty*, and *justice*. The students will learn to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and the meaning behind it. The flag is a very important United States symbol. The students will learn what it represents and why it is important. Based on the population of students I serve, I believe the words "liberty and justice for all" from the Pledge of Allegiance are especially important. I believe these words can help the students to know regardless of their socioeconomic status, they are still Americans and have rights. I want the student to embody the respect that resonates throughout the pledge. I want them to learn to have respect for their country (patriotism), respect for themselves and others (citizenship), and respect for rules (laws).

It is very important that character education is established in the primary years. Self-respect is crucial. When students learn to love and respect themselves they can emulate that same behavior in their relationships with other people. I want my students to know that as citizens, they play an important role in this world. I want them to learn they are responsible for their behavior. I want them to learn how they are supposed to carry themselves on a daily basis to be productive and good citizens. Part of being productive citizens is following rules. At the beginning of the school year, teachers often establish classroom rules. Rules are like laws in the classroom. I want the students to learn to have respect for these rules and laws. We will explore how respect rules/laws keep us safe.

In first grade students grow a lot as writers. Children are often very conversational, but their views are not always effectively demonstrated through their writing. Throughout this unit I want the students to write narrative and informational pieces. I want them to create a class flag and write to explain why certain symbols were placed on the flag. They will write a set of rules to govern our classroom and at the end of the unit I want them to write a classroom pledge.

I have Big Ideas and Essential Questions that are focused on citizenship, character, and patriotism. The two

Big Ideas are: We are all citizens and social skills are necessary to be successful citizens. The Essential Questions are: Why do we have rules? How do rules keep us safe? What does it mean to be a citizen? How can we show we are good citizens? As a citizen how can my devotion to my state and country be demonstrated? What symbols are important? We will refer back to these throughout the unit. During the unit, students will have opportunities to both speak and write to show their understanding of these ideas. This unit is taught through the use of literary and informational text on the topic. To analyze their level of understanding students will be required to write both informational and literary pieces in response to the content they are learning.

Content Objectives

I Pledge Allegiance

From the first words of the Pledge of Allegiance we understand that we are charged with two things. We are asked to promise and give our loyalty to our country. In August 1892 Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister from upstate New York, wrote the Pledge of Allegiance. The pledge was originally published in *The Youth's Companion*, a family magazine with half a million subscribers, on September 8, 1892. Bellamy began working at Youth Companion in 1891 when Daniel S. Ford, principal owner and editor, hired him. As part of Bellamy's duties in the promotions department, he worked on arranging a patriotic program for schools to assist with the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival to land that we now call the United States of America. A very important part of the program was a salute to the flag for school children to recite together. On October 21, 1892 school children celebrated Columbus Day and for the first time the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.¹ In its original form the words of the pledge were:

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Bellamy wrote the pledge with hopes that citizens in any country could use it, but the pledge has since changed twice. In 1923, the words, "the Flag of the United States of America" were added. This was added so immigrant children would be clear as to which flag they were saluting. At this time it read:

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

In 1954, in response to the Communist threat of the times, President Eisenhower encouraged Congress to add the words "under God," creating the 31-word pledge we say today. Bellamy's daughter objected to this alteration. She knew it was not her father's intent to make it a religious document. Today it reads:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." ²

To the Flag of the United States of America

One of the most common symbols seen throughout the United States is the American flag. It is a symbol of pride and motivation for millions of citizens. It represents freedom and someone's ability to speak up for the

things they believe in. It embodies the strength and courage of American citizens. We look at the flag with respect and visions of our past and hopes for our future. "The Star Spangled Banner," America's national anthem, was written in dedication to the flag. While the flag is flown during times of joy and excitement like sporting events, it is also displayed during solemn moments. Flags are often flown at half-staff or half-mast in memory of those who have died. American explorers plant flags at their destinations as a sign that they have been there. The American flag is one of the first United States symbols many children encounter. In 1923 a National Flag Conference was held in Washington, D.C. During the conference provisions recognized that the flag 'represents a living country and it is itself considered a living thing.' These provisions became part of the Flag code, which was a federal resolution in 1947.³

The origins of the American flag still remain a mystery. The designer is believed to have been Francis Hopkinson, a congressman, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Betsy Ross sewed one of the earliest versions of the flag for the Pennsylvania Navy in 1777, but it is still a mystery who made the very first flag. There have been many variations in the physical appearance of the flag. In the early years of the flag there were no guidelines about how the stars, stripes, or the blue field on the flag should be arranged which led to flags that were not proportional.

Each year on June 14 we celebrate Flag Day. On June 14, 1777, the Second Continental Congress passed its Flag resolution intended to establish a design of an ensign to be used on boats during the Revolutionary War: 'Resolved: that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.'" ⁴ Throughout the years there have been several orders pertaining to the flag. On June 24, 1912 the Executive Order of President Taft established proportions of the flag and provided for arrangement of the stars in six horizontal rows of eight each, a single point of each star to be upward. The executive orders of President Eisenhower provided for the arrangement of the stars in seven rows of seven stars each, staggered horizontally and vertically (January 1959) and provided for the arrangement of the stars in nine rows of stars staggered horizontally and eleven rows of stars staggered vertically (August 1959). ⁵

The flag we pay homage to today consists of fifty stars and thirteen stripes. The thirteen horizontal stripes alternate between seven red stripes and six white stripes. The thirteen original colonies are represented through the stripes. The flag also hosts fifty stars. The stars represent the fifty states. A resolution regarding the Great Seal of the United States defined the meanings of the country's colors several years after the flag was designed. Red stands for hardiness and courage, white for purity and innocence, and blue for vigilance, perseverance, and justice.⁶

And to the Republic for which it stands

What stands for the republic, besides the flag? In the United States of America, symbols represent the republic. They are visual representations of the ideals we believe in. Symbols often remind us our bond as citizens. They remind us our strength and our freedom. The bald eagle, the liberty bell, and the statue of liberty are three well-known symbols.

The Bald Eagle

The bald eagle is our national bird. The bald eagle was first introduced to the nation on the great seal. A resolution from the July 4, 1776 meeting, which declared America independent, called for a seal for the United States of America. They wanted an image for the people of the nation that represented freedom and their

hopes for the future. 14 men worked on the seal. It was the idea of William Barton to add an eagle to the seal. The original eagle was an Imperial eagle. Charles Thomson, secretary of congress in 1782, put emphasis on the eagle and wanted the seal to be completely American. He replaced the Imperial eagle, which is found in Europe and Asia, with the Native American bald eagle. ⁷

The bald eagle is the only eagle that is indigenous to North America. Bald eagles are usually found along the coast. Bald eagles are not bald. The word bald refers to the white head on the eagle. The feathers that cover the top of their heads are white. Their chest and backs are a dark brown color. The neck, tail, and hand are white while the beak is yellow. Bald eagles live between fifteen and twenty years. They weigh ten to fourteen pounds. Bald eagles are at the top of the food chain.

So why exactly was the bald eagle chosen as the national bird? Is it because of its strength? Author Maude Grant said, "It is said the eagle was used as a national emblem because, at one of the first battles of the Revolution the noise of the struggle awoke the sleeping eagles on the heights and they flew from their nests and circled about over the heads of the fighting men, all the while giving vent to their raucous cries. 'They are shrieking for Freedom,' said the patriots. Thus the eagle, full of the boundless spirit of freedom, living above the valleys, strong and powerful in his might, has become the national emblem of a country that offers freedom in word and thought and an opportunity for a full and free expansion into the boundless space of the future." ⁸ On June 20, 1782, the bald eagle became the national emblem of the United States.

The Liberty Bell

In the heart of Philadelphia in Independence Square sits a bell that you cannot ring and you cannot touch. It is the Liberty Bell. The Liberty Bell is a symbol of freedom. We know bells are often rung to make important announcements or to get someone's attention. The Liberty bell is a reminder of the hard fight America went through to be free. It was originally located at the top of the State House, which is where the Declaration of Independence was first discussed. On the day the Declaration of Independence was read bells rang throughout the thirteen colonies informing people of the news.

Statue of Liberty

The statue of liberty is a symbol of freedom for Americans and immigrants. It was a gift from France to commemorate the Declaration of Independence. Historian Edouard Rene Lefebvre suggested that a monument should be donated to celebrate America's Independence Centennial in 1876. It is also a symbol of friendship between France and America. Bedloe Island was chosen as the destination for the statue because it was adjacent to Ellis Island. Ellis Island is where immigrants were processed prior to being granted access to the United States. On October 28, 1886 there was an inauguration ceremony for the Statue of Liberty.⁹

One Nation under God indivisible

In the famous words of Abraham Lincoln, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." These words were written in his House Divided Speech delivered on June 16, 1858. He wrote this speech during a time when congress was divided in their opinions as to whether or not slaves should be free. During the civil war the nation was divided into southern states that believed we should keep slavery and northern states that believed slavery should be abolished. These divided thoughts led to fighting within the nation.

The notion of being one nation speaks to the unity we were supposed to have. The word indivisible means nothing and no one should be able to break us apart. In order for the United States of America to be

prosperous as a country we need to be united. Individuals, communities, businesses, and government need to work together for us to build a united nation. We need to respect one another, listen to each other, help one another, follow directions, and be responsible. One nation is defined as a country where everyone plays his part: “A country where everyone has a stake; a country where prosperity is fairly shared; where we have a shared destiny, a sense of shared endeavor and a common life that we lead together.”¹⁰ All of these traits make us good citizens or members of the various communities we belong to. As citizens we are bonded by our commitment to the United States.

With liberty and

Fireworks, parades, and a sea of flags waving through the air are all signs commonly seen during a fourth of July celebration. What exactly are we celebrating on that day? On that day we celebrate our liberty. We celebrate the United States being free from the British government. On July 4, 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. While many of us cannot recite the entire document, a very well known part states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Americans felt as if it was time for them to fix the mistakes in British society. They felt it was time to create a new government that was “free of kings and hereditary rule, governments in which all officials owed their power to popular choice.² British colonists living in Boston felt as if the British parliament and its king were taking away their freedom with some of its acts. The Sugar Act (sugar tax), Stamp Act (paper tax), Tea Act (tea tax), and the Townsend Act (paper tax) put taxes on things that Americans used every day. American colonists did not agree with the tax. They had not voted for these taxes nor had they voted for the government officials who enforced the taxes. This was taxation without representation. They wanted to be involved in the process of electing lawmakers, but that was only an option given for people who lived in Britain. This led to the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

While the war was still in progress, the delegates decided they had had enough. They decided they wanted their independence. They began working on the Declaration of Independence in June of 1776. Once congress approved the declaration, the British were forced to leave.

“Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” describe the rights that all people have in common. The rights of a person were not determined by their socioeconomic status. God gave the same rights to all people and part of these rights was the right to live free. Citizens should expect these rights regardless of government giving it to them.

Justice for all

The last three words of the Pledge of Allegiance are justice for all. Another mention of the word justice is in the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States. The preamble says, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Five men wrote the Preamble during the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. The Preamble sets the tone for the Constitution. The words of the preamble have a lot of meaning.

I believe the Preamble begins with “we the people” as a way of showing unity from the beginning. The word “people” makes it a document about individuals and not the states. It goes on to say, “establish justice.” The

word “establish” hints at the idea that there was previously no justice or not enough justice. Justice means fairness. The preamble lets us know that the Constitution sought to establish fairness for everyone. Justice could be achieved through the implementation of laws. The Constitution of the United States is the highest law of the nation.

Victor Hanson, a writer for the National Review, said, “America is a great, evolving experiment of a constitutional republic in which people of all races, religions, and ethnic backgrounds are equal under the law and see themselves as Americans first and member of their tribes second.” I believe this means in America regardless of whether or not someone was born in the United States, regardless of what they physically look like, or what higher power they believe in, our first priority is to our country and that is what unites us and makes us equal. Laws create equality within the United States. Fair and safe environments are created through the use of laws. Laws are guidelines telling us how we are supposed to carry ourselves. Laws are necessary. Without laws society could possibly be full of chaos and confusion. They regulate society and assist with upkeep of the nation.

Teaching Strategies

This unit is based primarily on the pairing of fiction and non-fiction. For example when teaching concepts of the Declaration of Independence, I will pair *Life, liberty, and the pursuit of Jellybeans: A fourth of July Story* by Heather French Henry with *Give me Liberty: The Story of the Declaration of Independence* by Russell Freedman. I will provide my students with an assortment of both types of text for engagement. I want students to learn to have an appreciation for both. I will introduce each topic with the use of a literary text to stimulate engagement and possible connections. After using the literary text, I will then use the informational text to teach the concept. At the first grade level students are required to be able to differentiate between fiction and non-fiction without the assistance of a teacher. In addition to that, I also would like for my students to learn to find their similarities. At the first grade level I know a lot of my students will be emergent readers. Because of this it is important that I have text at various ability levels accessible for them. I need to give careful consideration to both the materials and the strategies I use throughout this unit.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are a way to organize thoughts or new learning in a visual way. I plan to use a K-W-L chart at the beginning of the unit. The K-W-L will allow me to give the students a quick assessment at the beginning of the unit to see what they know. I can also use the chart to find out what they want to learn from the unit and lastly we will revisit the chart at the end to analyze what they learned. I am going to use a Venn diagram. Venn diagrams are used to compare things. I plan to use it compare the two types of text as well various books on the same topic. I have often felt as if Venn diagrams were difficult for the students to use because of the space. I plan to use hula-hoops to create Venn diagrams that are much larger and more accessible for the students. I will also use T-charts for comparisons.

Mini Lesson

A mini lesson is a 10-15 minute lesson. During balanced literacy this is the time spent delivering direct instruction to the students. Even though the mini lesson is short in length it is full of engagement. My school

uses an “I do, we do, you do” model. The “I do” is where the teacher is giving instruction or providing the background knowledge. The “we do” is where the teacher and students often collaborate. The “you do” is when the students work independently. This method follows the idea of a gradual release of responsibility. I think these mini lessons are extremely useful at the primary level because it does not require the student to work on one thing for too long. I have found that this method allows my students to stay focused and on task.

Read Aloud

Read alouds are essential to my unit. They will be performed on a daily basis. Read alouds are a way for me to not only model what fluent reading sounds like, but it also gives students access to the content orally. Read alouds in my classroom are done two ways. One way is I have a copy of the book I am reading from and I stop to show the students the pictures along the way. The second way I carry out a read aloud in my classroom is by projecting the book on the smart board so the students can follow along with the text and see the pictures as I read. During a read aloud I usually stop to ask the students questions and allow them to ask any questions they may have.

Shared Writing

Shared writing is a type of collaborative writing between the teacher and the students. The students assist me with a piece of writing that is visible to everyone. Even though I encourage independent writing, shared writing allows us to have conversations about the writing from beginning to end. This gives the students an opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts in a non-threatening environment. As I stated in my rationale, first grade students are very conversational and are emergent writers. Through shared writing we can take those conversations and transform them into written documents. Usually at the end of a shared writing experience, we have a shared reading activity, in which we chorally read what we have written.

Classroom Activities

Classroom flag

After learning about the American Flag students will create their own classroom flag. The students will determine the colors the flag will be as well as what symbol or symbols will be placed on the flag. Once the flag is designed, students will write a paper describing in detail why they decided on this specific design.

Symbol Search

Even though in the unit I am extensively covering the American flag, the bald eagle, the statue of liberty, and the liberty bell the students will also complete a parent/ student project in which they will pick another U.S. Symbol to research for example the White House, Washington Monument, or Lincoln Memorial. Students will be asked to give a picture of the symbols, tell why the symbol is important, and give 5 interesting facts about the symbols. Students will present projects to the class.

Classroom Pledge

At the conclusion of the unit, the students will write a classroom pledge. They will create a promise to

themselves and myself outlining the things they plan to do throughout the school year. Each student will individually write a pledge to share with the class. As a class we will take the ideas we value most to create the classroom pledge. We will then begin to recite the classroom pledge at the start of the school.

District Standards

My unit is based primarily on a social studies standard. Illinois state goal 14.C.1 states that students should be able to identify concepts of responsible citizenship including respect for the law, patriotism, civility, and working with others. I will use language arts Common Core State Standards to teach these concepts. I have included standards for reading literature, reading informational text, writing, and speaking.

RL.2 Retell stories including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

RL.1.4 Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

RI.1.4 Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.

RI.1.2 Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

W.1.2 Write informative/ explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

W.1.3 Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

SL.1.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and large groups. A. Follow agreed upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion) B. Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges. C. Ask questions to clear up and any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion.

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Student Resources

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Notes

1. Jeffrey Owen Jones. "The Man Who Wrote the Pledge of Allegiance." *Smithsonian Magazine* (2003).
2. Ibid, 11.
3. *The American Flag: A Handbook of History & Etiquette* (Carlisle, Mass: Applewood Books, 2013): 32.
4. Ibid, page.
5. www.usflag.org (Accessed June 11, 2015).
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