

***What do America's symbols and holidays say about who we are—and what we honor?***

Students curate the Museum of American Symbols: they watch the Citizenship 101 episode “American Symbols & Holidays,” then tour the collection by matching the flag, the anthem, the Statue of Liberty, and the major holidays to their meanings (Level 1), decode the flag’s design and close-read Francis Scott Key’s 1814 verse (Level 2), sit on the Holiday Committee to accept, reject, or revise proposed federal holidays against the standard real ones embody (Level 3), and design the museum’s newest exhibit—an original symbol whose every element, like the flag’s, must mean something (Level 4)—climbing from recall to creation as they rise through the ranks.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Identify the meaning of the flag’s stripes, stars, and colors, the name and origin of the national anthem, the Statue of Liberty, and the major federal holidays, as tested on the official U.S. naturalization exam.
- Analyze the flag’s design and a primary source—the first verse of “The Star-Spangled Banner” (1814)—explaining what each color stands for, why Americans pledge to the flag itself, and how Key’s imagery connects to Fort McHenry.
- Evaluate proposed federal holidays against the standard real ones embody—commemorating what shaped the nation, or honoring those who served it—and distinguish Memorial Day from Veterans Day: those who died in service versus all who have served.
- Create an original symbol for an American value, with a placard explaining the meaning of every design element.

**Key Vocabulary:**

- **Symbol:** An object or design that stands for something greater than itself—as the flag stands for the country’s history and values.
- **Pledge of Allegiance:** The vow recited “to the flag of the United States of America”—a pledge to the flag because the flag represents all that the country stands for.
- **The Star-Spangled Banner:** The national anthem, named for the flag Francis Scott Key saw “spangled”—glittering—in the sunlight after a night of bombardment.
- **Fort McHenry:** The fort the British bombarded through the night during the War of 1812; the flag still flying at dawn inspired the anthem.
- **The Statue of Liberty:** The immense copper statue on Liberty Island in New York Harbor—a “gift of friendship” from the people of France, completed in 1886, greeting millions of seafaring immigrants.
- **Federal holiday:** A public holiday recognized by the United States government—more than a date on a calendar, a carrier of the nation’s memory.
- **Memorial Day:** Honors the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military.
- **Veterans Day:** Originally Armistice Day—honors all who have served in the military, whether or not they died while serving.



**Educational Standards:** CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.9, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.L.6

**Academic Subject Areas:** Civics, U.S. History, Language Arts

## What You'll Need

- Video: *Citizenship 101: "American Symbols & Holidays"* ([Watch Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Citizenship 101: American Symbols & Holidays* (Click [Here](#))
- Supplies: Paper, pencils, colored pencils if available, whiteboard or projector; optional: a dollar bill for the motto hunt and a recording of the national anthem

## Lesson Plan (45–55 minutes)

### Warm Up: Why Pledge to a Flag? (5–7 minutes)

- Open with the puzzle: *Every morning, millions of Americans pledge allegiance "to the flag." Why pledge to a piece of cloth?* Collect ideas on the board without settling it—the episode will.
- Follow with three rapid-fire questions students jot silently: *Why does the flag have 13 stripes? What is the name of the national anthem? What is Independence Day?*
- Reveal: All three are real questions from the U.S. naturalization test.
- Deliver the twist: "The Museum of American Symbols just hired you as curator. The collection is in your hands—and the new exhibit opens at the end of class."

### Curator Orientation: Watch and Tour the Collection (9–12 minutes)

- Distribute the worksheet (one per student). Preview **Level 1 | Gallery Guide**: students complete the Level 1 matching activity as they watch the "American Symbols & Holidays" video. Every item is covered directly in the episode.
- **Curator's briefing (direct instruction, 2 minutes)**: Before pressing play, frame the idea. Symbols are coded messages: nothing on the flag is decoration—every stripe, star, and color means something. And holidays are more than dates on a calendar: they are how a nation remembers. Ask students to watch for the following in the episode:
  - What the stripes, the stars, and each color of the flag stand for.
  - The night at Fort McHenry that gave America its anthem—and what "spangled" means.
  - The gift from France, and where it stands.
  - Which holidays honor whom—especially the difference between Memorial Day and Veterans Day.
- Watch *Citizenship 101: "American Symbols & Holidays"* (4 minutes, 30 seconds).
- Give students 1–2 minutes to finish the matching with a partner, then quickly check the letters as a class—a guide who mislabels the collection doesn't keep the job.

### Conservation Lab: Decode the Flag, Restore the Anthem (10–12 minutes)

- Students move to **Level 2 | Conservator**: the flag decoder (the three colors, plus *why we pledge to the flag itself*), then the primary source—the full first verse of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (1814)—with three annotation tasks.

- **Read it aloud first.** Before anyone annotates, read the verse aloud as a class (or play a recording). Students have sung these words for years; today they read them as a *document*—written at dawn by a man who had watched the bombardment all night.
- **Key idea to surface:** the anthem’s “proof” is the whole point—the flag still flying meant the fort, and the young nation, had survived. Key wasn’t describing a flag; he was describing American resilience.

### **The Holiday Committee: Accept, Reject, or Revise** (8–10 minutes)

- Students advance to **Level 3 | Holiday Committee:** three proposed federal holidays to rule on—one absurd, one plausible, one deliberately borderline—plus the visitor who insists Memorial Day and Veterans Day “are the same thing.”
- **Require the standard.** Every ruling must cite the criterion the real holidays embody: commemorating events and figures that shaped the nation, or honoring those who served it. “Ice cream is fun” and “the moon landing is cool” are not rulings; grade the reasoning, not the verdict—the borderline proposal is *designed* to split the committee.
- **Watch for the trap.** The Memorial Day/Veterans Day distinction is a genuine citizenship-test discriminator: died in service versus all who served. Insist on the precise difference.
- **Optional live version (if time allows):** run the committee as a hearing—one student presents each proposal, the class votes, and dissenters must cite the standard.

### **The New Exhibit: Chief Curator** (8–10 minutes)

- Students complete **Level 4 | Chief Curator:** decode-to-encode. Having decoded the flag, they design an original symbol for an American value and write its placard—every design element must carry meaning, exactly as every stripe, star, and color does.
- **Hang the gallery.** Post the finished exhibits (or have two or three curators present theirs) and let classmates try to *decode* each symbol before the placard is read—if the design communicates, the decoding works.
- **Teacher tip: two extensions** for early finishers or a second day. (1) **The motto hunt**—around a dollar bill: find “In God We Trust” and, on the Great Seal, the nation’s first motto—“E Pluribus Unum,” out of many, one—and ask what a nation says about itself by printing its beliefs on its money. (2) **Hear the document**—play the anthem; students raise a hand at their underlined “proof” line. They will never hear the song the same way.

### **Wrap Up** (3–5 minutes)

- Return to the warm-up puzzle: *So, why do we pledge to a flag?* Answers should now come back precisely: because the flag represents all that the country stands for—its history and its values of liberty and justice for all.
- Exit ticket (spoken or written): What do the 13 stripes and 50 stars represent—and what is the difference between Memorial Day and Veterans Day?
- **Success criteria:** A strong response names the original 13 colonies and the 50 states and distinguishes those who died in service (Memorial Day) from all who have served (Veterans Day).
- Collect worksheets as a formative assessment, or have students keep them as part of a citizenship-test study guide if you plan to use other episodes in the series.

### **Don't have time for a full lesson? Quick Activity (25–30 minutes)**

Hand out the worksheet and play the episode—the worksheet's "mission brief" gives students everything they need with no setup. Students complete Level 1 while watching and Levels 2–3 after; assign the Level 4 | Chief Curator exhibit as homework. Check answers against the answer key. (The worksheet is written directly to students as a mission, so it works handed out with the video alone—no lesson plan required.)