

Betsy Ross

The Facts...

Born: **JANUARY 1, 1752** to Samuel and Rebecca Griscom.

Elizabeth "Betsy" Griscom was raised as a Quaker; she would have worn the plain dress and spoken the plain speech (thee and thou instead of "you") typical of the Quakers of that time. Betsy was said to excel in sewing.

Married: **NOVEMBER 4, 1773** to John Ross when she was 21 years old.

John Ross was not a Quaker; therefore records show that Betsy was "read out of meeting." In essence, her marriage to someone out of the Quaker faith was grounds to suspend her from practicing her religion. John and Betsy set up an upholstery shop on Arch Street.

Widowed: **JANUARY, 1776**

John Ross was killed in an explosion while guarding gunpowder for the war. Betsy continued in the upholstery shop. They had no children.

Marriages / Children:

Betsy Ross married twice after being widowed; to Joseph Ashburn in 1777 and after his death to John Claypoole in 1783. She had seven daughters.

Occupation:

Betsy **did** make flags. There is record of a payment to her on May 29, 1777 for "ship's colors." Her daughters joined her in the flag business and continued until the mid-1800's.

Death: **JANUARY 30, 1836** at the age of 84.

The Legend...

A tradition, passed through Betsy's children and grandchildren, claims that in June, 1776, less than a month before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the Widow Ross was visited by three men - Robert Morris, Colonel George Ross (her late husband's uncle), and General Washington. They presumably gave Betsy the design for a flag to be used by the Continental Army. Betsy made some suggestions on the design and then sewed it. The flag had thirteen stars set in a circle and thirteen stripes. Betsy Ross would have been 24 years old when she made the "first" flag.

"The Story of Our Flag"

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Before the Program

Talk About Legends...

What is a "legend"?

A story told from person to person over the passage of many years; usually the story is not written down until long after it is first recited.

Are legends true?

Legends are "half-truths," which means that some of the story is true, some of the story might be true, and some of the story probably is make-believe.

What "legends" do you know or have you read about?

Examples: George Washington and the cherry tree; Johnny Appleseed; John Henry; Robin Hood

Legends become "traditions" when they are accepted as truth by many people. The story of Betsy Ross and our flag is an American legend. There are many documented facts known about the real Betsy Ross, but the story of the "first" flag is a legend, an oral tradition passed down through the descendents of Betsy Ross. Is the legend true? Everybody must consider the evidence and decide for themselves. How much is make-believe and how much is fact?

Symbols...

What is a symbol? **(Something that stands for something else.)** Why are symbols important? Discuss symbols you know and use everyday. Create and draw your own symbols. **Listen closely as Betsy Ross explains the different symbols in our flag.**

Speech Patterns...

Even though we might speak the same language, do we all sound the same? What is a dialect? Does language change? **Do we use words today that weren't used 200 years ago? Did they use words that we no longer use today?** Find examples. Listen carefully to the language that Betsy Ross uses - what is different about it?

Vocabulary...

distinguished	waistcoat	honored	'tis; 'twas	tread
courteous	republic	constellation	Quaker	appeal
symbol	respect	patriot	crescent	grand
liberty	justice	indivisible	common	whole
legend	purity	pledge	resolved	angle
allegiance	resolution	priethee	represent	colonist

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After the Program

Language Arts...

Legends

Write your own legend. Choose a real person and make the person "bigger than life," or create a story that might have happened to them. Read about the other legends that surround our flag.

Patriotic Prose / Poetry

Write a short paragraph or poem on "What the flag means to me." Do an acrostic on the word "PATRIOTIC" or "SYMBOL" or "FLAG".

Creative Arts...

Drama

Create your own version of the making of the first flag, choosing the setting, characters, and situation. Or, dramatize Betsy Ross' meeting with Washington. Perform or read the play *A New Flag for a New Country* (see bibliography).

Music

Sing patriotic songs, or songs written about the flag.

Art

Research famous artwork that depicts Betsy's meeting with George Washington. Practice making five-pointed stars with only one scissor cut. Discuss the difference and similarities between kirigami and origami.

Social Studies...

Flags

Create your own flag. Decide what it will represent, choose your symbols, size and shapes. Or, **design a new American flag.** What do **you** think our flag should look like? What should our flag look like if more states are added? How could the design be changed? Research a flag from a different country or state, or a colonial flag, and try to discover why it looks the way it does (why the symbols were chosen).

Patriotism

What does it mean to be patriotic? Is it important? Is it necessary?

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Flag Vocabulary

Discuss / define the parts of the flag.

flag	"to fly in the wind"
canton	"the corner of a flag"
union	"the design that makes the flag come-together: in the American flag it is the stars in the blue field"
field	"background of a flag; everything except the canton"

Proper Flag Etiquette

Demonstrate proper flag etiquette (how to hold, fold, rules, etc).

History...

Biographies

Find out what part these men played in the American Revolution:

Robert Morris	George Washington
George Ross	Francis Hopkinson

Pledge of Allegiance

When was the pledge of allegiance written? Was it written all at one time?
Read and discuss "The American's Creed."

Science...

Constellations

The arrangement of stars on our flag was described by Congress as representing a "new constellation." What is a constellation? Discuss and show the different arrangements of stars in the sky. Create your own constellation of stars. Our flag's stars are white. Why is light white?

Rattlesnakes

Learn more about their habits. Are they a good symbol for the colonists?

Mathematics...

Proportions

Our flag is a very precise and specific size. Try to draw a proportionate flag, with the correct relationship of stripes and canton.

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Bibliography of Related Children's Books

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Flag Day, Dorothy Les Tina, Crowell Holiday Books, 1965.

Stars and Stripes: The Story of the American Flag, Mae Blacker Freeman, Random House.

Our National Symbols, Linda Carlson Johnson, Millbrook Press, 1992.

Flags of the World, Eve Devereux, Crescent Books, Random House, 1992.

State Flags, Sue R. Brandt, Franklin Watts, 1992.

Books for Older Students

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The American Flag, Thomas Parrish, Simon & Schuster.

The History of the United States Flag, Quaife, Weig & Appleman, Harper & Row