Design Your Own Family Flag

Flags of member nations flying at the United Nations Headquarters. 2005. UN Photo/Joao Araujo Pinto

What do you know about flags? According to https://www.kids-world-travel-guide.com/, people developed flags to signal that they belonged to a certain community, organization or country. A flag is used to show that members of a group share beliefs, goals, rules and regulations.

There are 195 countries in the world (54 countries are in Africa, 48 in Asia, 44 in Europe, 33 in Latin America and the Caribbean,14 in Oceania and 2 in North America) and every country has a flag of some sort. All but one (that of Nepal—see picture at right) are rectangular.

The art of designing flags is known as vexillography, and this week we will all be vexillographers! But instead of designing a flag for a country or a state, we will make one for ourselves or our family.

How old is the oldest flag? That's a little hard to answer as https://www.oldest.org/culture/flags/ explains that many flags do not have histories that are easy to trace. Several flags have symbols that are based on ancient legends. In addition, flags change over time as a country's history changes. A good example is the American flag, which in 1777 had 13 stripes and 13 stars to match its 13 colonies. When Hawaii joined the U.S. in 1960, it became the 50th state. Today's American flag still has 13 stripes to represent the original colonies, but it sports 50 stars in the box at the upper left.

(Left) "Betsy Ross" flag, 1777

(Right) Today's American flag, 1960

It should be noted that flags usually have just a few colors and not too much detail. This is so that they can be recognized easily from a distance. Many flags are symmetrical (meaning that each side mirrors the other) with a shape, symbol or illustration in the middle.

(Left) Canadian flag

(Right) Albanian flag

The Maryland state flag is divided into four repeating sections, while the Colorado state flag has a giant "C" just slightly off center.

(Left) Maryland flag

(Right) Colorado flag

Here are a few other interesting flags from around the world:

(Left) Flag of Wales

(Right) Flag of Seychelles

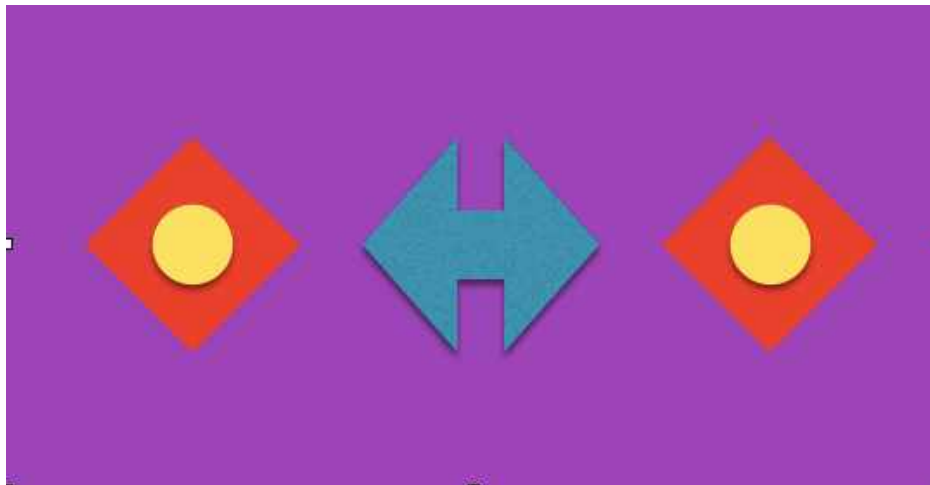(Left) Flag of Brazil

(Right) Flag of Kiribati

Making Your Own Flag

To create your own flag, think about what you want to show the world. Do you want your flag to include symbolic information about you, such as your birthday, number of brothers and sisters, pets, hobbies etc? Maybe you want to make more of a family flag that includes symbols for parents, other people who live in your house, and something about your community.

Keep in mind that most flags are rectangular and horizontal. This is because they are designed to hang from a pole and blow in the wind. But if you prefer, you could create a vertical rectangle, a large triangle or even an unusual shape.

You can divide your flag's space into stripes or sections. Think of which colors work well together. Do you want to have a lot of contrast? Colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel (reg and green, yellow and purple, or blue and orange) sizzle when placed next to each other.
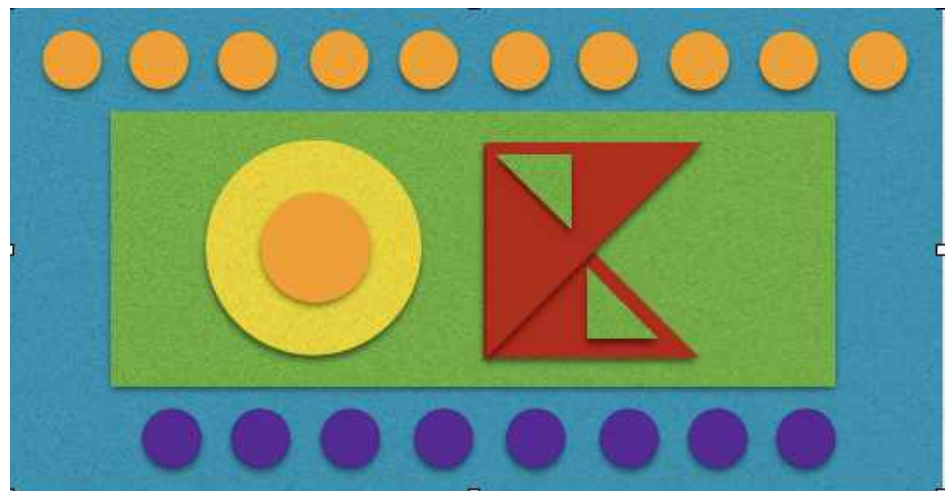
Here are a couple of homemade flag examples:

If this is your **family flag**, perhaps the red diamonds stand for your parents and the yellow circles stand for you and your sibling.

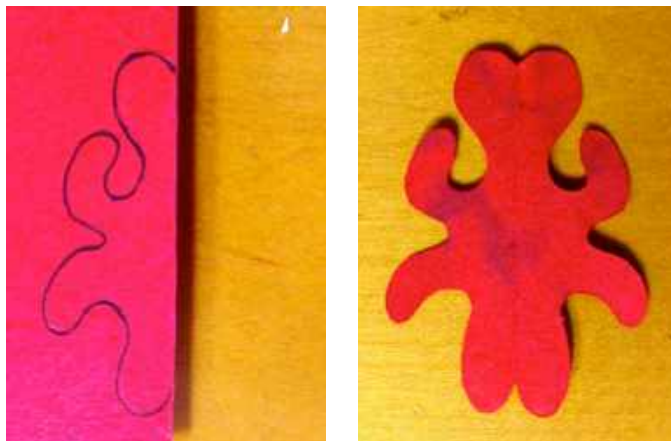The two-way arrow means that power is shared equally.

If this is your **personal flag**, perhaps you have hidden your birthday in the symbols: There are 10 orange circles at the top, so you were born on the 10th day of the month. There are 8 purple circles at the bottom, so you were born in the 8th month of the year, which is August. The two bigger circles to the left might stand for you and your sibling. The two red triangles stand for your two dogs and smaller green triangles might symbolize your two pet turtles.

Ways to make flags: Flags can be made on the computer or using construction paper and collaging shapes. If you want to use the computer, note that you do not need special design programs to create your flag. There are a variety of shapes and colors available in Pages and Word. You can layer shapes on top of one another and experiment with moving them around. The Arrange option in Pages and the Layout button in Word allow you to bring images forward or send them back.

You can also download shapes or images from the Internet to put on your flag. You can duplicate a chosen image to use it multiple times. You can also reverse images by flipping them horizontally if you want to show symbols going in opposite directions

Construction paper flags can be made using repeated images if you have shape punches, but if you don't you can trace around shapes to create multiples or cut out a shape from card stock that you trace over and over again. You may find it easier to create a flag using construction paper because you can move your shapes around to see where they look best before gluing them down. Hint: If you want a shape in the middle to be symmetrical, you can fold a piece of construction in half and draw half of the image up against the fold. Then cut on the lines and open your shape out for a perfect image. What might your invented symbol mean?
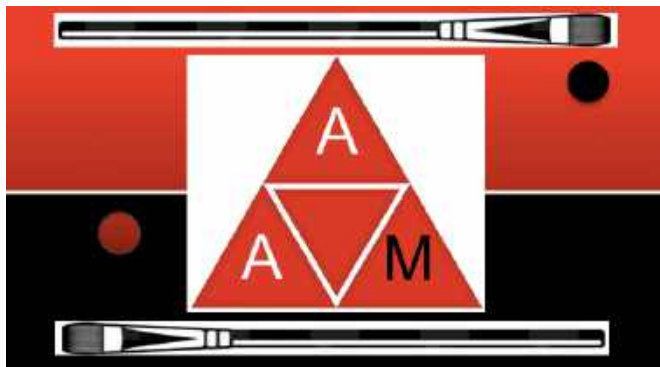
(Left) Drawing against folded paper

(Right) Paper cutout opened up

You will need construction paper, ruler, pencil, eraser, scissors, and glue stick for this project.

Optional: Shape punches, items to trace around

(Below) Personal Flag with first initial

(Above) What if the Academy Art Museum had its own flag?

If you want to share your original flag, please email a jpeg to cdelnero@academyartmuseum.org. We will post your entry to social media and send you some cool art supplies!