

Section Guide: Make Your Own Wagon Flag



Hey Teachers!

Thanks for making the Wyoming State Museum a part of your classroom! This guide will describe the activities in this section and how to use them with your students!

Introduction:

This section lets your students create a flag for their team's wagon. On the actual Oregon Trail, wagon flags were not very common – but many families found creative ways to identify their wagons. Some painted names, symbols, or slogans directly onto the canvas or wood of their wagons. These markings helped families stay together in large wagon trains and showed pride in their journey west.

Additionally, emigrant groups often traveled with others who shared similar backgrounds, beliefs, or goals. These might have been families hoping to start farms in Oregon, missionaries heading west to spread their faith, young men hoping to find gold in California, or Mormon pioneers traveling to Utah. These shared identities helped build community and mutual support on the trail.

In this activity, we simplify that idea into a wagon flag. Students will work together to design a visual symbol that represents who they are as a wagon team. This is a great opportunity to explore themes of identity, teamwork, and creative expression – while also connecting to the historical ways that emigrants built community and navigated the challenges of the trail.

Preparation:

If you are planning on doing the opinion writing activity for “Why Would You Travel West,” we recommend you do that activity first. You’ll also need to print the student worksheet for each of your students.

Make Your Own Wagon Flag

Activity:

Values Classroom Discussion:

Start with a class discussion about some things that people might think are important values: family, friends, adventure, honesty, love, loyalty, freedom, faith, kindness, determination, hard work, or many other values. You may also want to talk about why these values are important to people and our communities.

Symbolism Classroom Discussion or YouTube Video:

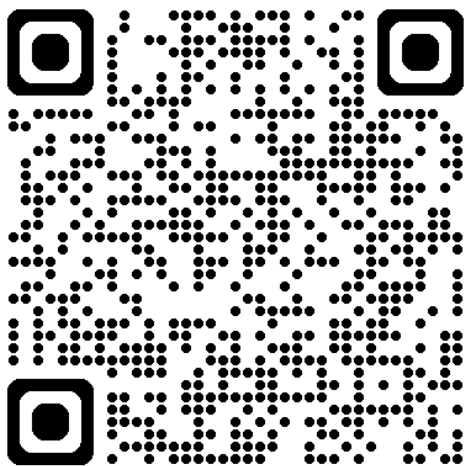
You also need to teach your students about symbolism. Most fourth-grade classes will have already learned about American Independence. You can use the current US flag as an example of symbolism. What do the 50 stars represent? What do the 13 stripes represent? What do the colors of red, white, and blue represent?

If you would rather let your students watch a three-minute, high-quality YouTube video about the symbolism of the US flag – we have that video on the museum’s website. The QR code at the bottom of this page will also take you there.

Make Your Own Wagon Flag Student Activity:

Afterwards, give each team (the museum recommends the same four-person teams that will be packing a wagon together) a piece of white printer paper, along with crayons or colored pencils. You should also give them the worksheet (on the next page) so they can think about the questions on the sheet while they create their flag. Then, let them design their wagon flag.

Once their flags are done, have them answer the questions on the worksheet. It is recommended to invite each team to present their flag to the class and describe what it means. You can then display their flags around the classroom.



Title: *What Does the US Flag Represent*

Format: YouTube Video

Note: This educational video talks about the history of the US flag and its symbolism. It is less than 3 minutes long.



Make Your Own Wagon Flag

1. What values did your team decide were important to you?

2. Why did you choose those values?

3. What do the symbols on your flag mean?

4. Does your team have similar goals for their trip or their life in Oregon? What are they?
