

Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!



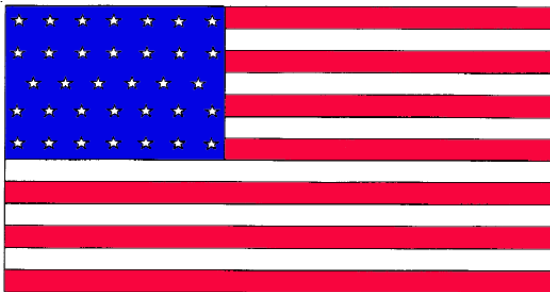
Clip from *New York's Bravest*, by Don Troiani. Courtesy of Historical Art Prints, Southbury, CT

Background Information:

Flags have long been used by nations, organizations, and even individuals as a means of identification. At the First Battle of Manassas, the Union and Confederate armies each had a variety of flags to identify each other and distinguish themselves from the enemy. However, their flags also performed a number of other important functions, which will be examined here. Each individual regiment (the basic building block of an army) for the Union and Confederacy, generally carried two flags, also referred to as colors, into battle — the national flag, and the regimental colors of the unit.

National Flags

The two contending sides in the Civil War, the United States of America and the Confederate States of America, each had a national flag designed to clearly distinguish their nation and armies from their opponents.



The national flag of the United States used during the Civil War is recognizable due to its similarity to the present-day United States flag,

known popularly then and now as the “Stars and Stripes”. It had 13 alternating red and white stripes, signifying each of the original colonies. In the upper left corner was blue field containing 34 stars, recognizing each of the states in the Union at the time.

Even though the southern states had left the Union to establish the Confederate States of America, the stars representing those southern states remained on the U.S. flag throughout the Civil War because the United States did not recognize the rights of the southern states to secede. During the course of the Civil War, West Virginia (1863) and Nevada (1864) joined the United States. Stars were added to the flag in recognition of their admission in 1863 and 1865, respectively.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to explain that soldiers used flags to distinguish their units.
2. Students will be able to describe at least four flags used at the First Battle of Manassas and identify which groups they represented.
3. Students will be able to list three functions of flags, identification of troops and positions; maintenance of morale and esprit de corps; and as a tool used to discipline the troops.

This module of the Baptism of Fire program addresses the following Standard(s) of Learning:

National: Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction, 2b

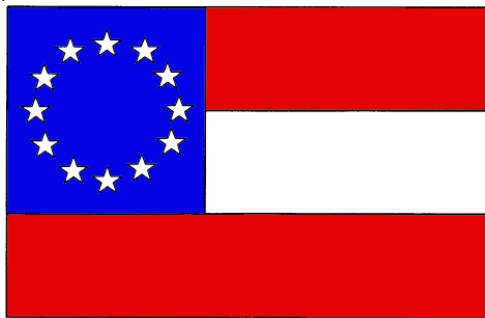
Virginia: History/Social Science VS.1, VS.7, & USI.9.

With some adaptation, First Grade Civics 1.11 & 1.12



Because they were attempting to establish a new country, officials of the Confederate States of America had to design a flag that would represent the new nation. The new Confederate Congress established a A Committee on Flag and Seal to design the new emblem. The committee chose four designs which were submitted to Congress for a final decision. The pattern selected (Figure 2) had more than just a passing resemblance to the Stars and Stripes and was described at the time as follows:

“The flag of the Confederate states of America shall consist of a red field with a white space extending horizontally through the center, and equal in width to one third the width of the flag. The red space above and below to be the same width as the white. The union blue extending down through the white space and stopping at the lower red space. In the center of the union a circle of white stars corresponding in number with the States in the Confederacy.”



The committee disagreed with this design, known popularly as the “Stars and Bars, “ because they felt it would be too easily confused with the Stars and Stripes. However, there was such a ground swell of public sentiment for the “old flag” that the committee could not ignore its design.

In March 1861, there were seven stars on the new flag of the Confederate States of America. Two more stars were added in May with the addition of Virginia and Arkansas to the Confederacy, and again in July with the admission of North Carolina and Tennessee. Some versions of the flag also contained stars in recognition of Missouri and Kentucky, border states with regions who were loyal to both the Union and the Confederacy. Because of the rapidly changing configuration of the Confederacy in its early months, Confederate flags in use at the First Battle of Manassas had anywhere from 7 to 13 stars.

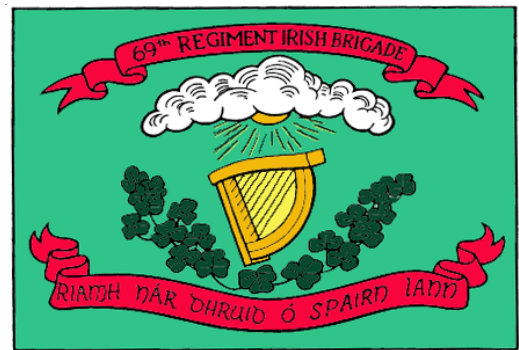
Regimental Colors

Very few things were as important to the Civil War soldier as his regiment. Regiments were organized in different ways and around a variety of themes. Geographically, regiments came out of city neighborhoods, congressional districts, counties, regions and other areas. There was a “teacher’s regiment,” a “lead miners regiment,” ethnic regiments and regiments recruited around a core of volunteer firemen. The regiment was the centre of the soldier’s life; he identified with it.

In turn, the soldier identified himself with the regiment’s flag, or colors. The ideals and honor of the regiment were embodied within and represented by the regimental flag. The flag was the symbol of the regiment. When a regiment was being mustered in a particular town, it was often the women of the area who would join together and make the unit’s colors. The completed flag would then be presented to the regiment during an elaborate ceremony, often attended by hundreds of people. To the homesick soldier, who was far from home and engaged in the most terrifying episode of his life, those regimental colors were a concrete reminder of their mothers, wives, and sisters who had helped make the flag. A Georgia captain’s response to the women who had just presented him with his unit’s flag in 1861 is typical of the feelings of most soldiers:

“Those tri-colors are emblematical of your . . . fair cheeks, and your blue eyes; in the future when we look up at those glorious stars . . . whose radiance will guide us to victory and fame, we will fondly remember the loved ones at home.”

To help build a sense of esprit de corps, the regimental colors were also designed to set the unit apart from others and, often times, to proudly display the unique characteristics of the regiment. For example, the 69th New York Infantry regiment was recruited in New York City from a very strong Irish community. Their regimental colors were illustrated with pictures of shamrocks and a Celtic harp on a green background, reminders of their Irish heritage (Figure 3). Another New York regiment, the 11th New York, had been recruited from firemen of New York City. Their colors contained the tools of their trade: a fireman’s helmet, ladder, hoses, and axe all appear on their regimental colors.



Regimental Colors of the 69th New York Volunteer Infantry

Once on the battlefield, the colors had the added importance of guiding the troops in the field. With scores of regiments and thousands of men often involved in the chaos and confusion of combat, the flags served as a way of keeping the various units together. A soldier who might become separated from his regiment could look for the unit’s colors to be reunited with his regiment.

The colors were carried by a soldier known as the color bearer. He would be charged with carrying the flag and keeping it aloft for all to follow. While the color bearer was a position of great prestige, it was also one of the most dangerous assignments of the regiment. Recognizing the importance of the flag for direction and morale, the enemy often targeted color bearers when battle commenced. In the early months of the war, however, many of the young, naive soldiers disregarded the danger and eagerly sought the honor of carrying the colors in battle. A young color bearer prior to the First Battle of Manassas wrote home:

“I have a position just under the flag and woe be to the Yankee who tries to take it from [me] for we’ve sworn to preserve it, or perish beneath its folds. What a glorious death!”

Accordingly, once on the battlefield, these soldiers would go to great lengths to ensure that the colors were protected. If a color bearer were shot (as was often the case), another man would pick up the flag and carry it, continuing to hold it aloft for all to see. A Union soldier could be awarded the Medal of Honor for capturing a Confederate flag, or going to great lengths to ensure that his own banner was not lost.

Because a regiment’s flag was a source of immense pride and because such steps were taken to protect it, the colors also played a prominent role in the disciplining of troops. For troops who had misbehaved, or performed poorly, a serious blow could be dealt to the unit’s pride by stripping them of their flags. The hope was that, in order to have their colors returned, the men would work that much harder to prove they were worthy of the banners.

Shortly after the First Battle of Manassas, the 79th New York Infantry mutinied when they were denied a furlough that would have allowed them to return home for a visit with their families. To teach the men a lesson after the mutiny was put down, General George B. McClellan ordered “the regiment will be deprived of its colors, which will not be returned to it until its members have shown by their conduct in camp, that they have learned the first duty of soldiers - obedience - and have proven upon the field of battle that they are not wanting in courage.” Of this punishment, one of the New Yorkers wrote, “you have seen in the papers the punishment awarded to the Regiment - the taking of our colors and the disgrace from which we are suffering.”

Activities for Students:

1. Share with the students the background information regarding the history and important psychological effects of the colors and the great lengths that regiments would go to ensure that their flag was protected. If a tape of Civil War music is available, play “Bonnie Blue Flag,” “We Are Coming Father Abraham” and “The Battle Cry of Freedom” as examples of flag references included in songs.
2. Have the students color the four flags found at the end of this section. This will help them to recognize some of the flags that were present at the First Battle of Manassas in 1861. Have them compare and contrast the USA and CSA national flags to see how the similarities could have caused confusion during the battle.
3. Have the students design their own personal colors, using the blank flag outline located on page 8 of this section. Encourage them to make their colors a reflection of themselves, family and community. Possible items to place on the flag include hobbies, interests, favorite colors, etc. Volunteers may share their flags with the class. Students may also color the examples of the national and regimental colors included in this section.
4. Divide your class into three groups or “regiments”. Have each regiment design and make an actual flag to be carried on the battlefield during the field trip. Again, the flag should be a reflection of their group interests, personalities and community. They may wish to include the school colors and mascot in the design, one star (or other distinguishing characteristic) to represent each member of the regiment (as in the 50 stars/50 states on the U.S. flag, etc.). Have them be creative!
5. When you come to the park, assign a color bearer from each regiment to carry the flag during the visit. Remind the students that the flag is a symbol of honor. Tell them the story of the 79th New York who, due to discipline problems, had their flag taken from them. Warn them that they, like the 79th New York, will have their banner taken from them should they misbehave.

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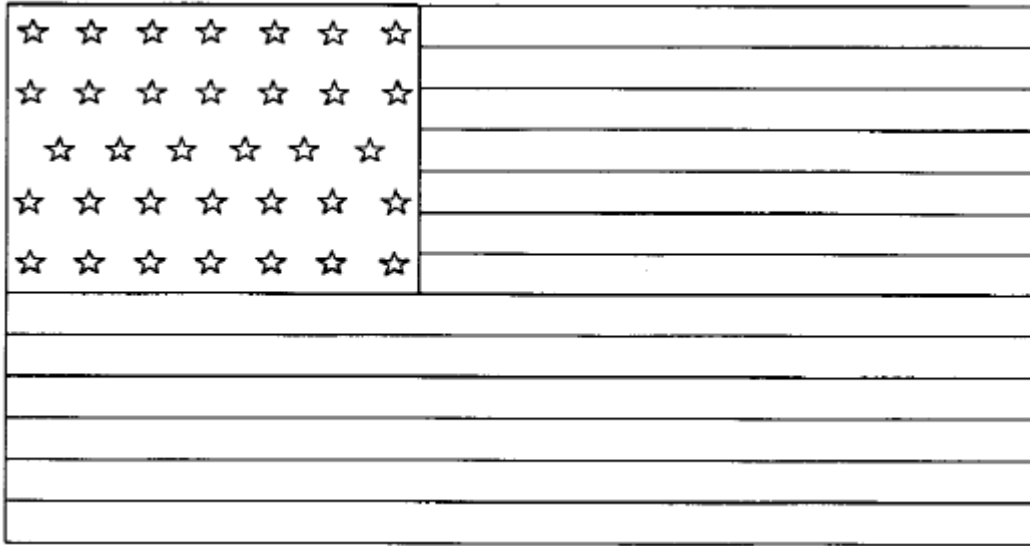
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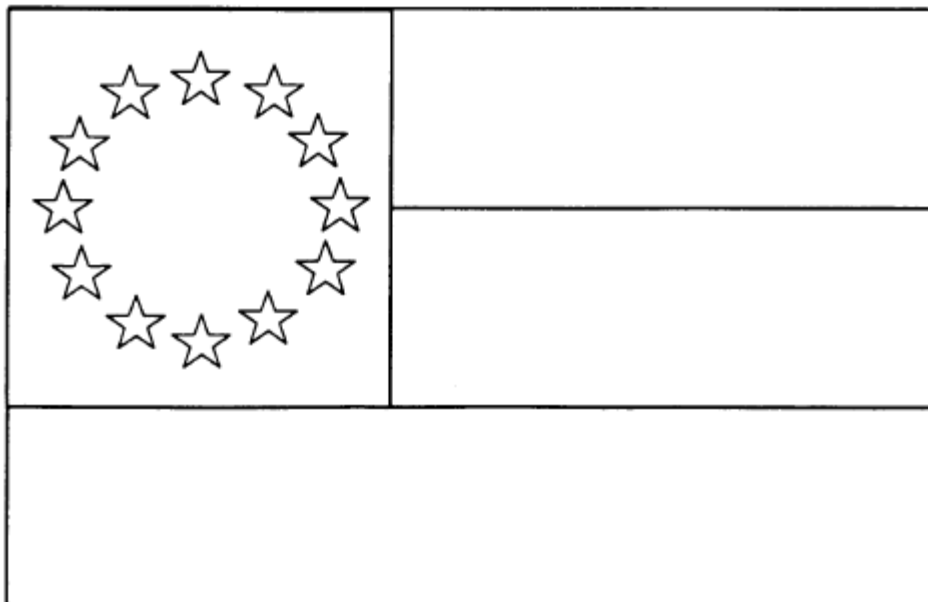
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National Flags

Civil War soldiers always carried flags, or colors, when they went into battle. Because the flags were often made by the women of the town in which the men lived, the colors served as reminders of the soldiers' homes and families. On the battlefield, the colors had the practical importance of guiding the troops during the battle. By following the colors of their unit, the men would keep from getting lost in the confusion and chaos of battle. The national colors, or flags of each country, are pictured here. The United States of America, or Union, flag is shown above, while the First National Flag of the Confederate States of America is below.

- Color each of the flags, using the color key on the following page. After they are colored, compare and contrast the two flags. If you were a soldier, what problems might these flags cause you? Given what you already know about the United States flag, how many states were in the Union during the First Battle of Manassas? In the Confederate States?



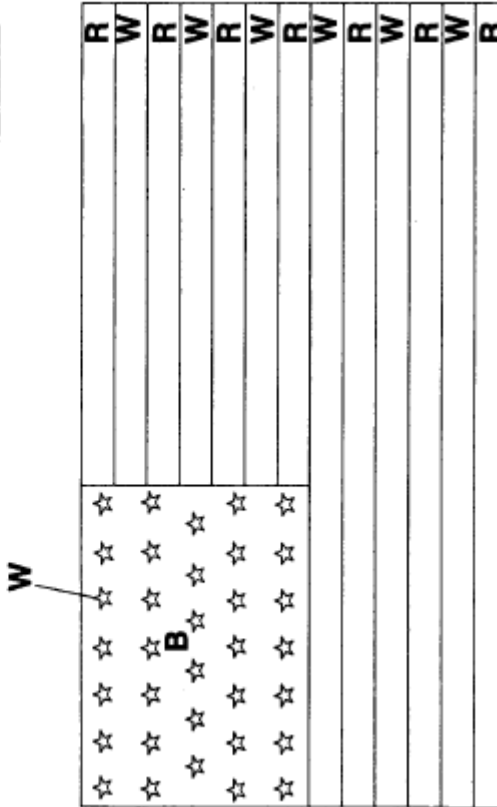
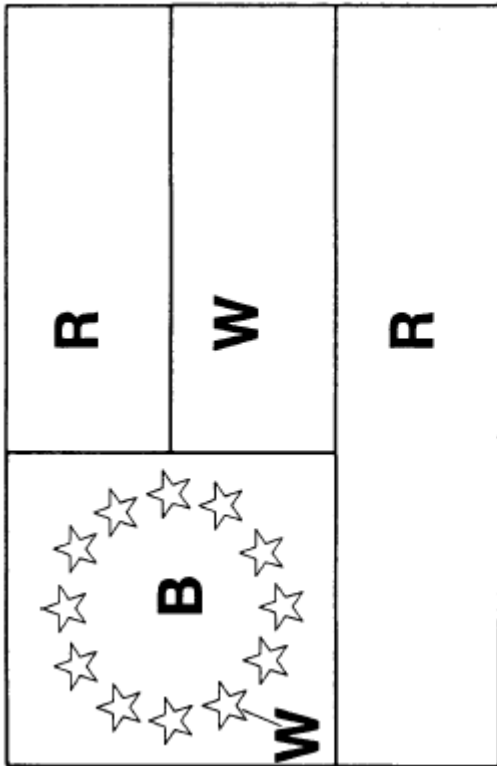
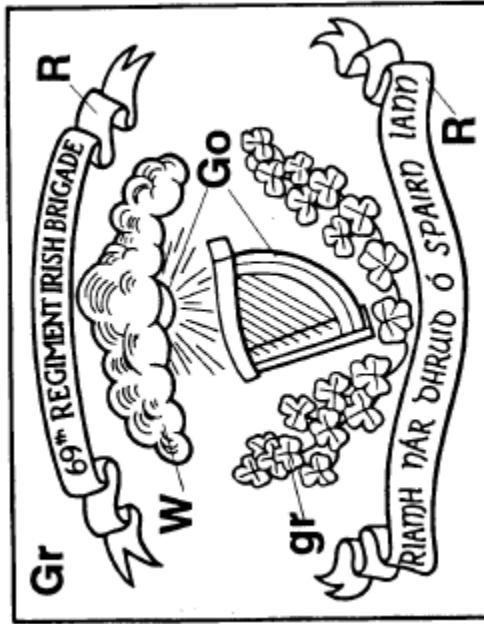


Battle Flags

Each regiment in an army carried a unique flag into battle known as the regimental colors. These flags had been designed by the men in the unit to set them apart from others and, often times, to provide information about the unit. Pictured on this page are the regimental colors of two units that fought at the First Battle of Manassas. Above are the colors carried by the 27th Virginia Infantry. On the afternoon of the battle, the men of the 27th fought against and probably saw the flag of the 69th New York Infantry, who carried colors similar to those pictured below.

- Color each of the flags, using the color key on the following page. After they are colored, examine them closely. Which one tells you more about the regiment who carried it? What can you learn about the unit? Which of the flags would you prefer to follow in battle? Why?





Color Key

B - Dark blue	Go - Gold	Gr - Light green	R - Red
P - Purple	W - White	Gr - Dark green	

Create Your Own Flag!

As you have learned, flags and regimental colors were often designed to provide information about a particular unit. For example, the 69th New York Infantry was made up primarily of Irish immigrants. Their flag was decorated with shamrocks, an Irish harp, and other symbols of their homeland. Even the color, Irish green, was a reminder of home. Another example is that of the 11th New York Fire Zouaves. Their flag contained the Firefighter symbol of the New York Volunteer Fire Department since most of the members of the 11th New York were volunteer firemen.

Imagine yourself a general commanding troops in the Civil War. Wherever you go, your headquarters will be marked by a flag. On the blank flag below, design your own set of personal colors. Remember to have it signify YOU! On your flag, you can show everyone your likes, dislikes, favorite colors, etc. Be as creative as you like!

