

IMAGINARY YELLOWSTONE ROAD TRIP

BACKGROUND

Yellowstone National Park has 452 miles of roads, and most people travel it by car. In 2024, Yellowstone saw almost 5 million visitors, many of them from all over the United States. License plates in the United States differ by state, and it is common for states to issue license plates with symbols that show history, recreation opportunities, or charitable organizations in that state.

GRADE LEVEL: K-2

SUBJECT: Geography, Art

TIME: 30-45 minutes

GROUP SIZE: Any

SETTING: Classroom

NATIONAL/STATE STANDARDS:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.5](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5](#)
- Extension meets [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W](#)



A herd of buffalo walk on the road, surrounding a vehicle. NPS/J.Frank

OVERVIEW

In this activity, students will learn about symbols and use them to express themselves in the form of a personalized license plate. With a brief introduction to Yellowstone National Park and its most popular attractions, students can explore the park on a virtual Yellowstone National Park road trip.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS/OVERARCHING CONCEPTS

- What are symbols, and how can I use them for self-expression?

MATERIALS

- Blank license plate printouts (e-file included)
- Images of example license plates
- 11" x 17" [Map of Yellowstone National Park](#)
- Map of the United States
- Colored pencils or markers
- Scissors
- Safety pins (at least 2 per student)
- Projector or television to watch online videos

PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduce Yellowstone National Park

- a. Using a map of the United States, point out Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone is in the Northwest corner of Wyoming and parts of it are in Montana and Idaho.
- b. Explain to students what a National Park is.
 - i. Yellowstone National Park is the oldest national park in the United States, established by the U.S. Congress in 1872. It is situated primarily in northwestern Wyoming and partly in southern Montana and eastern Idaho. The park covers 2.2 million acres and features geothermal areas with active geysers such as Old Faithful. Other notable places in Yellowstone include the Grand Prismatic Spring, Lamar Valley, The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and Yellowstone Lake. ([NPS.gov](https://www.nps.gov/))
- c. Optionally, view pictures posted by Yellowstone National Park with your classroom using the Yellowstone Flickr page (<https://flickr.com/photos/yellowstonenps/>) or social media channels like Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/yellowstonenps/>)

2. Discussion: Symbols

- a. *Symbol*: something that stands for or represents something else
 - i. Ex. skull and crossbones representing poison or pirates, NPS Arrowhead representing the National Park Service, your school mascot.
- b. Use the provided sample license plates to show symbols. Guide students to decide what the symbols and slogans might mean in this context.

ACTIVITY

1. Make your own license plate using the blank license plate printouts, coloring utensils, and child scissors.
2. Parameters
 - a. Student's name or nickname can be the license plate characters. Older students might want to get creative and choose something other than their name (a vanity plate) on the license plate.
 - b. Choose at least 1 color and have a reason why you chose that color
 - c. Choose at least 1 symbol and have a reason why you chose that symbol
 - d. (Optional) Choose a slogan and have a reason why you chose that slogan
3. Help the students attach their license plates to their clothes using safety pins when they are finished.
4. Take a virtual visit to Yellowstone with your students!
 - a. <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/photosmultimedia/virtualtours.htm>

VOCABULARY

Symbol – something that stands for or represents something else, sometimes evoking feelings or emotions.

National Park - A national park is an area set aside by a national government to preserve the natural environment. A national park may be set aside for purposes of public recreation and enjoyment or because of its historical or scientific interest. Most national park landscapes are kept in their natural state.

SHARING

1. Allow students to imaginatively role-play as vehicles around the classroom.
2. Ask students to share what is on their license plate and why.

EXTENSIONS

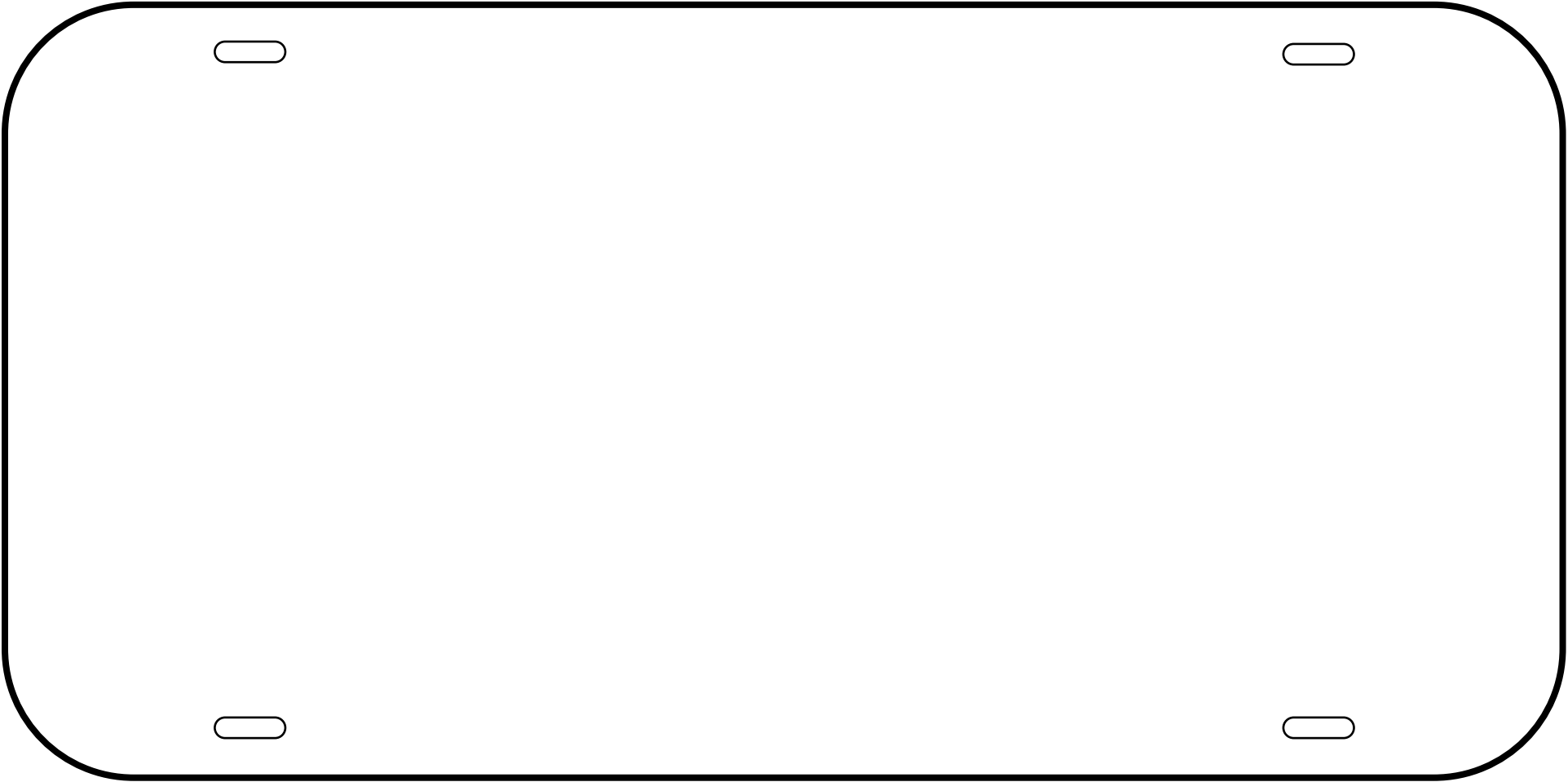
- Encourage students to provide written reasoning for their license plate design. This could include why the elements on their license plate best fits them.
- Students can compare their design with their state's current license plate.
- Combine this activity with one about the National Park Service arrowhead symbols, and what they represent (linked in supplemental resources)

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

- Videos of Yellowstone National Park - <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/photosmultimedia/videos.htm>
- Sounds of Yellowstone National Park - <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/photosmultimedia/sounds.htm>
- Lesson Plan: Learning about the NPS Arrowhead and its Symbols - <https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/learning-about-the-arrowhead-and-other-symbols.htm>
- Yellowstone Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/yellowstonenps/>
- Yellowstone Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/YellowstoneNPS/>
- Yellowstone Flickr - <https://flickr.com/photos/yellowstonenps/>

CREDITS & AUTHORSHIP

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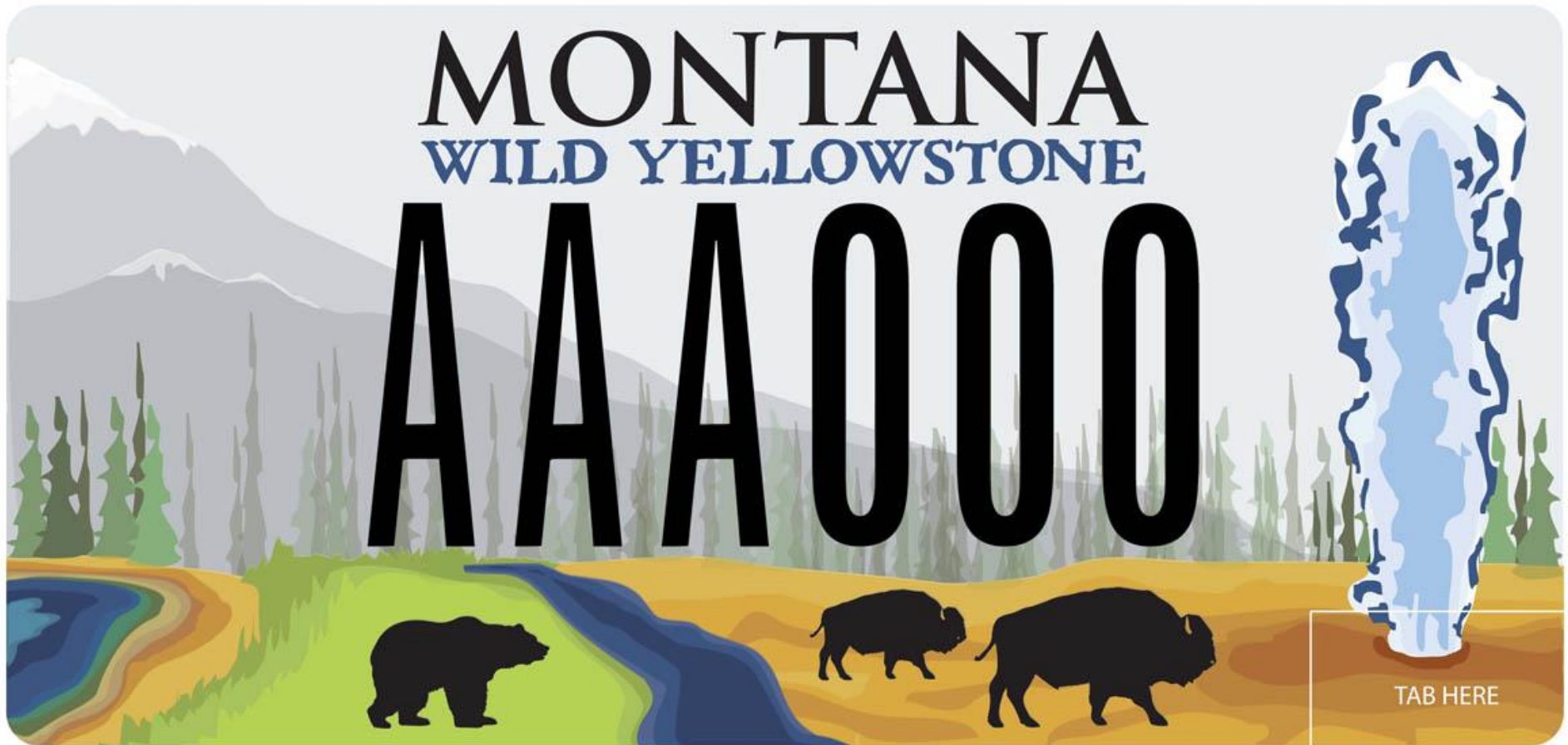


Image from Montana DMV website (<https://mvdmt.gov/portfolio-item/greater-yellowstone-coalition/>)

"The Greater Yellowstone Coalition works to protect the lands, waters, and wildlife of Yellowstone National Park and the lands that surround it. Funds generated by this plate will help ensure the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem – with the world's first national park at its core – is protected now and for future generations."



