

## 11.2 Flags of the 50 States TKN\_FlagFacts\_A\_2Mb

We see them all the time-- in schools, on municipal buildings, at special events. But how often do we actually stop to take a closer look at our state flags?

I'm from New York, and I don't really know what the flag looks like.

I'm from South Carolina. And it's Palmetto tree with a crescent moon on it.

We live in Missouri. And my state flag has a crest in the middle with two bears on the sides in the crest.

Randy Howe is a teacher and author of the book *Flags of the Fifty States*. His fascination with flags began when he was just a boy.

I went on a trip around the country. And one stop was Mount Rushmore. And I was looking forward to seeing the presidents, but I was struck by, as you walk up to the monument, you see the 50 states represented by their flags. And it was really dramatic.

So dramatic, in fact, Randy decided right then and there he wanted to learn more about each flag.

They were fluttering in the breeze. And that piqued my interest and also a general interest in US history, understanding how these 50 states came together as a country, the different things that were important to each of the 50 states. And oftentimes, they're really well-represented in those flags.

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Where you have these 50 states put together to form a country. And of course, we could all fly the American flag, and all states do, but it's very important for the people of each state to have a symbol that they can feel proud of that they feel represents their state.

Of course, flags aren't unique to our country. They've been flying over other nations of the world for centuries.

It goes back 3,000 to 4,000 years. And actually, the first flags didn't use material at all. They were either wooden poles or made of metal. And the first one they found, or the oldest one they found, was in Iran. And that's about 3,000 years old.

And there would be a carving at the top of the pole. And that was used as an identification marker. Eventually, they added material to these poles. It looked more dramatic on horseback or on a ship at sea. And that's really how flags came about the way we know them today.

There was a practical side to flags as well.

But even before there were nations and states, you had monarchs who liked to send their knights out to battle with some sort of identification marker, not only as a point of pride, but that way, you didn't kill other knights who are on your same side. You could tell apart friend and foe.

So what makes one flag more distinctive than another? What you need, most importantly, is a flag that is both symbolic and simple. Color is important. You need to be able to tell which flag you're looking at from a great distance.

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In the course of his research, Randy discovered that a flag's design was often determined by the history and geography of its state.

I think one good example of that would be the states in the west, in the far west, where, for example, mining was a big part of the development of Nevada. You had the Comstock Lode, which was the largest silver mine at that time in the world. And they chose to put a silver star on their flag.

There is a copper star on the flag of Arizona. That's because the world's largest copper mines were found in Arizona.

And sometimes states created flags just because, well, just because they needed one, like to fly on a ship, for instance.

There was in Arkansas that the USS Arkansas was commissioned. And then somebody realized they don't have a flag of Arkansas to fly on this ship. We better design a flag.

We'll have more fascinating flag facts in future programs. So stay tuned. Maybe one of the flags will be your state flag.

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