

Paideia Seminar Plan

The American Flag and the *Pledge of Allegiance*

Ideas and Values: citizenship, democracy, pledge, symbol

Pre-Seminar

Content – Present relevant background information:

Display the flag (according to custom) in your classroom during the week prior to the seminar and post the words to the Pledge of Allegiance where they can easily be read. A few days prior to the seminar, post the definition of the word “symbol” on the board and discuss it at least once with students prior to the seminar.

Just prior to the seminar, share the following background information: On June 14, 1777 the Second Continental Congress passed the Flag Resolution which stated: “Resolved, that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation.” For this reason Flag Day is now observed on June 14 of each year. The origin of the stars and stripes is uncertain. A popular story credits Betsy Ross for sewing the first flag at the request of George Washington, but there is little credible evidence for this.

The original Pledge of Allegiance was written for a popular children’s magazine by author and Minister Francis Bellamy in 1892. Bellamy’s original pledge read as follows: “*I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*” It was seen as a call for unity and wholeness after the bitter divisions of the Civil War. It was also intended to be easily memorized and quick to recite. The phrases “of the United States of America” and “under God” were added later to mend what were seen by some as shortcomings in the original.

Discuss any unfamiliar vocabulary in the Pledge of Allegiance, and then...

State directly that our purpose in participating in this dialogue is to gain understanding of the ideas and values in the texts. More specifically, our purpose is to discuss the following ideas, among others: *citizenship, democracy, pledge, and symbol.*



Ideas and Values: citizenship, democracy, pledge, symbol

Pre-Seminar

Process –Prepare participants to participate in seminar discussion with a version of the following script:

“A Paideia Seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open-ended questions.

“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the ideas and values from the Flag and the Pledge, of ourselves, and of each other.

“As the seminar facilitator, I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes.

“As participants, I am asking you to think, listen, and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions, and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other’s names.

“You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak; rather, you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.

“You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, ‘I disagree with Joanna because...,’ focusing on the ideas involved, not the individuals.

“Now, let’s think about how we normally participate in a discussion as a group. Is there a goal that we can set for ourselves that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar? For this seminar, I would suggest:

To focus on the relationship of the pledge to the flag.

[Set group goal and display it for all to see.]

“Please consider the list of personal participation goals that I have listed on the board.”

- To speak at least three times
- To refer to the texts in detail
- To keep an open mind
- To speak out of uncertainty

“Is there one that is a particular challenge for you personally? Will you choose one goal from the list and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have?... Please write your personal goal at the top of your copy of the text.”

Seminar

Opening – Identify main ideas from the text:

When you look at the American Flag, what is the most interesting detail that you see? (round-robin response) Why? (spontaneous discussion)

Core – Focus/analyze textual details:

The stripes on the flag represent the original 13 colonies that became the United States. Why do you think the original designers chose red and white as the colors for those stripes?

The 50 stars represent the 50 states (a new star has been added each time a state has joined the union). Why do you think the flag's designers chose white stars on a blue background to symbolize the states?

The flag is often discussed as a symbol of many things that have to do with America. What American ideas or values do you think the flag might represent? Why?

Now have the class read or recite the Pledge together aloud. Students can stand and salute the flag while saying the Pledge if they choose.

Does the Pledge capture the ideas and values you most associate with America? Why or why not?

Do you think it makes sense to pledge Allegiance to a symbol? Why or why not?

Closing – Personalize and apply the textual ideas:

If we were to design a flag to represent our school, what ideas and values do you think we should symbolize there? How should we represent them on our flag?

Post-Seminar

Process – Assess individual and group participation in seminar discussion with an appropriate version of the following script:

“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar.

“As part of the post-seminar process, I would first like to ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion.

“Would someone volunteer to share how you did with your goal?”

(Invite two or three participants to talk about how they did in relation to their individual goals. Congratulate on success and encourage continued work if the goal wasn't met that day.)

*“Now I would like us to talk together about how we did in relation to the group process goal we set for ourselves (**To focus on the relationship of the pledge to the flag.**). On a scale of one to ten, ten being perfect, how would you say we did? Why? (Pause for discussion.)*

“Do we need to revisit the same group goal in our next seminar or can we move on to something else? What would you suggest?”

“As always, our goal is continuous improvement: both as individual seminar participants and as citizens. Thanks again for your participation.”

Content – Extend application of textual and discussion ideas:

Distribute unlined paper along with colored pencils and crayon. Have the participants work in pairs to sketch ideas for a school flag, writing in the margins of their papers the ideas and values they are trying to symbolize. After an appropriate work time, have participants share their ideas and post the sketches. If time allows, have larger groups of students work together over the following days to create finished products of their proposed school flags.