

Title: Learning About the Civil War from Regimental Colors

Historical Background: Flags serve many purposes. They symbolize a people and represent national pride. Flags convey a shared history. Over the centuries, military units have carried flags and colors. Colors and flags affirm group identity. They build pride and morale, and represent the group's honor. In battle, flags served as a rallying point when a formation was broken. Troops gathered around the flag to regroup, attack or retreat. Flags marked specific individuals, locations and functions such as hospitals and ambulances.

Infantry regiments regularly held trooping ceremonies. Colors were paraded up and down the line of assembled soldiers to music to make sure the men remembered the colors. A guard of non-commissioned officers usually protected flags and colors. Held in great reverence, a regiment's honor was embodied in its colors. The entire regiment was humiliated if its colors were lost in battle.... During the Civil War, a soldier who captured enemy colors or saved his unit's colors frequently was honored. In addition to receiving a medal honor, a soldier was sometimes given a leave of absence. Soldiers who captured enemy colors were often mentioned in dispatches or listed on a role of honor.

At the start of the Civil War in 1861, Northern and Southern units came to the front with their own flags and colors. Women of the unit's hometown made and presented flags to their men.... When the southern armies surrendered in 1865, their battle flags generally were sent to the War Department. Later, in an effort promote reconciliation, President Theodore Roosevelt issued an order to return the flags to the southern states. In the North, soldiers returning from the war, placed their flags in various state capitals where most can be seen today.

Taken from the National Park Service website, "Symbols of Honor: Civil War Flags in the NPS Collection," at <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/flags/>.

Correlation to the New York State 7/8 Social Studies Core Curriculum:

Unit Six: Division and Reunion
II. The Civil War Breaks Out

Suggested Timeframe: One class period of approximately 45 minutes

Materials and Resources:

- Reading: "What are Regimental Colors?" (attached)
- 10 readings about individual regimental colors (attached)
- Worksheet: "New York Regimental Flags Worksheet" (attached)

Student Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of regimental flags during the Civil War
- Identify symbols and draw conclusions from individual regimental flags
- Draw generalizations about the Civil War from information gathered from primary sources.

Teaching Strategies and Methodologies:

1. This lesson will work best if students have received some background information about the Civil War prior to the class. Appropriate student experience in group work and drawing conclusions would also be useful.
2. Hand out the reading "What are Regimental Colors?" Students may read the page individually or in a whole class setting, but the teacher should gauge through discussion that students understand the importance and use of regimental colors. The teacher might wish to demonstrate the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center website

mentioned in the reading to show how these flags are being preserved and honored today, a century and a half after they were carried into battle.

3. The next portion of the lesson requires the gathering of information from ten worksheets focusing on individual regimental colors, and this may be accomplished in two ways:
 - a. If students have experience in working in cooperative groups, the teacher may
 - divide the class into “home” groups; typically three students might per group.
 - assign each individual group members to an “expert” group that reads three or four individual worksheets, discusses the questions at the bottom of the sheets, and fills out the information required
 - group members then reassemble in their “home” groups where they compile the information they discussed in their expert groups (see step 4).
 - b. If students work better individually, each student can be given all ten of the worksheets and be directed to gather information directly onto the worksheet (see step 4).

Note that while these worksheets can be reproduced in black and white, the dramatic nature of regimental flags can best be demonstrated in color. If possible, the worksheets should be reproduced in color; alternatively, students or teachers can access the original images on the website of the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center at <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/btlflags/electronindex.htm>.

4. Whether information is gathered in groups or individually, data should be entered into the three-column chart on the “New York Regimental Flags Worksheet.” When the chart is completed, students should attempt to draw general conclusions from all the information. This might be done within their home group or as a whole class discussion.
5. To help direct the drawing of conclusions, the teacher might ask these leading questions:
 - Which symbols seem most important on the flags? Why were they important?
 - What do the flags tell us about the people who fought?
 - What do the flags tell us about the people who created or donated the flags?
 - What have we learned about the following during the Civil War: patriotism? diversity?
6. Should students wish to continue their study of Civil War regimental colors, the following sites on the Internet provide additional information:
 - The National Parks Service website “Symbols of Honor: Civil War Flags in NPS Collections” at <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/flags/index.htm>
 - An online exhibit of the Kansas State Historical Society entitled “Keep the Flag to the Front: Battle Flags of Kansas” at <http://www.kshs.org/exhibits/flags/index.htm>
 - An “online relic room” maintained by the Ohio Historical Society entitled “Fight for the Colors: The Ohio Battle Flag Collection” at <http://ohsweb.ohiohistory.org/exhibits/ffc/relicroom/index.aspx>
 - A website of the Alabama Department of Archives and History entitled “Alabama Civil War Period Flag Collection” at <http://www.archives.state.al.us/referenc/flags/index.html>

Evaluation/Assessment: The teacher could monitor student work in group activities or collect completed “New York Regimental Flags Worksheet” to be graded. Individually or in groups, students could design a poster of their own “regimental color.”

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What are Regimental Colors?

During the Civil War, many men fought together in regiments that were organized near their homes and included many neighbors and friends. Each **regiment** would be made up of 1000 men or more, and on the battlefield there might be dozens of regiments on each side. One way to help keep the men organized was to carry large flags into battle that the soldiers could rally around. These **battle flags** helped them keep in formation in the middle of the confusion of the battlefield.

Union Army regulations called for two battle flags for each regiment, the national flag (the “stars and stripes”) and a regimental flag, sometimes called the **regimental color**, which was



unique to the regiment. Regimental colors showed the pride that the soldiers had in their regiment, and were often gifts from civilians back home. They were decorated with the regiment’s name and often included special symbols and records of battle honors. They were carried proudly into battle and often were damaged by bullets and exploding shells.

The photograph to the left, taken around 1865, shows Sergeant John Lyon and Corporal Melvin Tucker holding battle flags from the 16th New York Infantry Regiment. You can see that the flags are tattered from battle. Each flag was made of silk, usually six foot square, and carried on a pole or pike at least nine feet in length. At the end of the war, many states collected the battle flags for display and storage.

From the website of the NYS Military Museum and Veterans Research Center at <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/btlflags/conservation/conservationIndex.htm>

For more information about battle flags, go to the webpage entitled, “New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project” found on the website of the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center at <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/btlflags/btlflagsindex.htm>. A significant part of the Military Museum's permanent collection is a group of over 1,800 flags, including the largest collection of state Civil War battle flags in the country. To insure the flags' long-term preservation, textile conservators from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) are working on a program of care to protect this important part of New York's history.



Regimental Color, 26th Regiment, US Colored Troops

This one-sided blue silk color features a gold embroidered oak wreath encircling the old English letters "US" over the Roman words "Colored Troops." The motto reads "God and Liberty."

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimental Color, 37th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry

Reportedly received by the 37th New York Volunteer Infantry in February 1863 from the city of New York, and carried at Chancellorsville, Virginia, May 1-3, 1863, this green, silk regimental color features traditional Irish iconography painted on both sides. The flag also features painted battle honors commemorating the regiment's 1862 campaigns and the unit's distinction as "The first Regt. of Irish Volunteers in the Field."

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimental Color, 61st Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry

This blue silk regimental color carried by the 61st Regiment features the Arms of the United States painted to the center complete with 34 gold-colored, painted stars in two arcs (18 over 16). The lower ribbon, with raised center section and an ornate gold border and tails, includes the regiment's numeric designation.

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimental Color, 106th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry

Manufactured by Tiffany & Company from New York City, the richly embroidered regimental color carried by the 106th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry includes the Arms of the State of New York, complete with numeric designation in the upper ribbon, surrounded by 14 battle honors commemorating the regiment's service throughout 1863 and 1864. Women from the regiment's native counties, St. Lawrence and Franklin, raised enough money to procure the flag and on January 1, 1865, the regiment formally received the flag in a grand presentation attended by brigade and division commanders. The flag, carried by Corporal William H. Royal, was reportedly the first planted upon the enemy's works at Petersburg, April 1, 1865, and was pierced by no less than three bullets.

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimental Color, 1st Regiment Artillery (Light), NY Volunteers

The yellow, silk regimental color attributed to the 1st Artillery, New York Volunteers, features the Arms of the State of New York painted in the center accented with landscape scenes, crossed cannons, and battle honors. Deposited into the New York State Battle Flag Collection in November 1865, the flag was made from three pieces of silk, seamed together along the horizontal before the painted designs were applied. The Arms with landscape images are the same on the front and the back, however, the battle honors only read correctly on the front side of the flag.

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Standard, 20th Regiment Cavalry, NY Volunteers

The 20th Regiment Cavalry, or “McClellan Cavalry,” organized at Sackett’s Harbor and mustered into service for three years in September 1863 under Colonel Newton Lord. This embroidered silk standard includes the arms of the State of New York in the center with the regiment’s nickname, and Colonel Lord’s name along the top. The embroiderer misspelled the colonel’s name as “Lorde.” A familiar Union rallying cry, “The Union must and shall be preserved,” appears along the bottom.

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Standard, 22nd Regiment Cavalry, New York Volunteers

The 22nd Regiment Cavalry, NY Volunteers, reportedly received this red, silk standard while in winter quarters at Camp Russell, Virginia, in February 1865 from Mrs. H.B. Reed, Colonel Horatio Blake Reed's wife. The flag features embroidered crossed sabers, in their scabbards, with the regiment's numeric designation embroidered above and below.

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimental Color, 11th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry

W.H. Wickham, on behalf of the New York City Fire Department, presented this unique, two-sided, white silk regimental color with red, white, and blue fringe to Colonel Elmer Ellsworth's 11th Regiment NY Volunteer Infantry on April 29, 1861, as the regiment departed from New York City. The flag, painted by the New York City firm of George Barney and John Styles, includes images of traditional firefighting equipment, regimental identification, and the slogan, "The Star Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave."

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimental Color, 4th Regiment Artillery, NY Volunteers

The yellow, silk regimental color carried by the 4th Artillery, New York Volunteers with painted Arms of the State of New York and crossed cannons generally conforms to the 1858 New York State regulations. Deposited into the New York State Battle Flag Collection in November 1865, the flag includes 3-inch long, yellow, cotton and silk, fringe and a narrow sleeve for attachment to the staff.

What symbols are used on this regimental flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimental colors?



Regimentsal Color, 149th Regiment, NY Volunteer Infantry

In October 1862, shortly after the 149th Regiment New York Volunteer Infantry left Syracuse for the seat of war, the Jewish Ladies of Syracuse presented this blue, silk regimentsal color to Colonel Henry Barnum who remained in Syracuse to convalesce from wounds received earlier in the war. The flag includes the Arms of the United States painted on one side and the Arms of the State of New York on the other side. Both sides include the same painted presentation inscription, "Presented to 149th Reg't N.Y.S.V. by the JEWISH LADIES of SYRACUSE, N.Y. Sep. 1862."

What symbols are used on this regimentsal flag?

What do we know about these troops from their regimentsal colors?

Name _____

Directions: Fill in the blanks with information about the regimental flags you have studied.

Name of Regiment	Symbols Found on Flag	Information Found on Flag

Drawing Conclusions: Using the information above, draw two conclusions about the Civil War based on the battle flags you have studied:

1. _____

2. _____