

Our Flag

This is who we are!?



Complexity



8-13 years



60 minutes



6-30



Democratic
Citizenship



Discrimination



Gender Equality

Type of activity

Discussion, drawing

Overview

Children develop a group flag expressing their values and identity as a group.

Objectives

- To understand the meaning of flags and their uses
- To underline the importance of participation in the creation and protection of values and principles
- To decide on a set of values and principles that the group want to defend
- To discuss the dangers of group identification as a source of discrimination

Preparation

Do some brief research into the history of flags by searching online or using the library.

Print out or project a selection of flags or symbols, where you can explain the meaning / origin / colours to children. Include general flags not linked to countries, e.g. the Rainbow flag, Red Cross, Peace flag, flag of the United Nations, etc.

Materials

- Coloured pencils and A3 paper for each small group
- Flip chart and markers
- Examples of flags printed out or projected onto a screen

Instructions

1. Ask the children to give some examples of flags they know, and record these on a board or flipchart. Ask them to describe the design of the flags and see if they can explain the meaning of the colours and symbols. Add to their list using some examples you prepared, particularly of flags that are not linked to specific countries. Remind them that flags are most often used as an official symbol for a group – for example, a group of people from a particular country, or members of a club, or supporters of a sports team. They provide something which people in that 'group' can identify with and gather round. They are normally designed to communicate a particular message about the group.
2. Explain that the children will make a flag to represent their group as a whole and to send a strong message about their values and principles and the rights they want to defend. You could use examples such as the Peace flag or Rainbow flag, to show how a single message can be incorporated into a flag.
3. Divide the children into small groups and ask them to think about the message they would like to communicate about the whole group. Tell them that the message should be positive, because the flag will represent and be associated with the group as a whole. Everyone should be able to identify with it.

4. Give the small groups a few minutes to decide on key messages, then ask each group to select one colour and one symbol to represent the most important idea that they have come up with. They should be able to explain why they have chosen the colour and symbol – it should not be just because they like it!
5. Bring the small groups back together, and ask each to present their results, briefly. Allow for any questions or clarifications if other groups wish but try to prevent lengthy discussions at this stage. Make a record of the different results so that all the symbols and colours are visible to everyone.
6. Check that all children are happy with the messages, colours and symbols chosen by the other groups: remind them that this is to be a joint flag for the group as a whole. Explain that the next stage will be to put these symbols and colours together to make a single flag.
7. Mix up the original groups and form the same number of small groups, but with different participants in each. Give each group a set of coloured pens and some A3 paper, and ask them to draw their version of the flag, using the agreed symbols and colours. Remind them that they must respect the decisions already made by the whole group about colours and symbols.
8. Ask each small group to present and explain their flag to the rest of the group. When all the groups have presented, place all the flags together to create one big flag for the whole group.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the activity using questions such as these:
 - What do you think of the final flag for the group? Are you happy for it to symbolise your group?
 - What did you think about the process of creating it? Was it easy to agree on the key messages? Was it easy to agree on symbols and colours?
 - Were any of your ideas for the flag not agreed on by the whole group? Why not?
 - Did you discuss all the proposals from other children fairly?
2. Relate the activity to issues of human rights and citizenship, asking questions such as these:
 - Did you identify any human rights in the messages for the group flags?
 - Why do people need flags or symbols to represent their groups?
 - Do you think there can ever be any problems in having strong attachments to particular flags?
 - How does having a flag make you feel about the people who have a *different* flag – for example, people from different countries, or different teams?
 - Do you know any groups of people who are treated badly because they have a different ‘flag’?
 - What could we do to make sure that we do not treat people badly, just because they have a different ‘flag’?
 - The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) guarantees children the right to be legally registered, to have a name and nationality. Do you know of cases where this right is not respected? Should children be allowed to have more than one nationality (for example if their parents have different nationalities)?

Suggestions for follow-up

The activities ‘Our Constitution’ and ‘Every Vote Counts’ both engage children in the process of democratic decision making. ‘Words that Wound’ explores stereotyping and abuse or bullying based on stereotypes.

Ideas for action

Ask the children to investigate familiar flags and symbols – e.g. the school flag, city flag, national flag, any sports teams, etc. Encourage them to think critically about these flags and arrange a session to discuss why they like them or why they don't. Be aware that in certain countries or cultures, it is not permitted to transform or play with the national flag / symbol – so some participants may be resistant to take this as a point of discussion. Most participants will probably approve of their flag on an emotional level. You could raise the question with them why we have such strong emotional attachments to little pieces of cloth! Why are some flags sometimes considered to be “sacred”?

Tips for facilitators

It may be difficult for children to think of the values or principles they want to communicate, but you can give them examples using existing flags and could even ask them to think about what they associate with the flags they already identify with – for example, their country's flag or the school / club emblem.

Remind the children that the whole group must like and be proud of the flag they produce – partly because they will have created it, but also because it should show the positive side of the group.

If children struggle to think of symbols to associate with their values, give them some examples – e.g. hands, hearts, animals, particular objects or shapes.

Adaptations

You could ask children to draw one big collective flag on a flipchart instead of A3 flags in small groups. This works well if you have a small group of children. You could also use a large piece of white tissue or material so that by the end, the group will have a “real” flag.