

My Pledge

Purpose:

Most students know very well the words to the Pledge of Allegiance. They are recited perhaps every day, but many students may not think in detail about what they are saying. This lesson asks students to explore the meaning behind the words of our Pledge of Allegiance and their own right to freedom of speech, from both an historical and personal perspective.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to stand to salute the flag and recite the Pledge of Allegiance as you might do on any given day of class. Ask students the question, "Why do we salute the flag?" Lead students to the understanding that many things are taught in schools beyond their lessons about math, history, or science; that schools are the places where our nation passes down its traditions and where students are taught what it means to be a citizen in the United States.

2. Review the history of the creation of the Pledge of Allegiance and conduct an introductory discussion as to the meaning behind the words of the pledge by using the Power Point presentation, "I Pledge My Allegiance." Stop periodically to answer students' questions and elicit feedback, as prompted in the presentation.

3. Remind students that reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is a privilege protected by freedom of speech, as guaranteed in the First Amendment. In fact, the pledge contains several references to ideas mentioned in the First Amendment. To assist students in identifying these ideas, post both the text of the First Amendment and the text of the Pledge of Allegiance for all students to view. (A template is included for use on an overhead transparency or lcd projector.) While students may identify several common references, make sure that students discuss the following:

- the pledge refers to "the republic" as the First Amendment refers to the powers of Congress—our representative body of lawmakers in our republic
- the pledge refers to "one nation under God" as the First Amendment guarantees freedom of religious expression in our society
- the pledge refers to a nation "with liberty and justice" as the First Amendment lists specifically the liberties of speech and religion.

4. Inform students, if they do not already know, that the First Amendment even protects their right not to be forced to salute the flag or recite the Pledge of Allegiance. According to the First Amendment, the government (including schools) cannot abridge (put limits on) a citizen's right to speak freely. So while schools offer students the opportunity to express their patriotism and loyalty by saying the pledge, each student and his or her parent, has the right to decide if he or she will say it. However, if we say the Pledge of Allegiance, we should know the reasons why we say or don't say it.

5. To better understand the meaning of the Pledge of Allegiance, ask students to participate in the Readers' Theatre, "What the Pledge Means to Me", which has been adapted from the 1969 televised performance by comedian Red Skelton. (The teacher may wish to play the role of the principal in the readers' theatre; however, if the school's principal can participate, it will be a more meaningful exercise for students.) Optional activity would be to use the media file of the actual audio recording of Red Skelton's performance, included in this lesson. (Video files may be ordered online, as well, as the teacher desires.)

6. Ask students if they know of any other pledge or oath. They may be familiar with the salute to the Oklahoma flag, passed by the state legislature upon the 75th anniversary of statehood. If not, display the text of the United States Pledge of Allegiance and the text of the State of Oklahoma Salute, included in this lesson. (Note to teacher: Ask students to jot down in the oval what ideas the two texts have in common. The handout for this activity is separate PDF file.)

7. Extension: Ask students if they are aware of the "symbols of peace" on the Oklahoma flag. If not, use the resources included in this lesson to discuss what the state flag's symbols represent. Ask students if they believe the guarantees of the First Amendment protect our right to fly the American and state flag at our homes, schools, and businesses. Could the action of flying a flag send a message? What message might that be? Would this message be protected under the First Amendment? Ask students to conduct a class debate, answering these questions, or require students to write a brief paragraph responding to the question, "Are unspoken messages, such as flying a flag, protected speech?" (Note to teacher: This is an example of symbolic speech and is protected by the First Amendment.)

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

First Amendment, U.S. Constitution

**I pledge allegiance to the flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation under God,
indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.**

Reader's Theatre

What the Pledge of Allegiance Means to Me



Setting: One sunny morning in September, in a school classroom.

School Principal: "I've been listening to you boys and girls recite the Pledge of Allegiance and it seems as though it is becoming a chore to you. If I may, may I recite it and try to explain to you the meaning of each word? You recite the pledge and I will stop you along the way to tell you what the pledge means to me..."

Students: I

Principal: That means me, an individual, a committee of one.

Students: Pledge

Principal: That means I dedicate myself and all of my worldly goods to give...

Students: Allegiance

Principal: My love and my devotion.

Students: To the flag

Principal: That means Old Glory, a symbol of freedom. Wherever she waves, there's respect because your loyalty has given her a dignity that shouts freedom is everybody's job!

Students: United

Principal: That means that we have all come together...individual communities that have united... individual communities with pride and dignity and purpose; all divided yet united to a common purpose, and that's love for country.

Students: And to the republic for which it stands,

Principal: A republic is a country in which power is given to representatives chosen by the people to govern.

Students: One nation under God

Principal: Some time ago, just about the time that our last two states, Alaska and Hawaii were added to our country, two more words were added to the pledge of Allegiance- under God.

Students: Indivisible

Principal: Meaning incapable of being divided.

Students: With liberty

Principal: Which is freedom- the right to live one's own life without fear

Students: and Justice

Principal: Justice means dealing fairly with others.

Students: For all.

Principal: Which means, boys and girls, it's as much your country as it is mine. Now, let's turn to the flag and let me hear you say the Pledge of Allegiance again, proudly, and really think about what you are saying.

Students: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.

Adapted from a performance by Red Skelton, televised January 1969.



The Oklahoma state flag features a sky blue field with an Osage battle shield made of buffalo skin. The shield symbolizes the many Native American people who first settled in our region. On the shield are crosses which stand for the stars in the sky. A pipe (calumet) and an olive branch meet together over the shield. The Indian pipe and the olive branch are both symbols of peace and two groups of people living side-by-side together.