

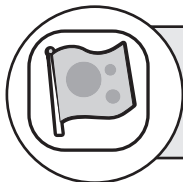
A FLAG FOR YOUR PLANET

BY ANDREW FRAKNOI



An Activity for the Whole Family from Project ASTRO™

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390 Ashton Ave., San Francisco, CA 94112 ■ www.astrosociety.org/education.html



- **Recommended for Ages:** 8 and up
- **Type of Activity:** Facilitated
- **Time to Do:** 30 minutes

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

Participants use their knowledge of the solar system to design a flag for one of the planets. This is an open-ended activity that allows families to use their creativity and to apply their knowledge. We provide a version for your family event, below, and there is a version included in the *Race to the Planets* game.

MATERIALS INCLUDED

- Planet cards from the *Race to the Planets* game
- Handout pages

MATERIALS YOU'LL NEED TO GET

- 8-1/2 x 11 sheets of white paper and/or construction paper for the flags
- Magic markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- (Optional) Books about flags
- (Optional) Some sticks and tape to attach the flags.

SETTING UP THE ACTIVITY

Before the family event, put out the materials on each table. Decide what you will do to introduce the activity (see below) and make sure you are ready to do the introduction. This is a good activity to do at the end of a family event on the planets.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY

The biggest challenge in doing this activity is figuring out how to give families enough information about the planets so that they can make a flag that really reflects their planet's characteristics. You may choose to do this activity at the *end* of the first or second family event you do about the planets, and let the earlier activities be the source of flag information (together with what families already know from school or the media).

We have also included in the leader's kit some of the planet cards from the *Race to the Planets* game that all the families will be taking home. These cards include a wealth of information about each planet, and can be a great source of ideas for the flags. You may want to put one of these cards on each table and ask the family to do the flag for that planet or place them all on a single table and have the families choose a planet on their own.

In addition, many family members may not be familiar with flags besides the U.S. and the local state flag. Some flags are very abstract and tell their story through colors and shapes only, while others include pictures and symbols. If possible, it may help to show some flags or books with pictures of flags. There turn out to be several good inexpensive paperback books with many colored flags in them. We recommend some in the resources section.



DOING THE ACTIVITY

After families have chosen or been assigned their planet, suggest they read the instruction sheet, look at the materials on the table, and discuss what kind of flag they want to make. Have enough paper available so that each child in a family could make his or her own flag (just in case the kids don't all want to work together.)

Remind them about flags on Earth – not just flags for countries and states, but flags for cities, religious and civic organizations, and even sports teams. If there is time, have the family members describe some flags they have seen. Can they tell you any flags that have astronomical symbols on them. (For example, the Alaska state flag shows the Big Dipper, with its pointer stars pointing to Polaris, the North Star. Alaska is the northernmost of the U.S. states, and thus the state where the North Star is seen highest in the sky.)

Emphasize that, since there are no rules for planet flags yet, they can use their imaginations and knowledge to create the most interesting flag possible. You might challenge them by saying that it would be great if the other families could tell which planet the flag was for just by looking at it. The planet cards from *Race to the Planets* show the colors of the Sun and all the planets (except Pluto), as well as some possible “tourist sights” on each world.

When everyone is done, ask each family to hold up their flag or flags and describe what is on them without naming the planet. Then have the other families guess which planet the flag is designed for. If they don't have enough time to finish, or want to try other approaches, you can remind them that a version of this activity is in the *Race to the Planets* game that they will be playing with at home.

FAMILY CHALLENGES

I. An Anthem for Your Planet

Now that each family's world has a flag, doesn't it need an anthem? An anthem is the official song, something that tells the universe why your world is special. This can be a fun thing to try, even if they only compose one verse (and it doesn't have to be very good, just good enough to make everyone laugh or applaud.)

For example: Mars is the planet that is so red,
Without a spacesuit, you'd be dead.
There was water there in the past,
With low gravity, it didn't last.



Rap songs about planets are fun too. For an example of a “rap song” about the planets, written by a professional astronomer (but not a threat to any real rap artists) see: <http://www-astro.phast.umass.edu/directory/people/rap.html>

If you intend to bring the group together in another session, you might give them the (optional) assignment of making a planet anthem between the two planet events. A web site with flags and anthems for several countries is: <http://www-math.mit.edu/~igorvp/FlagsAnthems/flagsanths.html>

2. Who Will Own the Moon or the Planets?

If you have time, you might want to have a short discussion about whether the planets should become private property eventually. In the old days, when explorers planted a flag, they were usually claiming the territory for the country they represented. Sometimes wars were fought when two or more countries wanted the same desirable territory.

Do we want the same thing to happen when we explore the Moon, or the planets and their satellites? Or are we ready to regard these other worlds as the territory of all humanity?

In 1967, the U.S. and many other countries put together the Outer Space Treaty, which says "...outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or other occupation, or by any other means." This means that no country can claim another world for itself. Ninety-six countries have officially ratified this treaty and 27 others have signed it.

How do the families feel about this? You might ask them a question like this: Suppose that your family's grandchildren or great grandchildren gets to go to another world that has a surface to stand on (not all the planets have solid surfaces). Should they be able to own land there, just as people can own land on Earth? Or should these other planets be jointly owned by all of humanity?

These are interesting topics to think about as we move into the second century of the space age.

RESOURCES



Some Books on Flags:

Devereaux, Eve: *Identifying Flags: The New Compact Study Guide and Identifier*. 1998, Book Sales (80 pp).
Znamierowski, Alfred: *The World Encyclopedia of Flags: The Definitive Guide to International Flags, Banners, Standards, and Ensigns*. 1999, Lorenz Books (256 pp).
Eyewitness Handbooks: Flags. 1999, Dorling Kindersley (240 pp).
Ultimate Pocket Flags of the World. 1997, Dorling Kindersley (240 pp).



Web Sites:

Flags of the World: <http://www.fotw.net/flags/>

An amazing site with more than 9100 pages about flags and more than 16,400 images of flags, maintained by dedicated volunteers interested in "vexillology," the study of flags.

The Flag Detective: <http://www.flags.av.org/flags/>

This site allows you to figure out an unknown flag by the elements of its design. It's also great as a way of learning about the different elements that go into flags.

World Flags Database: <http://www.flags.ndirect.co.uk/>

A nice basic site in which each country's flags are accompanied by information about that country.

Quinn Flags and Banners: <http://www.qflags.com/index.html>

Big commercial site selling flags from all over the world. Has illustrations of many different types of flags, from countries, states, military organizations, religious groups, sports, etc.

Mars Society Suggestion for a Mars Flag: <http://www.marssociety.org/bulletin.asp?id=20>

The Mars Society, a group of Mars exploration advocates, has made one simple suggestion for a flag for Mars.

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Someday, when people have begun to live on other planets or their moons, these worlds might develop their own flags. In this activity, you get to design a flag for your favorite world.

There are no rules yet for how to design a planet flag. The flag can just have colors and symbols, like many Earth flags do, or it might highlight some of your planet's most interesting places to visit.

For example, a Mars flag might have a red background, because the rusty sands of Mars look red from space. It could have some symbols representing weapons on it, because Mars was the god and planet of war in ancient mythology.

Or, if you hope the planet's future will be more peaceful, you could one of the red planet's most spectacular tourist sights on the flag, such as the giant volcano called Mount Olympus, which is almost three times the height of Mount Everest, the tallest mountain on Earth.

If you picked a world with no solid surface to stand on (such as Jupiter or Neptune), you might also come up with a scheme for displaying your flag? Is a flag without a flagpole OK? What would be some ways to show the flag that don't involve having solid ground?



Books on Flags

Znamierowski, Alfred: *The World Encyclopedia of Flags: The Definitive Guide to International Flags, Banners, Standards, and Ensigns*. 1999, Lorenz Books (256 pp).
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