

EIGHT STARS OF GOLD: THE STORY OF ALASKA'S FLAG

What should I remember about Alaska's flag?

Level: Middle School and above (grades 6-12)

Background

Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag is the museum catalog written to go along with an exhibit celebrating the 75th birthday of Alaska's flag. This short catalog gives students an excellent opportunity to learn and practice important content reading skills while learning historical facts about Alaska. The 24-page catalog is divided into an introduction, three sections, two short feature stories and a timeline. The author, India Spartz, uses historical photographs, original flag contest designs, poetry, and the state song to tell the fascinating story.

These activities focus primarily on summarization and the author's style and technique. Summarizing helps students put the essential ideas of a passage into a sentence or short statement in their own words. It is an important higher-level thinking skill, that enables one to distinguish the difference between main ideas and secondary details.

Summary

Students practice identifying and summarizing main ideas while reading the exhibit catalog about the history of Alaska's flag.

Estimated Time

Varies. If these are new skills, 120 minutes
(4 sessions x 30 minutes)

If students already know how to summarize, 60 minutes (2 sessions x 30 minutes)

In this activity students will focus on the following:

Alaska Performance Standards at Benchmark 2
Reading

1a Use text structures such as illustrations, graphs, and headers to read and comprehend texts

Benchmark 3

Reading

3 Restate and summarize information or ideas from a text and connect new information or ideas to prior knowledge and experience

Alaska Content Standards

Government/Citizenship

A.1 Understand the necessity and purpose of government

A.3 Understand how nations organize their governments

Activities

Step One: Preview and practice

Tell the students that they are going to practice summarizing, a skill that helps them remember the most important ideas from this story and anything else they read. Tell them that they are going to begin by finding out how the author, India Spartz, organized the catalog to help readers find and remember the most important ideas.

Have students preview the catalog.

They should be able to locate:

- titles (blue titles on pages 5, 7, 8); sections with different colored pages or unique designs (yellow titles and purple background on pages 10-11, 13 and 20-21); photographs, sheet music, a painting (page 4), and timeline (gold color margins on pages 18-19).
- Tell the students that they should use all of these clues to help them locate and remember the most important ideas in the catalog.

- Practice summarizing. Students identify important facts from the following selection and rewrite them into a short sentence. Read silently, or together, the first paragraph:

On October 18, 1867, the Alaska Purchase was finalized during a flag-raising ceremony in Sitka, Alaska between Russia and the United States. When the United States purchased Alaska, it was designated a military district. The Army, the Treasury, and finally the Navy administered its government activities, while Congress enacted legislation pertaining to Alaska. However, discussion of Alaska statehood began almost immediately when, in 1869, William H. Seward, former Secretary of State and architect of the Alaska Purchase, visited Sitka and proclaimed that Alaska would soon become a territory and eventually a state. Little did he know that statehood for Alaska would take another 89 years to achieve.

- Ask, "What are the important facts?" (Answers will vary but should include: 1867 purchase, military district, William Seward said Alaska would become a state, and that statehood took 89 years.)
- Ask students to put only the most important facts into one sentence. Encourage students to discuss how to decide what is important and what can be left out. (Example: It took 89 years after purchase for Alaska to become a state.)

Step Two: Read and summarize

- It may be helpful to work as a group or in small groups while they are learning and practicing summarization skills. Have students read the first section, "The Alaska Purchase and the steps toward statehood" (pp. 5-7). Ask them to make a list of the important facts they read, either by themselves or with the group. Their goal, after reading, will be to have one or two short sentences that include only the most important ideas from these pages.
- Facts can be put on a chart or the board. These facts may include:
 - Congress made poor laws for Alaska
 - Alaskans couldn't marry, have wills, buy property or get mining claims
 - Absentee businesses controlled government
 - Alaska had colonial status
 - First Organic Act 1884 made a crude government and court system
 - Alaska was a district
 - Governor Kinkead designed a district seal that included important things about Alaska
 - Second Organic Act in 1912 made Alaska a territory
 - Elected legislature had some power to make laws
- Students should read through the list of facts, choose the most important, and compose 1-2 sentences. (Example of a summary: The people of Alaska did not

like being a district without the ability to make laws. In 1912 Alaska took the first step to statehood when it was made a territory.)

- Depending on the abilities of the students, have them work independently or in teams to write summaries for the rest of the catalog. (See *Parts of the Catalog* for a list.)

Step Three: Write and discuss

- Using the summary sentences from the students, work together to write a catalog summary. The catalog summary should be a short paragraph in the students' own words (no more than 10 sentences) that tells the most important facts about the catalog.
- Have the students discuss how the author's style helped them remember information. (Example answers: I knew where to look for information. The timeline listed most important facts.)

Assessments

- Give the students a paragraph at their reading levels and ask them to write a 1-2 sentence summary. Check for main ideas and clarity.
- Ask students to explain the steps that took Alaska to statehood using only their summary paragraph. If students are unable to explain the most important steps, they should review the text and consider adding more facts in their summary sentences.
- Students could do a short talk about the catalog for another class (such as 4th graders who study Alaska history) using only their summary paragraph as a guide.

Materials and Resources

- Parts of the catalog, handout
- Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001

Vocabulary

From Pages 10-11 for Benny Benson

amputate v. To cut off, especially by surgery

comical adj. Funny

revered v. To regard with deep respect, love

unanimous adj. In complete agreement

William Paul n. Alaskan Native leader and legislator

From Page 13 for Jesse Lee Mission Home

auspices n. Sponsorship

Bostonian n. A person from Boston

camouflaged n. Disguising to conceal from the enemy

epidemic n. Spreading rapidly among people, as a disease

habitation n. A dwelling; home

hospitalization n. To put in a hospital

Methodist Church n. A Protestant Christian church, developed by the teachings of John Wesley

tuberculosis n. An infectious disease characterized by small, rounded projections in the lungs

PARTS OF THE CATALOG

Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag

Pages

1	Title page
2	Information page
3	Introduction by India Spartz, Guest Curator
5–7	The Alaska Purchase and the steps toward statehood
7–8	The 'Twilit Twenties' and the birth of Alaska's flag
8 –17	Benny Benson's winning design
10 –11	Feature: Benny Benson
13	Feature: Jesse Lee Mission Home
18 –19	Timeline
20 –21	List of Entries
22	Bibliography
23	Benny Benson Poem
8 –17	Benny Benson's winning design