

LESSON PLAN

When Hateful Symbols Cause Hurt and Harm

Compelling Question: How do symbols harm people and society?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-3	60 minutes	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language
4-7	8-12		



Web Related Connections

Lesson Plans

[Antisemitic Incidents: Being an Ally, Advocate and Activist](#)

[Identity-Based Bullying](#)

[Words that Can Hurt, Help and Heal](#)

Other Resources

[11 Ways Schools Can Help Students Feel Safe in Challenging Times](#)

[A Guide for Responding to School-Based and School Sports-Related Bias Incidents](#)

[Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate](#)

[Hate Symbols](#)

Key Words

activists
Confederate
controversial
demands
divisive
economies
free
furls
heritage
identity
influence
lawmaker
property

LESSON OVERVIEW

Symbols are all around us. We see symbols as we are walking and driving, on buildings and billboards, in schools, outdoors, and in restaurants and stores. Symbols fill our digital devices and online spaces and we use symbols to communicate with each other. Unfortunately, we also see hate symbols all around us—in those same places and spaces. Hate symbols can be very powerful in how they convey or express messages of hate, bias, prejudice and injustice and instill a threatening and unsafe environment. Because bias incidents in schools often include hate symbols, discussing hate symbols is an important conversation to have in schools and classrooms.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to understand what symbols are and their importance in society, reflect on hate symbols and the harm they cause, and consider and start to plan actions they can take to address hate symbols.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify and describe the importance of symbols.
- Students will gain insight into the meaning of symbols by sharing and exploring their thoughts and feelings.
- Students will reflect on how hate symbols can cause hurt and harm to individuals, identity groups and society.
- Students will consider what actions they and others can take when faced with hate symbols.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Symbols (to be projected): Titles not included on image, symbols are as follows: (1) laughing/funny, (2) Nike, (3) TikTok, (4) wheelchair accessible, (5) stop and (6) peace
- Here I Am Statement Signs (prepared in advance): “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “In between/not sure,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree”
- [Mississippi furls its state flag with Confederate symbol on it](#) (one copy for each student)
- Four pieces of chart paper to place around the classroom, each with one of four words on it: Individual, School, Community, Online

[Note to Teacher: As you teach this lesson, be mindful that you may have students in your classroom who are the intended target of specific hate symbols or have had experiences with hate symbols in their lives. Do not show or share hate symbols in class and be thoughtful and sensitive to those students' needs, emotions and experiences. If your school recently experienced a bias or hate incident, see ADL's [A Guide for Responding to School-Based Bias Incidents](#) for more information. Throughout the lesson, reference that incident as appropriate as an example while making sure not to further harm or upset students. Refer to classroom community guidelines or ground rules to support students in discussing this topic without using words and symbols that could cause harm to their peers.]

Key Words (cont.)

racial injustice
represented
slavery
struggle
superior
suppressing
symbol
white supremacy

? Introduction: What are Symbols?

1. Begin the lesson by sharing with students that we see symbols all around us as we live our lives and go about our days. We see symbols when we are walking or driving, in school, outside, in restaurants, stores and other places of business, online and as we communicate with each other.

Ask students: *What is a symbol? What is the purpose of symbols?* Elicit and explain that a symbol is a drawing, shape, or object that represents or expresses an idea, object, emotion, quality or belief. Explain that symbols can be positive, negative or neutral (neither positive or negative). They can be emojis, memes, flags, bumper stickers, signs or other symbols.

2. Show students a variety of symbols by projecting them from the [Symbols handout](#). As you show the symbols one-at-a-time, ask students: *What does this symbol mean? What does it represent or express? Would you describe this symbol as positive, negative or neutral?* (Symbols handout answers: 1. Laughing, 2. Nike, 3. TikTok, 4. Wheelchair Accessible, 5. Stop, 6. Peace.)
3. Ask students to share other examples of symbols that they have seen, used, or heard about. You can have students draw them on the board/smart board or describe them. For each, ask what the symbol represents or means and whether it is positive, negative or neutral.
4. Explain that in this lesson, we will talk about different symbols and then focus in on hate symbols. Ask students: *What is a hate symbol?* Elicit/explain that a hate symbol conveys or expresses bias, prejudice or hate. Explain that hate symbols target specific groups of people (e.g., people who are Jewish, people who are Black, people who are immigrants) and spreads bias and hate through that symbol.

[Note: If your students are familiar with hate symbols such as the swastika, confederate flag, "okay" hand gesture or noose, you can reference those as examples of hate symbols. Do not draw them or share pictures of them. You can explain that these hate symbols are targeting or showing bias/hatred toward a specific group of people (e.g., a swastika targets people who are Jewish). Please see ADL's Hate on Display™ [Hate Symbols Database](#) to learn more about these symbols.]

☁ Here I Am: My Thoughts and Feelings about Symbols

1. Explain to students that in the "Here I Am" activity, they will explore their thoughts and feelings about symbols and hate symbols. Explain that they will listen to statements and decide whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Then, based on their opinion about each statement, students will position themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement.
2. Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line that indicate the farthest right point representing a "Strongly Agree" response and the farthest left point a "Strongly Disagree" response.

In between these two positions, indicate “Agree,” “In Between/Not Sure” and “Disagree” along the continuum. Create signs with these words in advance and hang them up on the wall.

[Note: If you are doing this activity online or in a space that is unable to accommodate students moving around, conduct a poll instead, with students raising hands or using a digital poll like Google forms, Mentimeter or a poll included in your learning platform. Another option is to have students do “fist to five” in which they use their hand/fingers to show where they are on the continuum—5 fingers means strongly agree, fist/no fingers means strongly disagree, and other numbers are somewhere on the continuum.]

3. Read each statement below (or choose a sub-set if time doesn’t permit using all of them), requesting students to take a minute to decide where they will position themselves in the continuum. Then, have them move silently to that place and observe where others are. After students have chosen their spots, have them spend 2–3 minutes talking amongst themselves about why they are situated there. Then, ask someone from each part of the room to share their thoughts with the class about why they are positioned in their spots. Use this process for each of the statements.
 - I see and use symbols every day, either in person, online or both.
 - Hateful symbols do not bother me; actions are what really hurts.
 - I often see hate symbols online/in digital spaces.
 - When I see a hate symbol, it makes me feel bad but I don’t know what to do.
 - Hate symbols bother some people more than others.
 - When we see hate symbols, we should do something about it.
 - If some people find a symbol biased or hateful and others do not, we should get rid of that symbol.
4. After reading and discussing each of the statements, reconvene the class. Engage students in a class discussion using the following questions.
 - Was it easy or difficult to decide where to position yourself? Were some statements easier to decide and some more difficult?
 - What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others?
 - Was there anything that was said or shared that changed or challenged what you thought before? Please explain.
 - Have you shifted changed your opinion during or after the activity? Please explain.
 - What did you learn from this activity?
5. Optional: Have students do a 3–5-minute “Quick Write” that responds to the following question: After doing this activity, have you either changed your position in some way or feel more certain in your position? You can use choose to focus on one of the statements used in “Here I Am” activity, or the ideas as a whole.

Reading Activity (Optional)

1. Distribute a copy of the article to all students: [Mississippi furls its state flag with Confederate symbol on it](#). Read the article together as a class with students taking turns to read. For elementary students, read the article aloud to them.

[NOTE: This article is from [Newsela](#), which publishes daily high-interest news articles at five different reading levels. This article is written at a 5th grade reading level. If your students need reading materials at a lower or higher reading level, this article is available at grades 3, 5, 7 9 and 12th grade levels. You can register on Newsela (for free) to access all the articles.]

2. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - What is your biggest takeaway from this article?
 - Why did Mississippi remove the flag that included a Confederate symbol?

- What does the Confederate symbol convey? What identity group(s) are or feel most targeted by this symbol?
- Why did Robert Clark think about his grandfather as he watched the ceremony to remove the Confederate symbol? How do you think he felt when he saw the Confederate symbol on the flag? How do you think he feels now that it's gone? What impact did the Confederate symbol have on him and his family?
- What happened in 2020 that Mississippi decided to remove the flag? How did this change come about?
- What did you learn by reading this article? What more do you want to know?

Impact of Hate Symbols



1. Ask students: *Have you ever seen, used or heard about a hate symbol being displayed in public, in school, online or somewhere else? How did it make you feel?* Allow for a few quick responses.
2. Explain to students that like the article they just read about the Confederate symbol, hate symbols can be very powerful in how they can convey or express messages of hate, bias, prejudice or injustice.

Have students then turn and talk with a person sitting near them. Invite students to take 1-2 minutes per person and respond to the following questions: *Have you ever seen a hate symbol and if so, what was it? What did you think or feel when you saw it? How do you think it made others feel who saw it, especially those who identify in the group targeted by the hate (i.e., Jewish people and a swastika)?* After students talk in pairs, reconvene students and ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts with the whole class.

3. Then ask students: *How do hate symbols cause hurt, pain or harm to individuals? How do they cause pain and harm to our community (school, town, neighborhood, city) and society as a whole?* Ask them to start their responses with one of the following: "It makes me think...." or "It makes me feel...." or "It makes me wonder..." and record their responses on the board/smart board. Their responses may include one or more of the following:
 - It makes me think about a terrible time in history and how my family/ancestors were treated.
 - It makes me think the person who drew it hates certain groups of people.
 - It makes me feel threatened and that the person may do something worse to me.
 - It makes me think about bias and prejudice.
 - It makes me wonder why they did that and what they think about that identity group.
 - It makes me wonder if they'll target me next.
 - It makes me feel targeted and that someone hates me or a group I am a part of.
 - It makes me wonder what other actions the hate symbols can lead to.
 - It makes me feel scared.
4. Have students take a few minutes to read all the responses on the board. Ask: *How do you feel? What do you notice? What do you wonder?*



What Can We Do About Hate Symbols?

1. Ask students: *What can we do about hate symbols? How can we prevent them from happening in the first place? How can we help people understand their impact?*
2. Explain to students that they are going to suggest some ideas of what they can do either as individual, school, community or online. If needed, you can provide an example for each as follows but only do so if you think your students need examples. Examples include: individual (learn more about the history of hate symbols), school (pass a school or district rule banning all hate symbols), community (create a town or neighborhood committee to paint over or eliminate hate symbols) and online (report and encourage others to report hate symbols to the web platform).

Point to the four pieces of chart paper around the room and have students circulate around to each of them, writing down ideas they have for each of the four categories. If students see their idea already written, they can put a check mark next to it or write it again. Provide ten minutes for this process.

3. After students have placed their ideas on the chart paper around the room, have them move to the category that they want to discuss more and in greater depth.
4. When all students are situated in their spots (Individual, School, Community, or Online), invite them to discuss the ideas that are recorded on the paper. They will then choose one of the ideas to focus on. Invite students to identify one idea and sketch out the beginnings of an action plan to bring that idea to fruition. Explain that they should answer the following questions or can use the [Hate Symbols Action Plan Worksheet](#) to record their ideas. Provide 10-15 minutes for this process.
 - What is the goal? What are you trying to achieve or change?
 - What tasks will you need to do to complete the idea?
 - Who needs to be involved in carrying out the tasks? Who needs to participate in the action idea?
 - How long will each of the tasks take? Please provide a timeline of steps in the process.
5. If groups are unable to complete the worksheet in the time allotted, assign as homework to complete the worksheet. If time permits, spend the next few weeks having students provide more details on their action plan and begin to implement the idea if it is realistic within the timeframe or choose one to focus on as a class to bring to fruition.

Closing: Symbols that Represent Inclusion, Allyship and Justice

Invite students to share aloud or show symbols they have seen that represent the opposite of or counter to hate, bias and injustice. These can include inclusivity, love, friendship, belonging, diversity, allyship, empathy, equity and justice. After sharing, ask students to each share a word about how these symbols make them feel. If time permits, allow students to create their own new symbols that represent these qualities and feelings and share those with the class or post around school.

Additional Reading and Resources

- [Hate on Display™ Hate Symbols Database](#) (ADL Center on Extremism)
- [Oregon Department of Education issues ban on hate symbols in public schools](#) (The Oregonian, September 19, 2020)
- [Symbols and Civility](#) (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, March 4, 2019)
- [That Flag](#) (Children's book)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
Writing
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Symbols













Mississippi furls its state flag with Confederate symbol on it

By Emily Wagster Pettus, Associated Press, Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff



Honor guard members from the Mississippi National Guard practice folding the former Mississippi flag before a ceremony to retire the banner on July 1, 2020, inside the state capitol in Jackson. The ceremony happened a day after Republican Governor Tate Reeves signed a law that removed the flag's official status as a state symbol. The 126-year-old banner was the last state flag in the U.S. with the Confederate battle emblem. Photo: Emily Wagster Pettus/AP Photo

On July 1, 2020, a ceremony was held to take down Mississippi's state flag and put it in a history museum. The ceremony happened the day after Mississippi governor Tate Reeves signed a law to officially retire the flag. Mississippi's flag was the last U.S. state flag to include the Confederate battle emblem. To many, the symbol is a divisive sign of slavery and racism, but to some, it is a symbol of Southern heritage.

The new law required the swift and respectful removal of the flag. At the July 1 ceremony, three flags flying at the capitol were lowered as people watched. Many applauded after members of the military and the Mississippi Highway Patrol presented them to state officials.

Then the flags were transported to the Museum of Mississippi History, where they will be put into an exhibit and the archives.

Watching The Ceremony With Pride

Robert Clark watched the ceremony with pride. In 1967, Clark became the first Black American since the years just after the Civil War to become a Mississippi lawmaker. He was a lawmaker for 36 years and achieved the second-highest position in the Mississippi House of Representatives.

For decades, Clark has tried to persuade Mississippi lawmakers to change the flag, which many consider to be racist. The Confederate battle emblem is red with a blue X and 13 white stars. White supremacist lawmakers put it on the upper-left corner of the Mississippi flag in 1894, as white people suppressed the political power Black Americans had gained after the Civil War. Still, nobody was ready to listen to Clark while



Reuben Anderson, the chairperson of the Mississippi Archives and History Board (left) and Agency Director Katherine Blount hand off the retired Mississippi state flags that were flown over the Capitol to Pamela D.C. Junior, director of the Two Mississippi Museums in Jackson, Mississippi, July 1, 2020. Photo: Rogelio V. Solis/AP Photo

he was a lawmaker.

Clark is now 91 years old. He said that during the ceremony, he thought about his grandfather, who was enslaved until he was 11 years old. His grandfather was forced to go barefoot and eat from food containers used for animals.

“That’s why I fought to get the flag changed — because the flag represented that,” Clark said.

Racist Sign Or Symbol Of Southern Heritage?

Mississippi has tried to change the flag before. In 2001, voters chose to keep the flag. Supporters said they saw it as a symbol of Southern heritage. However, since then, many cities and all the state’s public universities have stopped using it.

For years afterward, lawmakers did not want to discuss the flag issue because they thought it was too controversial. However, that changed in May 2020 when George Floyd, a Black man, was killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His death sparked weeks of protests against racial injustice and calls to take down Confederate symbols. Mississippi faced increased pressure to change its flag.

On June 28, lawmakers passed a law to retire the flag. It was the result of decades of work by Black lawmakers and others who see the Confederate emblem as a symbol of hatred.

For years, critics have said that it’s wrong for a state where 38 percent of the people are Black to have a flag with Confederate symbols. Hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan have used the symbol to promote racist ideas.

“This Flag Has Flown Over Our Best And Our Worst”

Philip Gunn is a lawmaker and a state leader who participated in the flag ceremony.

“We have much to be proud of and much to reckon with,” said Gunn, who has advocated changing the flag for the past five years. “This flag has flown over our best and our worst. Some flew it over their bravery to defend their homeland. And for others, it’s been a shadow over their struggle to be free.”

Mississippi will not have a flag for a while. A new one will be designed, but it cannot include the Confederate symbol and must have the words “In God We Trust.” Voters will vote to approve the design in the November 3 election. If they reject it, a new design will be created and voters will vote on it again later.

Many young activists, college athletes and leaders from business, religion, education and sports called on Mississippi to make the change. Their influence pushed lawmakers to finally vote.

Hate Symbol Action Plan Worksheet

Student Names:

Category (select one):

☐ Individual ☐ School ☐ Community ☐ Online

What is your action idea?

What is the goal of your action idea? What are you trying to achieve or change?

What tasks will you need to complete the idea?

1.
2.
3.
4.

Who needs to be involved in carrying out the tasks? Who needs to participate in the action idea?

How long will each of the tasks take? Provide a timeline of steps in the process.

Due Date:		Task:	
Due Date:		Task:	
Due Date:		Task:	
Due Date:		Task:	