

Lesson Title: Understanding the Pledge of Allegiance: History and Meaning

Grade Level: Upper Elementary (Grades 4–5)

Citizenship Test Connection: Question: What do we show loyalty to when we say the Pledge of Allegiance?

Answer: The United States and the flag.

Essential Question: Why do some students say the Pledge of Allegiance, and should it be something we do in school?

Lesson Objective:

Students will explore the history and changes of the Pledge of Allegiance to understand how it has been used in schools over time. They will use what they learn to form and explain their own opinion about whether the pledge should still be recited in schools today.

Classroom Routines & Considerations: Parking lot questions; Homegroups used for gallery walks; sticky note inquiry during gallery walk; Word Snap vocabulary during gallery walk in ELA journal; students have some knowledge of Christopher Columbus/Columbus Day.

Differentiation

- Pre-teach and scaffold key vocabulary with visuals and student-friendly definitions.
- Use graphic organizers and visual supports during activities and note-taking.
- Provide sentence starters and writing frames to support oral and written responses.
- Allow flexible response formats: oral answers, drawings, or assistive tech instead of only writing.
- Break lessons into smaller chunks with clear instructions and provide extra time and peer/adult support as needed.

SWBAT:

1. Describe why the Pledge of Allegiance was created and how it has changed.
2. Share their opinion about whether students should say the Pledge in school and explain why using evidence and prior knowledge.

Standards Alignment:

- **Civics:** Understand symbols and practices of the U.S. government
- **ELA:** Vocabulary, speaking and listening, and written expression
- **Social Studies Skills:** Analyzing primary sources, understanding historical context

Before the lesson begins:

1. Hang up the 4 primary source images/documents around the classroom:
 - 1892 original text of the Pledge of Allegiance/Youth's Companion
 - Image from 1892 Columbus Day school ceremony – Program Cover/Badge
 - Modern version of the Pledge of Allegiance/Eisenhower Excerpt
 - The Pledge in Schools
2. Make sure each student has 5-8 sticky notes.

Introduction/Opening Discussion (8 minutes)

Hook

Project:



Ask:

“Does you recognize this quote?” Allow students opportunity to share. If no volunteers, tell students it’s the first Pledge of Allegiance.

Ask: “What do you know about the Pledge of Allegiance?” Allow students to pair/share with tablemates or partners.

Share Out – give students an opportunity to share their background knowledge or what they learned from classmates.

Acknowledge that while some may have heard of it or seen it in media, most have likely not recited it in school. Share that saying the pledge used to be a daily school ritual and explore why practices like this change over time.

Introduce the origin of the Pledge in 1892 as part of a national celebration of Columbus Day. Walk through timeline. Project:



Tell students to write down any questions they have on one of their sticky notes and put it in the classroom parking lot. Let them know we will share questions after gallery walk.

Historian Walk/Primary Source Analysis (12 minutes):

Tell students that they will have 3 minutes at each station during the gallery walk with their classroom homegroups. Ask students to consider the questions (write on whiteboard)

1. What's happening in this photo or document?
2. What words or symbols stand out?
3. Why do you think the Pledge of Allegiance was created in the first place?

Students should use their post-it notes at each station to write down any question and put it in their ELA journal, making sure they label each sticky note with source. Students also use their ELA journals for Word Snap vocabulary routines (write what they think word means based on context/image.)

(Teacher should circulate and support during homegroup work; each station should be set for 3 minutes.)

Galley Walk Debrief – Top 3 Takeaways and Wonderings (10 minutes):

In the classroom homegroups, students should discuss and decide top 3 three they learned to share. They should also decide on one thing they are wondering about.

Each group should share its collective work.

(Teacher should collect parking lot sticky notes to be used during next discussion. Teacher should circulate and support during homegroup work.,)

Modern Civic Reflection /Guided Reflection (15 minutes):

Using the sticky notes from earlier in the lesson and thoughts from each group, lead class discussion on themes that emerged.

Considerations:

1. Students may not know why the words 'under God' were added to the Pledge. You can share that in the 1950s, many Americans were concerned about threats to the country's

safety and identity. Leaders wanted to show that the nation believed in shared values like freedom and faith. President Eisenhower and Congress added 'under God' in 1954 to show a sense of unity and national belief during a tense time in history.

2. Some people say the Pledge of Allegiance every day, and others choose not to. For a long time, it was a common tradition in schools, especially after the words 'under God' were added in the 1950s. But over time, people began to have different feelings about saying it—some because of their religion, some because of personal beliefs, and some because they believe that saying the pledge should be a choice, not something you have to do. Today, it's less common in many schools, but not gone completely. The important thing is to understand the history and meaning behind it, and to respect each person's choice about whether or not they say it.
3. If students ask why some say it and some don't: That's a really important and thoughtful question, and I know a lot of people have different beliefs about saying the Pledge. For today's lesson, though, we're focusing on the history of the Pledge—like when and why it was written, how it changed, and how it's been used in schools over time. We won't get into everyone's personal reasons today, because that could take us away from our goal. But I do want you to think about what you've learned about the Pledge's purpose and how it's changed and use that to form your own opinion about whether or not schools should say it.

Say – Let's revisit our essential question: Why do some students say the Pledge of Allegiance, and should it be something we do in school?

5. Exit Ticket (10 minutes):

Students answer: Think about the history of the Pledge of Allegiance — why it was created, how it changed, and how it has been used in schools. Based on what you learned, do you think schools today should still say the Pledge? Explain your opinion using at least one fact from what you have learned today or your prior knowledge.

Exit Ticket

NAME:

DATE:

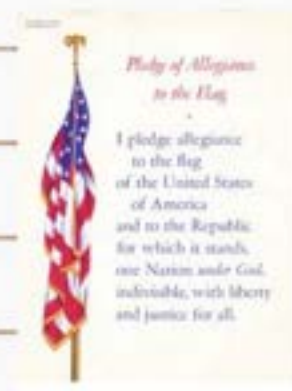
THINK ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE — WHY IT WAS CREATED, HOW IT CHANGED, AND HOW IT HAS BEEN USED IN SCHOOLS. BASED ON WHAT YOU LEARNED, DO YOU THINK SCHOOLS TODAY SHOULD STILL SAY THE PLEDGE? EXPLAIN YOUR OPINION USING AT LEAST ONE FACT YOU HAVE LEARNED TODAY, OR YOUR PRIOR KNOWLEDGE.



1892



1923



1954

4 Point Rubric

4 - Exemplary

- ✓ Clearly states a well-developed opinion
- ✓ Provides strong, relevant evidence, including at least one fact from the lesson or prior knowledge
- ✓ Includes a clear explanation of how the evidence supports the opinion
- ✓ Demonstrates logical organization and grade-level vocabulary
- ✓ Uses correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation

3 - Proficient

- ✓ States a clear opinion
- ✓ Supports opinion with at least one relevant fact
- ✓ Includes a general explanation of the evidence
- ✓ Shows some organization and mostly appropriate vocabulary
- ✓ Minor errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation that do not interfere with meaning

2 - Developing

- ✓ States an opinion, but it may be unclear or underdeveloped
- ✓ Provides limited or unclear evidence
- ✓ Attempts to explain the evidence, but the connection may be weak
- ✓ May be disorganized or use limited vocabulary
- ✓ Frequent grammar or spelling errors that somewhat interfere with understanding.

1 - Beginning

- ✓ Provides an unclear or missing opinion
- ✓ Gives little or no supporting evidence
- ✓ Does not explain reasoning
- ✓ Lacks structure and vocabulary is below grade level
- ✓ Many errors make the response difficult to understand

0 - No Score

- ✓ Response is off-topic, blank, or does not address the prompt

Projection Slide #1

The Pledge of Allegiance (timeline)

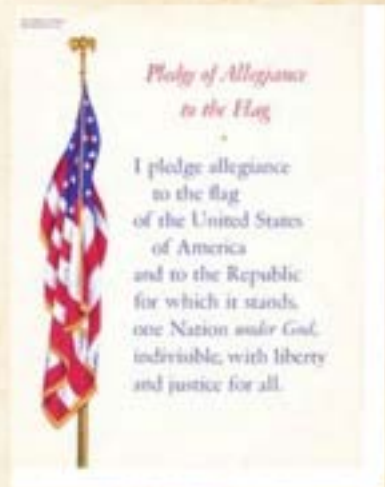
*"I pledge allegiance
to my Flag
and the Republic
for which it stands,
one nation, indivisible,
with liberty and
justice for all."*

— Francis Bellamy 1892

1892



1923



1954

Current Version

Projection Slide #2

The Pledge of Allegiance (timeline)

*"I pledge allegiance
to my Flag
and the Republic
for which it stands,
one nation, indivisible,
with liberty and
justice for all."*

— Francis Bellamy 1892

1892



1923



1954

Current Version

Primary Source #1

Where did the Pledge of Allegiance Come From?

*"I pledge allegiance
to my Flag
and the Republic
for which it stands,
one nation, indivisible,
with liberty and
justice for all."*

~ Francis Bellamy 1892

Written by Francis Bellamy, published in The Youth's Companion, September 8, 1892



The Youth's Companion was a popular weekly American magazine published from 1827 to 1929. It was written for 10-16 year old kids and focused on national pride and community ideas.

Primary Source #3

Columbus Day Celebration Program And Ribbon (1892)

This national program guided schools on how to conduct a flag salute and encouraged uniform patriotic ceremonies across the country.



Ribbon from the 1892
Celebration

"Let every pupil rise and salute the flag with the words, 'I
pledge allegiance to my Flag...'"

—From the official instructions for the National
Columbus Public School Celebration

Primary Source #2

President Eisenhower's change to the Pledge of Allegiance (1954)

The Pledge Of Allegiance To The Flag

Eighty-third Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Began and held at the City of Washington on Wednesday, the sixth day of January,
one thousand nine hundred and fifty-four*

Joint Resolution

To amend the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That section 1 of the joint resolution entitled "Joint resolution to codify and emphasize existing rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the flag of the United States of America", approved June 22, 1942, as amended (38 U. S. C., sec. 1721), is amended to read as follows:

"Sec. 1. The following is designated as the pledge of allegiance to the flag: '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'. Such pledge should be rendered by standing with the right hand over the heart. However, civilians will always show full respect to the flag when the pledge is given by merely standing at attention, with, however, the headless. Persons in uniform shall render the military salute."

Dwight D. Eisenhower
Speaker of the House of Representatives

APPROVED
JUN 14 1954

Lyndon B. Johnson
Vice President of the United States and
President of the Senate *pro Tempore*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

the flag: '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'. Such pledge should be rendered by standing with the right hand over the heart. How-

On June 14, 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower signed a bill to insert the phrase "under God" into the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance

Primary Source #4

The Pledge of Allegiance in School (different decades)



Uncredited image - Early 1900s



First grade students in Baltimore say the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag in June 1955. Credit: Richard Stacks/Baltimore Sun/Tribune News Service via Getty Images



Chicago schoolkids pledge allegiance in 1963. Bettmann / Corbis



2025



1970s