

SIGNAL FLAGS

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will use signal flags chart to identify common ship signals.
2. Students will create different signal flags and meanings on their own.

AGE: Grade 3 - 5

TIME: two 45-minute periods.

MATERIALS

- Copy of signal flags
(<http://www.marine waypoints.com/learn/flags/flags.shtml>)
- Two flags you have made in advance. (Skull and crossbones, stop instantly)
- Story books and picture books about ships and flags from the library
- Markers/Crayons and construction paper

INSTRUCTION:

- Begin a discussion about communication between ships (or ship to shore) before radio was invented. What kinds of things might one ship wish to communicate to another ship? (Dangerous cargo, need assistance, danger ahead) Invite students to suggest effective ways of communicating across the water. Show them the flags you have made and ask them to "read" the message. Many students will guess the skull and crossbones means danger (probably from cartoons), but few will guess that the yellow and black squares mean, "stop instantly".
- Discuss why it is important to establish a symbolic language that all ships at sea recognize. (Much like the universal symbols that are used for driving - stop signs, yield, no U-turn, etc.)
- Distribute the International Flags and Pennants chart.
- Explain that these are the symbols currently used by sea-faring vessels all over the world. Each flag has 2 meanings. The first is a letter of the alphabet, which when strung together, form the "call

- sign” of that ship. When a ship uses the radio they identify themselves by their call letters. The letters are expressed as words. For instance the Ron Brown’s call letters are WTEC, which is read as Whiskey, Tango, Echo, Charlie. This is so there is no confusion between the letters. A B can often sound like a D or a P.
- Give a few practice examples by calling out a group of 4 letters and have students respond as a whole group.
 - Have students spell out their own name using the call letters.
 - Activity - make your name by copying the appropriate flags
 - The second meaning of each flag is a message. Oscar means, “Man overboard”. Allow students time to look at the meanings and speculate on their uses.
 - Activity - Students can work individually or in groups to design an international alphabet in flags. The new symbols and meanings should be written clearly on the back.

EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:

- Successful completion of student created international flag alphabet with clear messages written on back. Completed work should be colorful and uniform.