

Flag facts:

As our Summer Exhibition 2012 has the Olympic ideals of excellence, friendship and respect incorporated into the exhibition brief, we thought that our 'design and make' activity should explore emblems and colour symbolism in one of the simplest, but most visible, ways. To that end we are hoping you will design and make your own flag to join the display. Here are some flag facts to help.

The concept of a flag grew out of the need to recognise friend or foe on the battlefield. Shields were painted with identifying emblems but it's hard to spot a shield in the scrum of battle. Raising it up made it easier to see.

The Romans were the first to use squares of cloth fastened to the cross bars at the end of spears. Fastening a flag to the side of a pole soon followed.

The word 'flag' comes from an old Saxon word 'fflaken', meaning to fly or float in the air.

The study of flags - their history, symbolism and usage – is called vexillology.

The five rings of the Olympic flag represent the five significant continents and are interconnected to symbolise friendship.



The six colours: blue, yellow, black, green and red, and the white background, are those that appear on all the national flags of the world at the time of the flag's inception.

The symbolism of flag colours is open to interpretation but loosely it could be said that:

RED is for danger, revolution, courage and power

BLUE is for freedom, justice, perseverance and prosperity

YELLOW is for the sun and caution

WHITE is for peace and surrender

GREEN is for safety, youth, hope, fertility and the Muslim religion

BLACK is for determination, defeating ones enemies (and pirates)



The flag of the United Nations was adopted on October 20, 1947, and consists of the official emblem of the United Nations in white on a blue background.

The emblem's design incorporates a map of the world centred on the North Pole, inscribed in a wreath consisting of crossed conventionalized branches of the olive tree.



The Nepalese flag is the only national flag that is not quadrilateral.



Some Jolly Roger flags also include an hourglass, another common symbol representing death in 17th and 18th-century Europe. Despite the Jolly Roger's prominence in popular culture, plain black flags were the choice of most pirates at the time.

Historically, the flag was flown to frighten pirates' victims into surrendering without a fight, since it conveyed the message that the attackers were outlaws who would not consider themselves bound by the usual rules of engagement. Since captured pirates were usually hanged, they did not have much to gain by asking for quarter if defeated.