

Name: _____ Class: _____

The First Flag

By Barbara Radner
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Barbara Radner is an associate professor at DePaul University School for New Learning. Most historians now believe that Judge Francis Hopkinson created the first U.S. flag. However, the folk tale that a woman named Betsy Ross was the creator is still popular among Americans. In this short story, the possible events of Betsy Ross' creation of the first American flag are narrated from the perspective of a fellow seamstress. As you read, take notes on the narrator's perspective, and how her perspective impacts her feelings about the American Revolutionary War.

[1] Betsy Ross made her living as a seamstress, and had many customers. She sewed many things, including clothes, blankets, and curtains. Each day, she would start with a pile of cloth and create things people paid her to make for them. Everyone knew she would do a wonderful job, so they came to her home and asked her to make many items for them. Business was so good, and as she began to get very busy, Betsy hired me to help. I am an experienced seamstress, so I can sew very well.

On my first day, three men came to her home and asked if she could make a flag. I listened to them talk with great interest. One of them was named George Washington.¹ I had heard of him, and now here he was right in front of me. He came to the store in May. I remember it very well because it was my birthday that day. Washington was leading the army, but the army did not currently have a flag. The army was fighting for freedom,² but at the time no one knew if we would win.



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The men showed Betsy Ross a drawing of the flag of the new country. It had stars and stripes. I said, "Silver stars would be great." Betsy said, "No, it will be too difficult to make those. The flag should be red, white, and blue." So we set to work that day.

We worked on the flag for a solid month. It would be very big. In addition to sewing the flag, we had to do other work, too. Betsy said we had to make more clothes to get money. We were making the flag as a present, which meant we would not be paid for the flag.

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1. At this time, George Washington was the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, which was formed after the start of the American Revolution to lead the efforts of the Thirteen Colonies.
 2. The thirteen colonies of North America fought for their independence from Great Britain in the American Revolutionary War.

- [5] Finally the flag was complete, so George Washington sent someone to come get it. He opened it up and said, "This is it. This is just what we need to inspire the army." He did not show it to anyone yet, though. He kept it for a special day.

On July 4th,³ the army flew the new flag. That was the first Independence Day. On that day, the United States said it was a new country. It had a new flag. We were not there, but we heard about it later.

The army had to fight more battles. Just saying they were independent did not make it true. The war went on for 7 more years. We worried. We made more flags. In all those battles, soldiers saw that flag. Still, it was difficult to win.

When the war ended, the country started. I was proud when I saw the flag. I didn't just make a flag. I was part of making the United States.

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3. On July 4th, 1776, representatives from the Thirteen colonies approved the Declaration of Independence, a document declaring the United States' independence from Great Britain.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best identifies a theme of the text?
 - A. When teams work well together, they will overcome every challenge.
 - B. Everyday people can contribute to great causes through hard work.
 - C. The best way to bring about great change is through small, kind acts.
 - D. Women had to find creative ways to contribute to history.

2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "The men showed Betsy Ross a drawing of the flag of the new country. It had stars and stripes." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "We were making the flag as a present, which meant we would not be paid for the flag." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "This is it. This is just what we need to inspire the army." (Paragraph 5)
 - D. "We made more flags. In all those battles, soldiers saw that flag. Still, it was difficult to win." (Paragraph 7)

3. PART A: How does paragraph 8 contribute to the story's development?
 - A. It shows how the flag was necessary to win the war.
 - B. It gives an example of a time when the flag inspired people in battle.
 - C. It presents the flag as a key part of American history.
 - D. It explains why the seamstress did not feel like she made a difference.

4. PART B: Which sentence from paragraph 8 best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "When the war ended, the country started."
 - B. "I was proud when I saw that flag."
 - C. "I didn't just make the flag."
 - D. "I was part of making the United States."

5. What are the effects of telling this story from the point of view of Betsy Ross' assistant?
