

COVER
NOT FINAL

FLAGS

COVER COMING SOON!

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Anatomy of a Flag

If you've ever watched the parade at an opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, you'll have spotted each team proudly waving their country's flag. Each flag is unique, but they also share many similar features, just like we humans share the same body parts. Here are the main parts that make up a flag:

flag, sometimes also called the ground

Canton – a quarter of a flag, almost always used to describe the upper corner on the hoist side

Fly side – the side or edge of the flag furthest from the hoist

Field of a flag
Field – the background of the

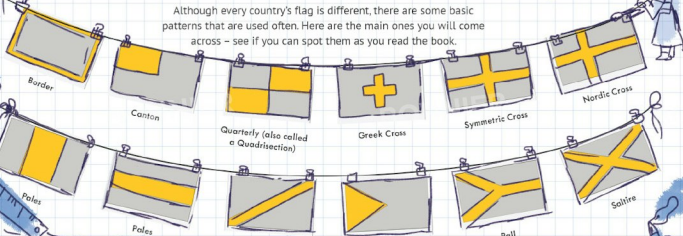
Charge – a symbol appearing in the

Hoist side – the side or edge of the flag next to the flagpole

It's like a flag skeleton!

FLAG PATTERNS

Although every country's flag is different, there are some basic patterns that are used often. Here are the main ones you will come across – see if you can spot them as you read the book.



BIG, BOLD STRIPES

A flag with a two-colour background is called a colour. ('Bi' means two.) The colours could be split horizontally, vertically or diagonally. If a flag has three stripes, it's called a triband. Tribands with three different colours are



Nigeria's triband flag contains only two colours: green for natural wealth and white for unity and peace.



Lithuania's bright tricolour was banned while the country was part of the Soviet Union.



Ukraine's flag is a bicolour. The band of blue represents the sky and the yellow represents wheat; a crop Ukraine is famous for producing in huge quantities.

KEEPING THINGS IN PROPORTION

Although almost all flags are rectangular, some are narrow, while others are closer to a square. These differences are known as a flag's ratio. The most common ratio is 2:3, meaning the flag is one-and-a-half times as wide as it is tall. Almost half of all national flags use this ratio. The next most common ratio is 1:2, used by more than a quarter of countries. In these, the flag is twice as wide as it is tall.

1:1

2:3

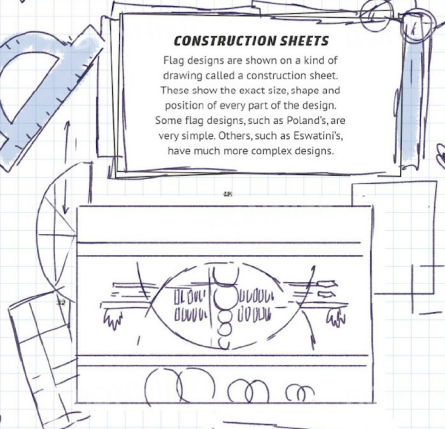
10:19

1:2

Gator wins the award for narrowest national flag.

CONSTRUCTION SHEETS

Flag designs are shown on a kind of drawing called a construction sheet. These show the exact size, shape and position of every part of the design. Some flag designs, such as Poland's, are very simple. Others, such as Eswatini's, have much more complex designs.





The blue band on Liechtenstein's flag represents the sky, and the red represents the evening fires lit inside houses in this tiny Alpine nation. A golden crown represents the unity of the people and the prince.

In 1297, Francesco Grimaldi led an army of soldiers disguised as monks and captured the Rock of Monaco. Grimaldi's family colours of red and white have been present on the Monaco flag ever since.

EUROPE

When you think of the history of Europe, perhaps the vast Roman Empire or the adventurous Vikings come to mind. Maybe you think of the seafaring nations, who sailed across oceans on powerful fleets of ships, waging violent battles to claim territories around the world. Most European flags are simple – bicolours and tricolours make up well over half of the national flags. This is because these flags, steeped in history, are taken from the days of battles on horseback and at sea, when it was important to be able to identify from a distance who was friend or foe.

Because Europe has a mostly Christian heritage, crosses are shown on many of the nations' flags, particularly in the Scandinavian countries of the north. However, in the far east of the continent, where some countries span Europe and Asia, you'll find some flags that share features with Asian flags. Here, the moon and star of Islam shines out from the flags of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The Belarusian flag features an intricate pattern based on the traditional *rushnik*, a ceremonial cloth. Most Belarusian babies receive a *rushnik* at birth, as the red represents life.

The 'five cross flag' of Georgia is believed to have first been used in medieval times. The flag with one big central cross and four smaller ones in the corners is called a Jerusalem cross.

Many historians believe that the Russian tricolour is based on the Dutch flag. One theory is that Peter the Great saw a Dutch-built boat, was impressed with the fluttering flag and decided to make his own.

Cyprus's flag features a map of the island and two olive branches which symbolise peace between the Greek and Turkish communities, who have for decades struggled to live side-by-side on the island but are hopeful of a peaceful

The Greeks win the prize for the most striped flag in Europe. The cross in the canton represents Orthodox Christianity, but scholars cannot agree on the significance of the blue and white stripes.



Three flags in one

The United Kingdom is sometimes called a country of countries as it has four parts: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The national flag, known as the Union Jack or Union Flag, is made up of the red cross of England's Saint George, the diagonal red cross of Ireland's Saint Patrick, and the blue and white cross of Scotland's Saint Andrew.

A UNION OF CROWNS

England and Scotland had been separate kingdoms – often at war with each other and redrawing their borders – for centuries. A union seemed unlikely. However, in 1503, James IV of Scotland married Margaret, the eldest daughter of Henry VII of England, and exactly a century later, the English throne had a lack of immediate heirs. Due to the earlier royal marriage, King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England, unifying the crowns.

FIRST UNION FLAGS

This 'union of crowns' was a personal one, as the two kingdoms were technically separate states. Nevertheless, King James wished for a common symbol. The natural and neutral choice was to combine the English and Scottish flags, England and Scotland squabbled about which flag should be on top. Ultimately, they went with the English version.

St Andrew's Cross (Scotland)



Version preferred in Scotland



St George's Cross (England)



Version preferred in England



This flag was sometimes called the King's Colours or Great Union Flag

THE ADDITION OF IRELAND

An Irish harp was sometimes added to the flag when Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protectorate of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1653

Finally in 1801, the red cross of St Patrick was officially added when the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was formed after an Act of Union.

FLAGS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

The red dragon symbolises the fearlessness of the Welsh nation and people. It has been an emblem of Wales since the reign of Cadwaladr, King of Gwynedd, in 655CE. At the time of the union of the crowns, Wales was considered part of England, and so was represented by the Cross of St George. But some say the flag could use a dragon...

Since 1952, the Isle of Man has been represented by this triskelion – a three-legged symbol. Many say that it is because the island always lands on its feet!

The white stripe in the centre of the Irish flag symbolises peace between the Catholics in green and Protestants in orange, the two main groups of people Christians in the country.

A Flag for a Fleet

With its powerful navy and voyages of discovery, Spain has a famous seafaring history. It makes sense, then, that its flag, known as *la Rojigualda*, began life in 1785 as a flag used by the Spanish navy. It was chosen by King Charles III, who picked it out of 12 designs by a navy officer called Antonio Valdés y Bazán. The flag was eventually made the official national flag in 1843, by Queen Isabella II.

COAT OF ARMS

The current coat of arms has been used since 1981. The central shield represents the old kingdoms that united to form Spain, while the crown on top symbolises the monarchy of today. On either side stand the Pillars of Hercules and the Spanish motto, *Plus Ultra* (meaning 'more beyond'), which is another nod to Spain's history of exploration.

A SHORT-LIVED FLAG

Other than a few changes to its coat of arms, the Spanish flag has stayed much the same, apart from 1931 to 1939 when the monarchy was abolished and the country became a republic. For eight years, a new flag flew: this one also featured a coat of arms but on a red, yellow and purple colour, representing all parts of Spain.

Though it wasn't to last, as today Spain has a king once more and the red and yellow flag flies again.

I guess that's it for us.

THE LEGACY OF AN EMPIRE

The Spanish navy helped create the vast Spanish Empire, which colonised a large part of North and South America as well as areas of Africa, Asia and Oceania. Although this brought ships full of gold and silver to Spain, it took a terrible toll on the local peoples in many of the captured lands. Today, independence from Spain is celebrated in the colours and symbols of many South American flags.

BOLD AND PROUD

Though several old kingdoms joined together to form Spain, the people of each region still celebrate their own unique identities and have great pride in their regional flags. The Catalan flag, known as the *Senyera*, reflects the strong identity and pride that Catalans feel for their language, culture and history, and the *Ikurrriña* – the flag of the Basque region – has a red field that represents the Biscayne people.

A NATION OF NAVIGATORS

Spain's neighbour Portugal stretches along the Atlantic coast, and like Spain, it has strong links to the sea. In the 15th century Portugal expanded their fleet at sea of to take over the seas. This history is represented in its flag, which features an armillary sphere – a tool that allowed Portuguese sailors to navigate their way around the world's oceans by working out the position of the Sun and stars at different times of year.

The Famous Tricolore

Liberté, égalité, fraternité! France's famous red, white and blue flag, the *Tricolore*, is forever entwined with the values of freedom, equality and brotherhood. Its origins begin in the French Revolution of 1789, where the peasants and middle class wanted the same rights as higher classes and rose up to overthrow the monarchy.

PARISIAN COLOURS

Early on in the Revolution, tempers were rising. A group of Parisians attacked and took control of a prison fortress, the Bastille. Among this group, the Paris militia wore red and blue cockades on their hats, as these were the traditional colours of Paris. The colours came to symbolise the revolution. White, symbolizing purity, was later added, and by 1794 the official flag design we know today was born.

This isn't a colourful decoration worn on a hat, often made of ribbon, and used as a way of showing that the wearer belongs to a particular group.

What's a cockade, anyway?

ALL THAT FOR A NAPKIN!

Nearly a century later, after the war of 1870, a man called Henri, Comte de Chambord was asked by the new parliament to become king. However, he insisted he would only do so if France changed its flag back to a white one, representing the monarchy. The French were by now very attached to their *Tricolore*, and so they refused. When he was told about this, the Catholic Pope commented, "And all that for a napkin!"

WHICH BLUE?

In 1974, the French president at the time decided to use a version of the *Tricolore* with a lighter blue and red. Since then, both the old and new versions have been used, but it's still more common to see the darker colours fluttering in the breeze.

COPYCAT TRICOLOURS

The French flag might be the most famous tricolour, but it isn't the oldest. It is thought that the French revolutionaries took inspiration from the Dutch flag, which at that time was made of horizontal stripes of red, white and blue. The flag of Luxembourg, which used to be part of the Netherlands, is also very similar. The tricolour design has proved very popular in Europe, with the continent flying a total of seven vertical and 14 horizontal tricolour flags!

CONTRASTING NEIGHBOURS

Two of the countries bordering France have similar flags, but their colours contrast with the French *Tricolore*. Belgium's black, gold and red vertical stripes date from 1831 and come from the colours of a historic coat of arms featuring a golden lion with red claws. Meanwhile, Germany's flag of horizontal black, red and gold was first flown during the revolution in 1848 and later became the national flag in 1919 and again in 1949, after the Second World War.

What Do Flag Colours Mean?



Whether they come from the depths of history or have been chosen to represent the hopes and pride of a newly independent nation, a flag's colours are full of symbolism.

THE COLOURS OF NATURE

Blue sea and sky, green forests, white ice and yellow sun – colours are often used to represent a country's landscape and climate. Argentina's flag commemorates an uprising that led to the country's independence. On the day of the uprising, the clouds over Buenos Aires parted, revealing a sunny blue sky.

MATCHING COLOURS

Countries with a shared history and culture often share flag colours too, giving them a sense of unity. We can see this in flags with Pan-Arab (page 26) and Pan-African (page 54) colours!

Orange is a flag colour you don't see very often! In the Irish flag, a stripe of orange represents the protestant members of the population, while on the flag of Sri Lanka, it represents the Hindu Tamil community. In the flags Niger and Côte d'Ivoire, bands of orange symbolise the countries' savannah.



Iceland



China

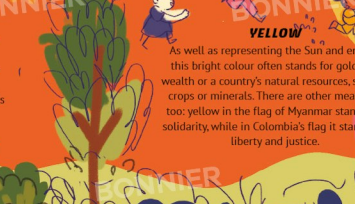


RED

In many flags, red stands for power, courage, bloodshed, and struggle for independence, but it can also stand for equality and brotherhood. The colour is also a famous symbol of communism and socialism, such as in the flags of China and Vietnam.



Myanmar



Colombia

YELLOW

As well as representing the Sun and energy, this bright colour often stands for gold and wealth or a country's natural resources, such as crops or minerals. There are other meanings, too: yellow in the flag of Myanmar stands for solidarity, while in Colombia's flag it stands for liberty and justice.



BLUE

White blue often represents the sea or sky, it can also stand for wealth, as seen in the flag of Laos, for monarchy, as in the flag of Thailand, or for brotherhood, as in the flag of Honduras.

PURPLE

Purple is the rarest colour, found on only four national flags. Discover why when you learn about Dominica (page

GREEN

Green is the colour of nature, so it is a popular flag choice to represent lush and leafy forests and farmland around the world. Look out for it on the flags of Grenada, Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands. As the colour brings to mind spring and new life, it is sometimes used to symbolise hope, such as on the flags of Belarus and Hungary. It is also an important colour in Islam (see page 38), meaning you're likely to spot it on several flags in Asia.

WHITE

White is often used to represent purity, honesty and peace. Why do you think this might be? You can find large areas of white used in the flags of South Korea, Indonesia and Singapore in Asia.

BLACK

In the symbolism of Pan-Arab colours, black is said to represent defeat of enemies. In others, such as the flag of Estonia, it can stand for past suffering or hardships. In some flags, it represents the richness of the nation's soil.

Learn the story behind Ghana's black star symbol on page 60!



The lion on the flag of Sri Lanka is said to date back to the nation's first ruler who brought a lion banner from India in 486 BCE.

Lebanon's distinctive flag features its national symbol, the cedar tree. Cedars of Lebanon were mentioned many times in the bible as representing strength and wealth.

Kyrgyzstan's flag features the top of a Kyrgyz yurt (a kind of tent) surrounded by a blazing sun. The 40 rays represent the 40 tribes united under national hero Manas to defeat the invading Mongols in 1219.

Bruni's flag includes a stylised image of the royal parasol used by the sultan in this hot, tropical nation. It's the only national flag to feature an umbrella!

ASIA

Asia covers almost a third of our planet's land area and is home to an amazing variety of landscapes and cultures, from the elevated Tibetan mountains to the metropolis of Singapore. From the simplicity of Indonesia's red and white bicolor to the complexity of Turkmenistan's tapestry, Asia's national flags vary as much as its people. There is plenty of religious symbolism in the flags of Asia, too. Perhaps this is to be expected from a continent that gave birth to 11 major religions including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism!

Many flags in the Arabian Peninsula (Southwest Asia) contain black, white, green and red. These are the Pan-Arab colours. Individually, each colour represents an Arabian dynasty, but additional meaning was added in a 14th century verse by Iraqi poet Sa'ad al-Din al-Hilli, which reads: "White are our acts, black our battles, green our fields, and red our swords."

Turkmenistan's flag is considered the most complex in the world because it features five incredibly detailed guls, or traditional carpet designs, that represent the five main tribes of the country.

The red and blue taeguk at the centre of South Korea's flag represents balance between positive and negative forces.

At the centre stage on Cambodia's flag is the incredible temple, Angkor Wat. If you think the temple on the flag looks impressive, you should visit the real thing - built in the 1100s, it's one of over a thousand buildings, making it the largest religious structure in the world.



Gandhi's Flag

More people live in India than in any other country on Earth, but this diverse nation, speaking hundreds of languages, is united under a single flag. The *Triranga*, meaning tricolour, was adopted on 22 July 1947, just weeks before India gained independence from the British Empire.

Mahatma Gandhi was a leader and activist, who fought for India's independence. He knew it was important to have a flag as unifying emblem for all Indians. In 1921 he designed an early version of the flag, with red for India's Hindus and green for its Muslims. Soon after, he added a white band across the middle for all the other faiths and cultures of India.

In 1931, red was changed to saffron another important colour in Hinduism. When India finally achieved independence and the flag became official, its colours were given new symbolism. The saffron is now said to stand for courage and sacrifice, the white for peace and truth, and the green for faith and chivalry.

A flag represents an ideal... It will be necessary for us Indians, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Parsis and all others to whom India is their home to recognise a common flag to live and die for.

WHEELS OF CHANGE

Gandhi encouraged India to become self-reliant by spinning its own cloth out of Indian cotton, rather than shipping it to Britain. Because of this, he felt a spinning wheel would be the perfect emblem for the new flag. By 1947, however, the spinning wheel had been swapped for a dharmachakra, a Buddhist and Hindu wheel symbol representing the eternal order of the universe and, on the Indian flag, also standing for progress.

When producing the flag, only one type of cloth is allowed, a special hand-spun Indian cloth called khadi.



dharmachakra



SOYOMBO SYMBOLISM

Another flag featuring a Buddhist symbol can be found in Mongolia. The Soyombo is made up of many parts. Sun and moon symbolise that Mongolia will exist for eternity and triangles represent arrows that will defeat enemies. The yin and yang stand for balance between opposites. The horizontal rectangles symbolise the honesty and justice, while the vertical rectangles represent unity and strength. The three-topped spire represents growth, wealth and success in the past, present and future.



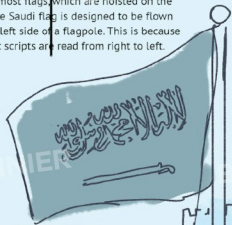
PARTING WAYS

When the region gained independence from the British Empire in 1947, the British government split it into two countries: India, which was mainly Hindu, and Pakistan, which was mainly Muslim. Reflecting this religion, Pakistan's flag is mostly green with a star and crescent moon. Its white band represents the nation's non-Muslim minorities.

Script and Sword

FLY TO THE LEFT

Unlike most flags, which are hoisted on the right, the Saudi flag is designed to fly from the left side of a flagpole. This is because Arabic scripts are read from right to left.



A decorative Islamic script also features in the flag of Iraq, which proclaims 'God is the greatest'.



FEELING A LITTLE GREEN?

You might think Saudi Arabia's flag has a lot of green on it, but it can't compete with the old flag of Libya. From 1977 to 2011, the Libyan flag was completely green, with no other symbols or words! Today, no country has a single-colour flag.

With its bold green background and prominent Arabic inscription, underlined with a thin, white sword, the flag of Saudi Arabia stands out from the crowd. The text is the Islamic profession of faith, or *shahada*: 'There is no god but Allah (God); Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (God).'

The current flag was designed by Hafiz Wahba and has been used since 1973, but earlier versions date back to the 1700s, often showing the script in a larger size, sometimes with a curved sword below and other times with no sword at all.



THE SWORD OF A KING

The sword on the Saudi flag is said to represent the sword of King Ibn Saud, who conquered much of central Arabia and founded Saudi Arabia in 1932, uniting the four regions of Hejaz and Najd and parts of Eastern and Southern Arabia. The weapon is also said to symbolise strictness in applying justice, making it an appropriate emblem for a country ruled by strict laws.

A HOLY FLAG

In many countries, lowering a flag to half-mast is a sign of mourning, but because the *shahada* written on the Saudi flag is holy scripture, lowering it is considered blasphemous (disrespectful to God) and not allowed. It is also forbidden to display the flag on other items, such as mugs or t-shirts, which is seen as disrespectful to Islam.

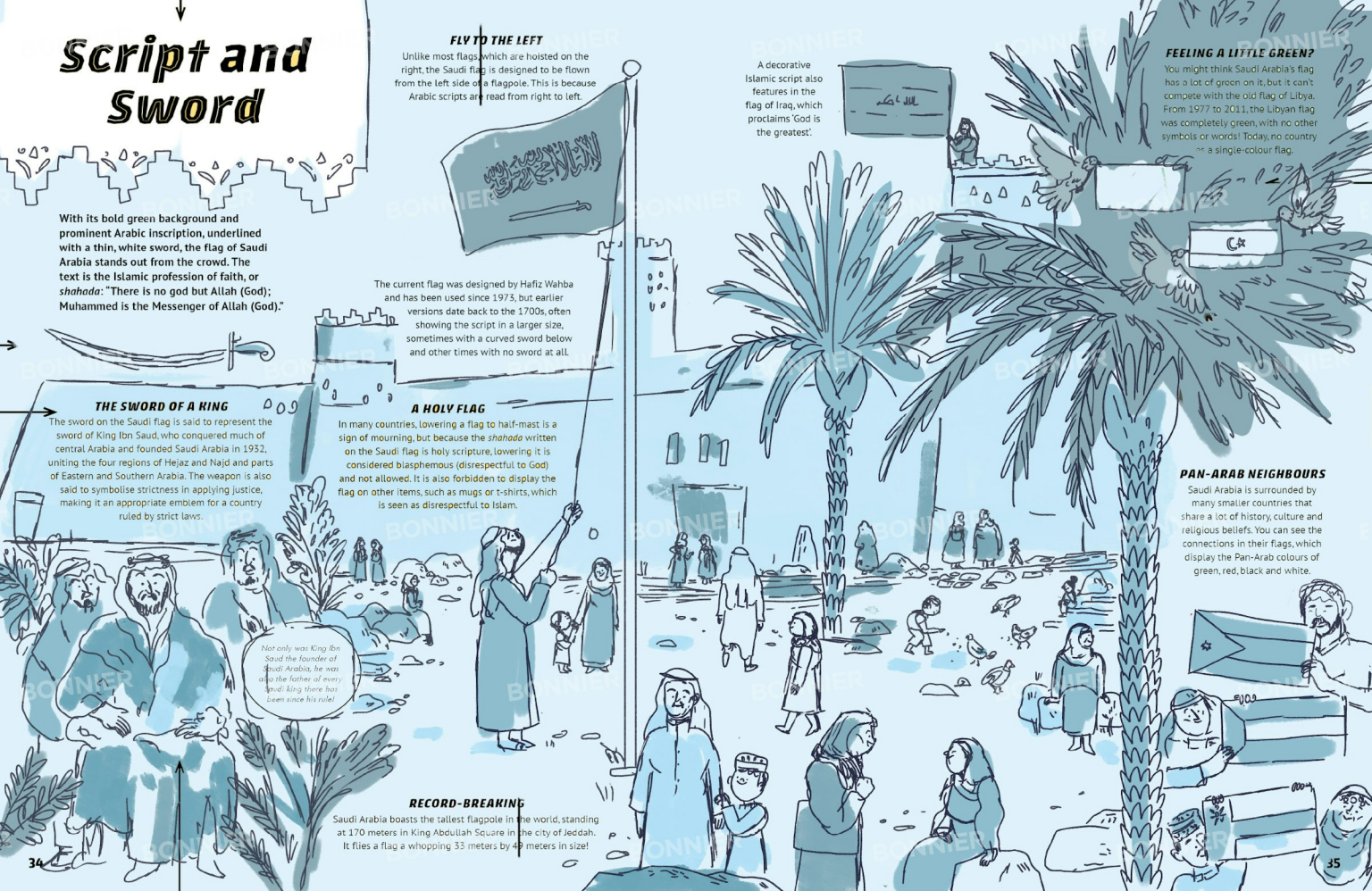
Not only was King Ibn Saud the founder of Saudi Arabia, he was also the father of every Saudi king there has been since his role!

RECORD-BREAKING

Saudi Arabia boasts the tallest flagpole in the world, standing at 170 meters in King Abdullah Square in the city of Jeddah. It flies a flag a whopping 33 meters by 49 meters in size!

PAN-ARAB NEIGHBOURS

Saudi Arabia is surrounded by many smaller countries that share a lot of history, culture and religious beliefs. You can see the connections in their flags, which display the Pan-Arab colours of green, red, black and white.



Doing things Differently?

Of all the national flags in the world today, only Nepal's is not a rectangle. But why is that? Well, to a Nepali, that question might seem back-to-front. They might ask: why aren't more flags triangular or pennant-shaped?

In South Asia, triangles and pennants were once the norm, but when European influence spread across the world, most countries adopted rectangular flags. But Nepal has a history of breaking the mould. From their unique flag to their individual time zone, this country beats to its own drum.



UNPACKING THE PENNANT

The shape of Nepal's flag is believed to represent the country's mountains. The sun and the moon individually represent rulers of Nepal, together and the wish for Nepal to last for as long as these celestial objects. The blue outline is a symbol of peace and crimson red represents the rhododendron, Nepal's national flower.

Did you know...? Many countries have their national emblem on their flag, but Nepal's has their flag on their national emblem!

PRAYER FLAGS

Prayer flags can be found hanging at temples and monasteries, in homes and at mountain passes across the Himalayan region. They come in yellow, green, red, white and blue, and these colours represent earth, water, fire, wind and sky. Prayers are printed on the flags, and it is believed that the wind will scatter these good wishes.

Land of the Thunder Dragon

Just a yak's trek away from Nepal is the country of Bhutan or, as it is known in the local language, *Druk Yul* – Land of the Thunder Dragon. And this druk is an impressive beast! It's not a fearsome, destructive creature like dragons from the west. Instead, it's a guardian spirit.

A DIFFERENT PALETTE

The flag of Bhutan is the only national flag in the world that doesn't feature red, blue or green. Instead, the colours of yellow, white and orange are deeply rooted in the traditions of the Bhutanese monarchy and of Buddhism.

Yellow represents the king, who wears a yellow silk garment called a kabney.

The druk is white, which represents the pure thoughts and actions of the Bhutanese people.

Orange symbolises Buddhism, the national religion.

The dragon's pearls represent prosperity and wealth.

A GRANDMOTHER'S FLAG

Bhutan's flag was designed by Ranu Choying Wangmo Dorji, the grandmother of the king. Her original design featured a traditional blue and green dragon facing towards the hoist. But later, the direction of the dragon was flipped so that its face was clear to see when the flag was flying, rather than getting lost in folds of fabric.

A DIFFERENT DRAGON

Bhutan's national flag isn't the only one to feature a dragon, but you'll need to look very closely to see the creature on Malta's flag. In the centre of the cross is an image of Saint George on horseback defeating a dragon.



The Maple Leaf

For centuries, the indigenous people of Canada loved *sinzibukwa* – the sweet, succulent sap of the maple tree. In the 1500s and 1600s, European settlers ventured up the rivers of eastern Canada and soon learned the secrets of the delicious maple from the local people. The tree made such an impression that from the mid-1700s it started appearing on regional flags and newsletter headings all over the country.



However, European flags soon flew over Canada as the British and French both claimed areas of these northern lands. Indeed, even after Canada gained independence in 1931, the Union Jack of the United Kingdom continued to soar over the land, sometimes alongside a Canadian ensign.

COMPETITION TIME

Finally, in 1964, a contest was held to design a national flag for Canada, which captured the identity of the nation. About two-thirds of the entries included the maple leaf, showing just how it was seen as a strong symbol of the people. Canadian soldiers had even worn maple leaves to war, so it was no surprise to see it so prominently.



A committee gathered to narrow the suggestions down to two flags for a final vote. One was the 'Pearson Pennant' – a three-stemmed maple leaf on a white panel surrounded by two blue panels. These colours symbolised the national motto 'From sea to sea', as Canada stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west.



The other was the single maple leaf on a red and white colour, designed by historian George Stanley. The idea for this design came to him one day whilst watching a Royal Military College of Canada flag – which had similar colours – fly in the wind. The simplicity of Stanley's design ultimately won out. Red and white were two colours that honoured the British and French histories respectively, and the maple leaf was a neutral symbol for Canadian peoples of all races and backgrounds – a clear and simple national emblem.

OUR LAND

Nunavut (which is the Inuktitut word for 'our land') is the northernmost and newest of the Canadian territories, established in 1999.



Like the flag of Canada, it uses an iconic symbol to represent the region: the inuksuk. This is a manmade stone marker traditionally used in a region with no trees and few distinct natural features. The blue star represents the North Star and the leadership of the elders in the community.

OUR FLAG

Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark that neighbours Canada to the north. Until 1985, only the Dannebrog was officially flown across this northern land. That year, the region too held a contest to design a flag. Many entries featured Nordic crosses to honour the relationship with other similar territories, but the winning design bears no cross at all, and is striking and unique.

Called Erfalasorput ('our flag'), it was designed by Greenlandic Thue Christensen. The red stripe represents the ocean, while the white stripe symbolises the icecap. The red semicircle is the sun, and the white semicircle is the pack ice that closely surrounds its landmass.



One Nation Two flags

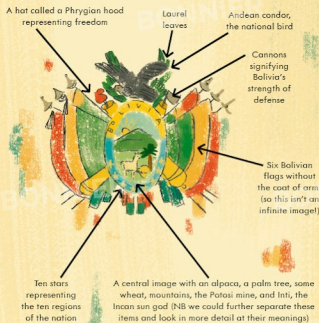
Since 2009, Bolivia has had not one, but two very different official flags. Most nations have multiple flags – in addition to the 'main' or national flag, there may be flags especially for use at sea or other state flags for the president and royal family. But currently, Bolivia is the only country to have two main flags.

THE TRICOLOUR

Since 1851, Bolivia has flown a red, yellow and green tricolour. But these colours had actually been a symbol of the nation's freedom for 25 years already! In August 1825, just 11 days after they gained independence from Spain, a red and green striped flag with a yellow star was adopted. On today's design, red represents the bravery and bloodshed of soldiers who fought for independence, yellow represents the nation's wealth and resources, and green is for the country's natural environment.

COAT OF ARMS

Coats of arms are unique designs used as symbols of countries, monarchs, regions and even families, and they often feature detailed images of things that represent who they belong to. Some countries, like Bolivia, display their national coat of arms on their flag, and South America is a hotspot for this with five national flags displaying their proudly!



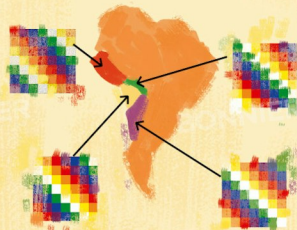
THE WIPHALA

The marvellous wiphala is a symbol that has been used by Andean peoples for over a thousand years. It consists of 49 squares of seven different colours arranged in diagonal stripes. In 2009, Evo Morales, the first indigenous president in South America, declared the Wiphala to have the status of national flag alongside the tricolour. With this, the many indigenous people of Bolivia were lifted up as citizens and made to feel included in their homeland.



FOUR WIPHALAS

Four different regions have different wiphala patterns. This region encompasses parts of present-day Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Argentina as well as Bolivia. The west of Bolivia is in the Collasuyu region, so takes the wiphala with white squares running down the central diagonal.



A winning Design

In 1957, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African nation to gain independence after colonialism. In the lead up to this historic event, a competition was advertised held for the newly liberated citizens to design the country's new flag. Theodosia Okoh, a talented artist and teacher, jumped at the chance, and designed a masterpiece which balanced captured the nation's overwhelming outlook for the future with striking simplicity, symbolism and visual impact.

RED GOLD AND GREEN

Like many flags, each coloured band of the Ghanaian flag holds lots of meaning. The red band represents bloodshed in the country's fight for independence. The middle band is gold to represent... gold! In fact, Ghana is Africa's largest producer of the metal. Finally, green is for the rich forests that cover the nation's land. And it's no coincidence that these three bands are also present on the Ethiopian flag, a country that fiercely resisted colonialism, and stood as a symbol of hope and freedom for many African nations.

BLACK STAR

In 1919, a Jamaican activist called Marcus Garvey formed a shipping company called the Black Star Line. It was owned and run by local people, and became a symbol for freedom and independence. Particularly in Ghana, the meaning of the black star can be seen everywhere, from the Black Star Gate in Black Star Square to the national football team: the Black Stars!

NEW FLAGS FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

From the late 1950s to 1980, groups of people fought valiantly across the African continent for gain independence for their country. This was called decolonisation. Because this happened relatively recently, we can pinpoint the origin stories of their flags. These talented designers had a unique opportunity to write their nation's new history.

SOMALIA

Mohammed Awale Liban was a scholar who designed the flag of Somalia upon the country's independence in 1954. Its five-pointed star represents the five areas where the Somali people live, and the light blue was originally chosen in honour of the UN, who assisted Somalia in gaining independence. Today, the blue represents the sky and the sea beside the country.

NAMIBIA

The nation of Namibia gained its independence less than 30 years ago in 1990. Following this, a flag competition was launched. Rather than picking one winner, the government liked the colours and meanings from three designers, including Theo Jankowski's message of hope, Don Stevenson's Sun symbol, and Ortrud Clay's design celebrating peace.

TOGO

Artist Paul Ayhi designed the Togolese flag. He modelled it on the Liberian flag, whose star and stripes are based on the America's Star Spangled Banner. The white star represents peace and hope, and marked the country's freedom from colonial rule in 1960.

Did you know...?
Ayhi also designed the Independence Monument in the Togo's capital, Lomé.

A Flag Menagerie

It seems natural that a creature displayed on a flag should be the sort of thing of as majestic and fearless, so it's no surprise to discover that the most common animal featured is an eagle. And if that isn't fierce enough for you, how about one with two heads?

DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE

The Kastrioti family of Albania had an emblem featuring a two-headed eagle in the 14th and 15th centuries. Skanderbeg, the national hero who defeated the Ottomans, was part of this family, and now the double-headed eagle represents the entire nation. Neighbouring Montenegro and nearby Serbia also include a two-headed eagle on their flags.

AN EGYPTIAN EAGLE

In the 12th century, Saladin became the first sultan of Egypt and Syria. He used a yellow flag with an eagle likely inspired by the many carvings of Egyptian vultures in tombs and temples of Ancient Egypt. The Eagle of Saladin found its way back onto the Egyptian flag in 1952, following the Egyptian Revolution.



Montenegro



Serbia



Kazakhstan

On the flag of Kazakhstan, a striped eagle soars beneath a blazing sun, symbolizing freedom.



Albania



Egypt

Zambia, Moldova and Mexico also have flags that feature a eagle.



Ecuador

BIRDS, BIRDS AND MORE BIRDS

Across the world, birds of all sorts can be found on flags. They are often native to that land, holding a special place in the hearts of the people. On the flag of Uganda, their national bird – a grey crowned crane – proudly stands to attention. Ecuador's flag features an Andean condor perched on its coat of arms, while on the Guatemalan flag, a native quetzal sits pleasantly on a scroll.



Uganda

HOOVES, HORNS AND HAIR

It's not just birds that are popular. You'll find some interesting four-legged beasts hiding in coats of arms – but you'll have to look closely to spot them! On the flag of Venezuela is Paloma, the white horse of Simón Bolívar, who led the country to independence from the Spanish Empire. Travelling south, the state flag of Peru features a vicuña. This native animal is related to llamas and alpacas, and represents freedom, national pride and the animal life of Peru.

Over in Europe, the tiny country of Andorra features two red cows on its flag. Long ago, Andorra was governed by its neighbours, France and Spain, and the cows represent those found in the French region of Béarn. Not to be outdone, Croatia has three different species on its flag! Look out for three lion heads, a goat and a marten at the top of its coat of arms, representing its historic regions.



Croatia



Andorra

THE LION'S ROAR

Seen as courageous and regal, the lion is an ancient and popular animal to feature on coats of arms. Look out for it on the flag of Jersey in the Channel Islands, Bermuda in the North Atlantic, and the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean. These were once part of the British Empire and still have ties to the United Kingdom. That's why their flags include the lion from the English royal coat of arms.

