

Alaska Flag Ornament

Explore how stars connect to history and culture by making an Alaska flag ornament!



Stars play an important role in history and culture. For thousands of years, people have looked up at the night sky, told stories about the patterns they see, and used the stars to navigate while traveling.

Materials Needed:

Flag Ornament printable (or draw your own), colored pencils or crayons, yarn or string, glue, scissors. *Optional:* Gold star stickers, hole punch.

Instructions:

Step 1: Color two flag ornament templates. Color the background blue and the stars yellow to make it look like the Alaska flag, or use your imagination!

Optional: Add gold star stickers for the North Star (the biggest star at the top).

Step 2: Cut out both flag ornament templates. Glue them together, back-to-back. Make sure the Big Dipper is pointing the same way on both sides!

Step 3: Use a hole punch or scissors to make a small hole at the top of the ornament. Tie a piece of yarn or string through the hole, and hang up your ornament!



Try looking outside on a clear night.

Can you find the Big Dipper and North Star?

The Story of Alaska's Flag

The Big Dipper and the North Star

A *constellation* is a group of stars that appears to form a pattern or picture in the sky. The Big Dipper, shown on the Alaska flag, is part of the constellation Ursa Major (the Great Bear). Two stars in the Big Dipper point toward Polaris, the North Star. Polaris is part of the constellation Ursa Minor (the Little Bear).



The Big Dipper and Ursa Major.
Image: Lunar and Planetary Institute.

Polaris is situated almost directly above the Earth's North Pole, so it is useful for navigation in the northern hemisphere. Cultures across the world have used Polaris to help navigate for thousands of years.

Did You Know? The Big Dipper is not a constellation! It is part of Ursa Major. The Big Dipper is an *asterism*: a recognized, but not official, grouping of stars.



Image: Miguel Claro, via Space.com.

Benny Benson and the Alaska Flag

In 1927, the American Legion held a contest for children to design the Alaska flag. Benny Benson, a 13-year-old living in an orphanage in Seward, submitted the winning design. It showed the seven stars of the Big Dipper pointing to the North Star.

Benson explained, "The blue field is for the Alaska sky and the forget-me-not, an Alaskan flower. The North Star is for the future state of Alaska, the most northerly in the union. The Dipper is for the Great Bear, symbolizing strength."



Benson's contest submission.
Image: Alaska State Museum.



Benson holding the Alaska flag.
Image: Alaska State Library.

Benson was born in Chignik, Alaska. His mother was Aleut and Russian, and his father was Swedish. When he was three years old, he was sent to live at an orphanage. After graduating from high school, Benson used his scholarship from winning the flag contest to study diesel engine repair. He settled in Kodiak and worked as an airplane mechanic. He died in 1972.

In 1935, Marie Drake wrote a poem about the flag, based on Benson's explanation. Elinor Dusenbury later composed music for the poem, and in 1955 it became Alaska's official song.

Watch a video of the Alaska Flag Song:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLunSyrGXco

Alaska Flag Ornament Printable

