

Name: _____ Class: _____

A Flag That Honors War Veterans

An Army captain invented a symbol for his sons that everyone could see.

By Shawn E. Hanscom
2016

In this informational text, Shawn E. Hanscom discusses how the first Service Flag was created and how it honors soldiers in war. As you read, take notes on what the Service Flag represents to those who display it.

- [1] When his two sons were fighting in France during World War I, Army captain Robert L. Queisser knew he wanted to come up with a visible symbol that would honor them. He decided a flag that was simple in design and easy to make would be perfect. The flag would have a white rectangular background with a wide red border and a blue star to represent a soldier.

"I wanted it to be a comfort, not only to my wife, but to all mothers whose sons or daughters were in the service," said Captain Queisser.



"101112-N-5586R-006" by U.S. Pacific Fleet is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

The Queissers' homemade flag had two blue stars, one for Charles and one for Robert Jr. When the flag was hung inside their front window, the message was clear: two members of this household had left to serve in the Great War. In the Queissers' hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, the Service Flag quickly became the unofficial symbol for parents with a child in the military. The city officially adopted the Service Flag in June of 1917. Soon, the message spread, and wives, mothers, grandparents, and children across America became busy sewing flags.

A National Symbol

The Service Flag made its way to Washington, D.C. In September of 1917, an Ohio congressman announced to the U.S. House of Representatives, “The mayor of Cleveland... and the Governor of Ohio [have] adopted this service flag. The world should know of those who give so much for liberty. The dearest thing in all the world to a father and mother are their children.”

- [5] Captain Queisser soon applied for a patent¹ on his flag design, which was granted in early November of 1917. The Service Flag was now a national symbol of honor and pride for families with members in the Armed Forces.

1. an official document that protects a creator's invention

It didn't take long for the symbol to expand its meaning. In 1918, when the names of the men and women who died in the war became known, grief replaced hope. Families covered the blue star with a gold one. The flag now had a different message: a member of this house has made the ultimate sacrifice with his or her life during the war.

The gold star is slightly smaller than the blue one underneath, so it appears that the gold star has a blue border. If there are multiple stars on a flag, the gold one is placed in the top position.

When World War I ended in 1918, these symbols of pride and sacrifice were put away. In the 1940s, after the U.S. entered World War II, the flag made a national reappearance, with more homes displaying it than ever before.

The Flag Today

In the wars after World War II, the flag was not as popular. It wasn't until the country's involvement in the Middle East that this changed. On April 11, 2003, the 108th Congress made a declaration² that "encourages the families of members of the Armed Forces to proudly display the Blue Star Flag or, if their loved one has made the ultimate sacrifice, the Gold Star."

- [10] It all started with one flag in one window. But 100 years later, the need that Captain and Mrs. Queisser had to honor their sons hasn't diminished. The flags remind us that these soldiers are true American heroes, and we honor and thank them all.

Copyright © Highlights for Children, Inc., Columbus, Ohio. All rights reserved.

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text?
 - A. Captain Queisser developed a Service Flag hoping that he would eventually be able to patent and sell it.
 - B. As people's support for the war diminished, there were fewer Service Flags displayed in windows.
 - C. Captain Queisser's decision to display a flag for his children in the service has evolved into a widely practiced tradition in America.
 - D. As displaying Service Flags became more popular, even Americans who didn't have children in the army started displaying them.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Captain Queisser soon applied for a patent on his flag design, which was granted in early November of 1917." (Paragraph 5)
 - B. "In 1918, when the names of the men and women who died in the war became known, grief replaced hope." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "In the wars after World War II, the flag was not as popular. It wasn't until the country's involvement in the Middle East that this changed." (Paragraph 9)
 - D. "It all started with one flag in one window. But 100 years later, the need that Captain and Mrs. Queisser had to honor their sons hasn't diminished." (Paragraph 10)

3. How does paragraph 4 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
 - A. It shows how the Service Flag took on national significance.
 - B. It explains why people began displaying Service Flags in their windows.
 - C. It shows how the meaning of the Service Flag changed.
 - D. It describes how the Service Flag evolved over time.

4. Which of the following describes the author's purpose in the text?
 - A. to prove that the use of the Service Flag has diminished
 - B. to encourage people to continue using the Service Flag
 - C. to explain how the Service Flag became a symbol in America
 - D. to show how Americans are affected by war

