

TRACE READING EXERCISE

NATIONAL FLAGS

- 1 The flag, the most common symbol of national identity in the modern world, is also one of the most ancient. The traditional flag of fabric is still used to mark buildings, ships and diplomatic caravans by national affiliation, but its visual design makes it adaptable for other roles as well. Most flags have a compact, rectangular shape and distinct visual symbolism. Their strong colors and geometric patterns are usually instantly recognizable even if miniaturized to less than a square centimeter. Images of flags can thus serve as identifying icons on airliners, television broadcasts, and our computer displays.
- 2 Despite its simplicity, the national flag as we know it today is in no way a **primitive** artifact. It is, rather, the product of millennia of development in many corners of the globe. Historians believe it had two major ancestors, of which the earlier served to indicate wind direction. Early human societies used very fragile shelters and boats. Their food sources were similarly vulnerable to disruption. Even after various grains had been domesticated, people needed cooperation from the elements to assure good harvests. For all these reasons, **they** feared and depended on the power of the wind, which could bring warmth from one direction and cold from another.
- 3 Ascertaining the direction of the wind using a simple strip of cloth tied to the top of a post was more reliable than either methods, such as watching the rising of smoke from a fire or the swaying of field grasses. The association of these prototypes of the flag with divine power was therefore a natural one. Tribes began to fix long cloth flutters to the tops of totems before carrying them into battle, believing that the magical assistance of the wild would be added to the blessings of the gods and ancestors represented by the totem itself.
- 4 **These flutters may seem like close kin of our present-day flags, but the path through history from one to the other wanders through thousands of years and over several continents.** The first known flag of a nation or ruler was unmarked: The king who established the Chou Dynasty in China (around 1000 B.C.) was reputed to have a white flag carried ahead of him. This practice may have been adopted from Egyptians even further in the past, but it was from China that it spread over trade routes through India, then across Arab lands, and finally to medieval Europe.
- 5 In Europe, the Chinese-derived flag met up with the modern flag's second ancestor, the heraldic crest. The flag used in Asia may have been differentiated by color, but they rarely featured emblems or picture. European nobles of the medieval period had, however, developed a system of crest (symbols or insignias specific to particular families) that were commonly mounted on hard surfaces; shields to be used in battle often displayed **them** especially prominently.
- 6 The production of these crests on flags permitted them to be used as heralds, meaning that they functioned as visual announcements that a member of an important household

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was present. While crests began to appear on flags as well as shields, the number of prominent families was also increasing. They required an ever greater number of combinations of stripes, crosses, flowers, and mythical animals to distinguish themselves. These survived as the basic components of flag design when small regional kingdoms were later combined into larger nation-states. They remain such for many European countries today.

7 Some nations, particularly, those whose colors and emblems date back several hundred years, have different flags for different official uses. For example, the flag of Poland is a simple rectangle with a white upper half and red lower half. The colors themselves have been associated with Polish nationalism since the 1700s. They originated as the colors of the Piast family, which during its rule displayed a crest bearing a white eagle on a red field. Homage is paid to the Piast Dynasty in the Polish ensign, the flag officially used at sea. Unlike the familiar plain flag flown on land, the ensign has a red with a white eagle centered on its upper white stripe.

1. In paragraph I, the author describes the design of the typical flag as ---.

- A) unfamiliar to people from other countries
- B) likely to change as technology improves
- C) suited to many different uses

2. The word "**primitive**" in paragraph II is closest in meaning to ---.

- A) ancient
- B) unsophisticated
- C) identifiable

3. The word "**they**" in paragraph II is closest in meaning to ---.

- A) grains
- B) people
- C) elements

4. The earliest ancestors of the flag were associated with divine power because ---.

- A) they were flown as high in the sky as people could reach
- B) they were woven from valuable field grasses
- C) they moved with the wind

5. According to paragraph IV, the first known national flag in history ---.

- A) was not carried into battle
- B) was copied by the Egyptians
- C) was not colored or patterned

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6. Which of the following is the best restatement of the following sentence in paragraph IV? *“These flutters may seem like close kin of our present-day flags, but the path through history from one to the other wanders through thousands of years and over several continents.”*
- A) Despite the obvious similarities between two, ancient flutters developed very slowly and indirectly into modern flags.
- B) Despite the widespread use of modern flags, flutters in the ancient style are still used in some part of the world
- C) Historians are slowly discovering evidence of how the flutters used on ancient totems developed into modern flags.
7. As discussed in the text, a crest is ---.
- A) the most important member of a household
- B) the color of a particular flag
- C) the symbol of a particular family
8. According to paragraph VI, the number of flag designs increased because ---.
- A) fewer shields were being made for battle
- B) artist had greater freedom in creating flags
- C) more families wanted their own symbols
9. The word “**them**” in paragraph V refers to ---.
- A) crests
- B) families
- C) hard surfaces
10. The two flags of Poland mentioned in the passage differ in that ---.
- A) they do not used use the same colors
- B) they originally represented different families
- C) one does not have a crest

ANSWER KEY: 1C 2B 3B 4C 5C 6A 7C 8C 9A 10C

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