

Introduction and Reflection

- Creating a Maine Identity Grades K-3-

What's the Deal with the Seal?

Summary:

Students will engage in a close, active exploration of the Maine State Seal. This activity provides an introduction to analyzing primary source materials. Students will compare historic perspectives to life today.

Materials:

- Blank paper OR printouts of “Draw your own seal”
- Pencils, markers, or crayons
- Printouts of Source 1 and Source 2, or show images on a projector or screen
- [Optional] Maine flag or image of flag

Themes & Sources (for teacher use):

- Choosing symbols and icons to represent the State
 - Source 1: Sketch of the Maine State Seal
 - Source 2: Painting of the Maine State seal

Note—Source 1 was an original concept of the seal, sketched in 1820 when the Maine Legislature was deciding on a design. Source 2 is a painted glass panel made between 1820-1860, and was probably used in the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

***Start by passing out printouts of Source 1 and Source 2, or projecting the images so everyone in the class can see them. ***

What is on the seal?

Maine became a state in March 1820. Three months later, in June 1820, the Maine Legislature decided on the design of the state seal. The first source is the first black and white sketch of the seal that they drew in 1820.

They made up rules about what should be in the seal, but it was drawn by different people and looked different over the years. For example, they wrote that it should have a moose. A moose that one person draws could be totally different than another person's moose! The second source is a more artistic, colorful version of the seal.

Have you seen this seal before? You probably have, even if you don't realize it! It's on the Maine flag [show the flag, if you have one].

TRY IT OUT—*Look at the seal as a class, and take turns listing all the different things you see in the picture. The closer you look, the better!*

Here's what that the official rules say must be in the state seal:

- Silver shield
 - Draw a shield up on the whiteboard so the class understands the shape.
- Pine tree
- Moose lying under the pine tree
 - Did you know—in 1979 the moose became Maine's official state animal.

- [Left side of the shield] Farmer “resting on” a scythe
 - A scythe is a tool with a long handle and a sharp blade used to cut plants. It is pronounced like “sigh” with a “th” sound at the end.
- [Right side of the shield] Sailor “resting on” an anchor
 - An anchor is a heavy weight that sailors use to keep a ship from moving. The shape lets it dig into the ocean floor, and the hole at the top is there so you can tie a rope to it.
- [Front of the shield] Land and sea
- [Under the shield] The name of the state, MAINE, in capital letters
- The North Star
- The state motto “Dirigo” should be between the North Star and the shield. Dirigo means “I lead” in Latin. It is pronounced “dee-rig-oh.”

Notice there is no rule about what color the seal should be. Artists could be creative!

TRY IT OUT [Optional]—Using these rules, draw your own state seal on the whiteboard as a class! Students can take turns adding each part of the design, or they can direct the teacher.

In 1919, the Maine Legislature approved the version of the state seal that we use today. It has looked the same ever since!

Why did they choose the stuff on the seal?

When Maine was a brand-new state, people had to decide what Maine’s identity should be. Your “identity” is all the stuff that makes you who you are. For example, you might identify as a brother, an artist, or an animal lover! States also have an identity. Maine’s identity is all the stuff that is important to Maine and that makes it special.

People chose symbols for Maine. Symbols represent something, like how a heart means love and a ‘skull and crossbones’ means danger. Symbols are a way to share important information quickly.

TRY IT OUT—draw some symbols up on the whiteboard as a class! (common examples—peace sign, dollar sign, recycling symbol, smiley face)

Everything on the state seal is a symbol. Look back to the list of everything that needs to be on the seal—the moose, the farmer, etc. Talk as a class about what those symbols mean.

Why do you think they chose these symbols to represent Maine? What symbols would you choose if it were up to you?

TRY IT OUT—*Forget the official rules--design your own Maine seal! You can choose any symbols you like. Hint—think about what is important to you. Think about what Maine means to you. Are there important people, places, and things that you can think of?*

Students may do this activity on a blank piece of paper OR use the Maine State Museum’s “Design your own seal” pdf, downloadable on our website.

We also offer Maine symbols for inspiration and extra coloring time!

Class Reflection Questions:

- How did you decide what to put on your seal? Why are those things important to you?
- Compare your seals to the official state seal. How are they different? How are they similar?
- Do you think people in 1820 had different ideas about Maine than we have today?
- If your class had to work together to come up with one seal design that tells people about Maine, what would it look like?