



FLAG GATE

Artist unidentified

Jefferson County, New York; c. 1876

Paint on wood with iron and brass; 39 ½ × 57 × 3 ¾"

Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill Jr., 1962.1.1

Photo by John Parnell, New York

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Flag Gate evokes the American spirit and exemplifies the widespread expressions of patriotism at the time of the nation's centennial. It is thought to have been inspired by the centennial celebration and may have been made for installation on Robert Darling's farm on Pulpit Road in the town of Antwerp, Jefferson County, New York. The wooden flag has thirty-seven white stars on one side and thirty-eight on the other (the thirty-eighth state, Colorado, entered the Union in 1876). Its red and white stripes are wavy, as if the flag were rippling in a breeze.

Flag Gate illustrates the multiple layers of meaning that may be encoded into folk art. It is a utilitarian object, it demonstrates its maker's participation in a national experience, and it also expresses its maker's individual creativity.

RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

www.folkartmuseum.org

The Flag of the United States of America:

www.usflag.org

Harding, Deborah. *Stars and Stripes: Patriotic Motifs in American Folk Art*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2002.

Hinrichs, Kit. *Long May She Wave: A Graphic History of the American Flag*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with American Institute of Graphic Arts, 1987.

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson. *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

FREEDOM'S GATE

QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- How does this compare with the American flag we know today?
- What can we say about how this was made?
- What can we say about the way this was used?
- What more can we find?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- By placing this gate at the entrance to his farm, what ideas did its owner convey to those passing by?
- This gate features thirty-seven stars on one side and thirty-eight on the other, perhaps because Colorado entered the union in 1876, when the gate was made. In what other ways does *Flag Gate* represent how the flag and nation have changed over the years?
- Why is the American flag, in particular, highly recognizable around the world? What other flags evoke meaning, and what stereotypes or associations come along with national symbols such as this?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What are the purposes of a gate?
- What message does this image carry in the United States? Abroad?
- Where else do we see this iconic image today?
- This gate was created in 1876. What was going on in the United States around this time? Abroad?
- How has the flag changed and evolved since 1776?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Brainstorm ideas of who was considered “American” in 1876. What did the people look like who could pass through the proverbial gate to freedom in America at this time?
- Ask students to research controversial issues surrounding the American flag, including flag burning and the United States government’s recent reluctance to broadcast images of soldiers’ coffins draped in flags.
- Have students develop a new flag for the United States. What symbols will it include?
- Examine the work of the multitude of contemporary artists who have incorporated the American flag into their work. Examples include Jasper Johns, Keith Haring, and Faith Ringgold. How do these different artists approach and depict the flag? How are their depictions different from or similar to *Flag Gate*?