



NC State Capitol | 919.733.4994 | historicsites.nc.gov/capitol
1 E. Edenton Street | 4624 Mail Service Center | Raleigh, North Carolina 27699

The Great Seal of the State of North Carolina

Overview

This lesson reviews the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina. It explains the concept of a symbol using the North Carolina State Capitol as an example. It also reviews the history of the seal and the symbolism contained in the modern seal.

Grade

4th grade

NC Essential Standards

- 4.B.1 Understand ways in which values and beliefs have influenced the development of North Carolina's identity as a state
- 4.H.1.6 Explain the significance of historical symbols in North Carolina from various perspectives

Materials

- Screen & projector
- Images, presentation (link here: [Great Seal of NC lesson](#))

Duration

30-40 minutes

Lesson

- Share a brief history of the Capitol

We're going to be learning the history of something that represents our state that you can see when you visit the State Capitol. Because you are not visiting the building today, first we'll go over a little history of the Capitol itself.

- Who built the building?
 - The building was constructed by enslaved workers, stone cutters from Scotland, plaster workers, carpenters. It was considered one of the finest public buildings in the country when completed.
- Completed in 1840, it was built to house all three branches of government. The executive served on the first floor, legislative on the second, judicial on the third and eventually first floor. The Supreme Court moved out in 1888. The NC General Assembly moved into a new space in 1963, after holding their final session in the Capitol in 1961
- Is the Capitol still used? Is it important? (Ask students to offer answers)

- Yes! It's used as the Office of the Governor and his or her staff
- Official ceremonies and commemorations
- Historic site/museum
- And it is also used as a symbol
- Define "symbol"
 - A symbol represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.
 - People often use symbols to exemplify the culture and history of places
 - The Capitol is the "People's House," a symbol of government, democracy, etc.
- What are other symbols of North Carolina? (Ask students to offer answers)
- Let's talk about another important symbol that represents our state - the state seal
- State Seal
 - Purpose: Each US state has a seal that is representative of its history, origins, and ideals. There's a seal for the United States, too! The state seal is affixed to show that something, usually a document, is official and has been created under state authority
 - Great Seal of the State of NC
 - We have had 10 different designs (4 in colonial times, 6 after independence). Some seals had a front and a back design.
 - Colonial Seals
 - Seal of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina (1665-1665)
 - Domitus Cultoribus Orbis "Tamed by the Husbandmen (cultivators) of the World"
 - Province of North Carolina (1665 to 1730)
 - "Where upon Liberty is represented introducing Plenty to Your Majesty. Quae Sera Tamen Respexit appeared on the colonial seal. That phrase, which means "Which, though late, looked upon me" in Latin, referred to the figure of Liberty which then, as today, also appeared on the seal
 - Province of NC (1730-1767) NC becomes a royal colony in 1730
 - Province of NC (after 1767) Gov. Tryon makes a new seal
 - Seals After independence
 - Great Seal of the State of NC (1779-94)
 - Seal becomes the responsibility of the Governor in 1776. The Constitution appears for the first time. Latin: "How fortunate are the colonists who know their own good"
 - 1794-1836. One sided. Cornucopia appears again
 - 1836-1883 NC gets new state Constitution in 1835
 - 1883-1971
 - 1971-1984 (Law to standardize the seal in 1971)
 - 1984- present (Halifax Resolves date added)

- Symbolism/meaning of the elements
 - Liberty (cap: symbol of freedom from bondage)
 - Constitution protects Liberty
 - Plenty: three stems of wheat, agriculture/staple crop
 - Cornucopia, a symbol of abundance/food
 - Three masted ship: commerce
 - Mountains and sea
 - Dates: Halifax Resolves and Mecklenburg Declaration
 - Mecklenburg Declaration: Mecklenburg Declaration was the colonies' first declaration of independence from Great Britain. It was allegedly signed on May 20, 1775—more than a year before the thirteen colonies united in one "official" Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776; allegedly, because no documentation for the document's existence has ever been found.
 - Halifax Resolves: Halifax Resolves were passed by the Fourth Provincial Congress of North Carolina and gave the colony's delegates to the Second Continental Congress, in Philadelphia, the right to vote for independence from Great Britain. This was the first official authorization from any of the colonies that encouraged a stand for total independence. The Halifax Resolves did not authorize the delegates to introduce a resolution that called for independence; it only authorized them to support such a resolution if one was already in discussion.
 - State Motto: The words "Esse Quam Videri" mean "to be rather than to seem." Most states have adopted a motto, generally in Latin. Mottoes are typically written in Latin because it is more condensed than English. The three words, "Esse Quam Videri" require at least six English words to express the same idea.

- The State Seal Press, image & video
 - This seal press in the Governor's office is from the 1800s. It is a metal clamping device that produces a raised indentation. In colonial times, they would make the impression on wax.
 - The seal is used to authenticate the Governor's signature and make the act official.
 - It is also transferred from outgoing to incoming governor, in a ceremony that is meant to illustrate the peaceful transfer of power between governors.
 - Does the seal actually give the new governor power? No! The Governor's power comes from the people, who vote to elect him or her. The passage of the seal is just another symbol.

- What do you think? Does our state seal represent the state? What would you draw on the seal?
 - Introduce optional assignment to have students draw a seal that represents themselves, their school, town/city, or a new seal for the state. When you draw your seal, think about landscape, culture, animals, or other unique elements that have symbolic meaning.