

Symbolic Timeline

Time: 60 minutes

- Social Studies – can be modified to fit any current area of study

Materials Needed:

- Butcher paper or poster board
- Crayons or markers
- Magazine pages or other pictures that can be cut and pasted (optional)
- Glue sticks (optional)
- Images of symbols through time that can be displayed to the class

In this lesson students will learn about symbols and how they have been used in both the past and present to represent ideas without words. Students will then use this concept to create a timeline of what they are currently studying using only pictures they draw or cut and paste.

Introduction:

Symbols have been used since early prehistory to represent ideas, objects, or relationships. Some common prehistoric examples are Lascaux Cave in France, Southwestern rock art, and Great Plains buffalo hide painting. Historic examples can include flags (especially the multitude of flags created during wartime) and tombstone art. Symbols are also very prevalent today – computer icons, musical notes, and the ever-present emojis. All of these examples are ways people can communicate ideas without using words or language. However, it's not always easy to understand what symbols mean. A great deal of interpretation is based on cultural context.

Activity Steps:

1. Talk to students about symbols, their meaning, and show examples. Can students interpret what some of the prehistoric symbols mean? Have them justify their interpretations with context clues and prior knowledge. Are historic examples any easier? Why or why not? What about modern examples? Do they think people from the past would be able to interpret our modern emojis?
2. Have a brief review of what topics have currently been covered in social studies. What are some major events, people, or places?
3. Break the class into groups of 4 or 5. Have each group discuss among themselves how they plan to represent their social studies timeline with pictures only. They can be drawings or images cut from magazines/printouts.
4. After the group discussion, give each group a piece of poster board/butcher paper and have them create their timelines.
5. After each group has finished their timeline, have them switch and see if they can interpret another group's timeline. Did everyone draw the same thing? Do you agree with all the information they included, or do you think they are missing an important event/person/place? Can you easily follow the events through time? What challenges did you have during your interpretation?