



VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP

The City of U.S.: A Virtual Field Trip to Washington, D.C. Family Companion Guide

Overview

The City of U.S.: A Virtual Field Trip to Washington, D.C. was created for upper elementary and middle school students to discover, explore, celebrate, and learn more about the history, culture, artifacts, and significance of the capital city.

During this Virtual Field Trip, your family will explore:

- The White House
- The U.S. Capitol Building
- The Supreme Court
- The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
- Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

Within this family guide, you will find helpful steps to foster discussion among family members during and after you watch. Families can then use the information from the Virtual Field Trip by working together to create a new “Great Seal” of the United States that highlights important themes, past and present.

Did You Know?

On this Virtual Field Trip, your family will learn about many of the important places in the capital city and the rich history and symbolism that make them special. Washington, D.C. is full of iconic symbols that connect to American founding ideals and together create a sense of wonder and reflection. There are some interesting facts about Washington, D.C. that many do not know, including:

- When the Washington Monument opened in 1884, it was the tallest structure in the world until the Eiffel Tower took the title in 1889.
- The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world with more than 162 million objects.
- Today, you can still look at the original Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights at the National Archives.

Watching the Virtual Field Trip as a family presents a great opportunity to create a shared experience, promote discussion, and work together on fun and informative activities. As President Biden stated in his Inaugural Address: “...the American story depends not on any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us.” By visiting and learning the history behind these special places, your family can continue the conversation on how the United States is still working to build a more perfect Union.



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Materials:

- Link to The City of U.S.: A Virtual Field Trip to Washington, D.C.
- Pencils/Pens/Markers
- Handout: Family Discussion Questions
- Handout: What Is the Great Seal?
- Handout: Make Your Own Seal

Activity 1: Family Discussion

During the Virtual Field Trip

Discuss

- As your family watches the Virtual Field Trip together, have the Family Discussion Questions on hand. Each stop on the trip is paired with questions to help deepen your family's understanding and connect them to shared values and experiences.
- You might consider answering the questions as you watch or you can continue the conversation afterward by doing more research on your interests or asking new questions that develop as you talk.
- One helpful trick for getting your family to think a little deeper or share more about their thinking is asking "What makes you say that?" after someone shares a thought or answer.

Reflect

- As your family finishes viewing, take a moment to reflect on your family's reactions and wonders.
- You might consider asking the following questions:
 - What are a few things you learned that you didn't know?
 - Which stop was most interesting to you? Why?
 - What do you think some of these places tell us about the shared American story?
 - How are Americans still working to create a "more perfect Union"?

Next Steps

- After watching the Virtual Field Trip, you might consider taking steps to learn more or continue the conversation in a new way.
 - Call attention to symbols, structures, or areas in your community that are important. Some examples might be a local memorial or plaque that commemorates an important event in your area.



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- Visit a museum.
 - Find out where a local museum is in your area. This could be a great opportunity to find out more about local history or to build knowledge on topics or events that might not be included in learning at school.
- Consider a person or a special event that created a positive change to memorialize.
 - Research your region or community and see if there is a person or an event that should be considered as a memorial or receive special recognition.

Family Discussion Questions

Directions: As your family watches, consider the following questions as conversation starters as you visit each stop along the way. You can also use these to continue the conversation even after the Virtual Field Trip!

Helpful Hint: To get your family thinking even more about their answers, consider following up some of the questions with “What makes you say that?”

The White House

- A. Why do you think the White House is sometimes called “the People’s House”?
- B. Would you want to live in the White House? Why or why not?

The U.S. Capitol Building

- A. The U.S. Capitol Building is where laws are made; why is it important to a democracy that laws are debated?
- B. What are new laws that you and your family think Congress should consider?



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The Supreme Court

- A. Why is it important to have a judicial branch of government that interprets laws made and enforced by the two other branches of government?
- B. Would you want to have the responsibility of interpreting laws to make sure they are constitutional?

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial

- A. Why is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. important to the past, present, and future of the United States?
- B. Memorials do not often get added to the landscape of Washington, D.C. Who else do you think should have a memorial? Why?

Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

- A. Why do you think it is important to honor the Unknown soldiers?
- B. Honor and remembrance are important parts of Arlington National Cemetery. How do you honor and remember your loved ones?

The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

- A. How might the country's ongoing push for space exploration impact its future?
- B. What fascinates you most about space exploration?



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Activity 2: Creating Your Own “Great Seal”

After the Virtual Field Trip

Discuss

- After viewing the Virtual Field Trip and learning about the historic buildings, monuments, and landmarks, continue the conversation by connecting these important places with the symbols and lasting themes they represent.
- Ask your family to share some of the symbols that were highlighted during the video. As you and your family continue to share some of the symbols that stood out to you, it could be a terrific opportunity to explore the meaning behind them.
- The symbols that adorn many of the historic places in Washington, D.C. have important meanings and often represent principles the country was founded upon, or even events that helped to shape the national story. These representations are sacred for many, as they may have a special connection to the themes or events they represent.
- As you consider the meaning of symbols, it is interesting to note that many of these symbols are found on the official seal of the U.S. It is officially called the “Great Seal of the United States” and is placed on the country’s most important documents.
- The Great Seal is where you can find the official motto of the United States. Does anyone in your family know what it says? The official motto is “E pluribus unum,” which is Latin for “Out of many, one.”
- As you share this information with your family, consider asking:
 - How does this motto connect with some of the information they heard in the Virtual Field Trip?
 - What do they think this phrase means?
 - What does it tell you about American values?
- To understand more about the Great Seal, use the Make Your Own Seal handout to learn more about its history and symbolism. You can also develop your family’s own modern version that uses new symbols that you discuss as a family.

Reflect

- As your family designs your own Great Seal, what symbols did you select? Why?
- Asking family members to share their symbols and the reasons why they chose them can serve as a window and mirror. It can be a window into seeing the stories of others or important events. As a mirror, it can be a way to become more self-aware or reflective on how someone views their community or nation.
- This conversation can be important in helping to shape the evolving narrative of the United States and how the country is constantly seeking “a more perfect Union.”

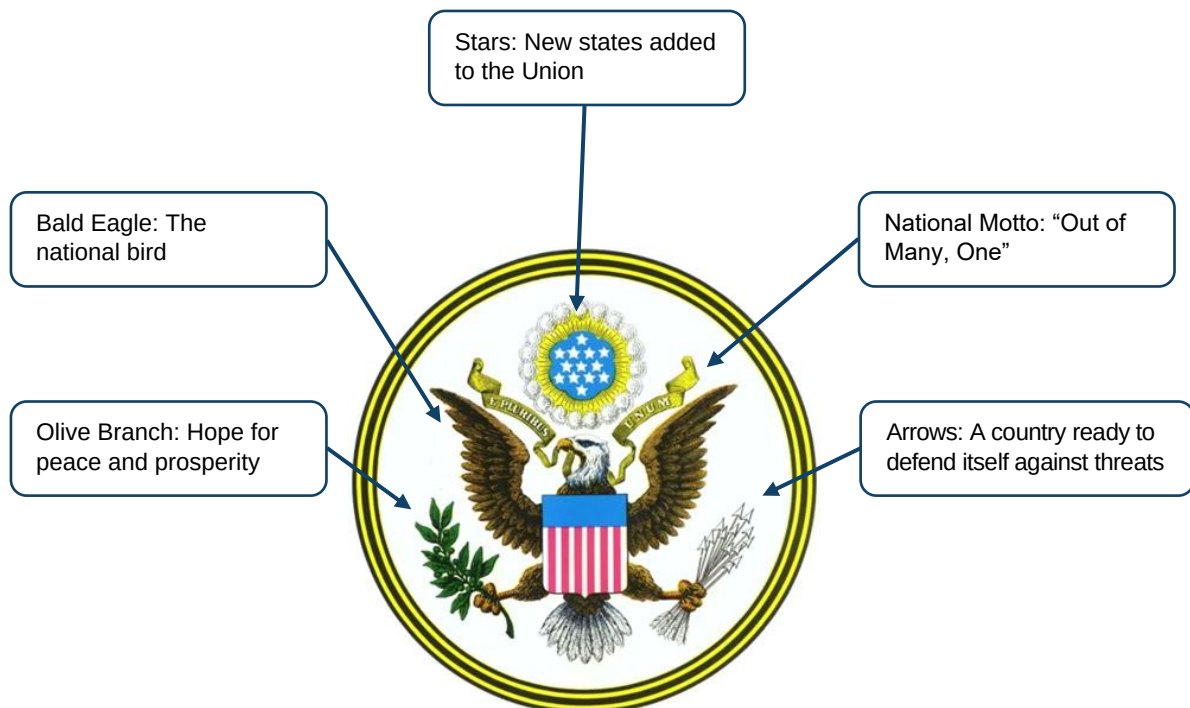


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What Is the Great Seal?

Background: In 1782, after six years and three committees, the Continental Congress decided on a new design for the Great Seal that reflected the beliefs and values that the Founding Fathers thought represented the new nation. The seal was designed to symbolize the country's strength, unity, and independence. The olive branch and the arrows held in the eagle's talons denote the power of peace and war. The eagle always casts its gaze toward the olive branch signifying that the nation desires to pursue peace but stands ready to defend itself. The shield is "born on the breast of an American Eagle without any other supporters to symbolize that the United States of America should rely on their own Virtue."

The Great Seal of the United States is a unique symbol of the U.S. and its national identity. Only one authorized Great Seal is in official use and is operated by the U.S. Department of State. The Great Seal is impressed upon official documents such as treaties and commissions. The Department of State places about 3,000 seals to official documents yearly.

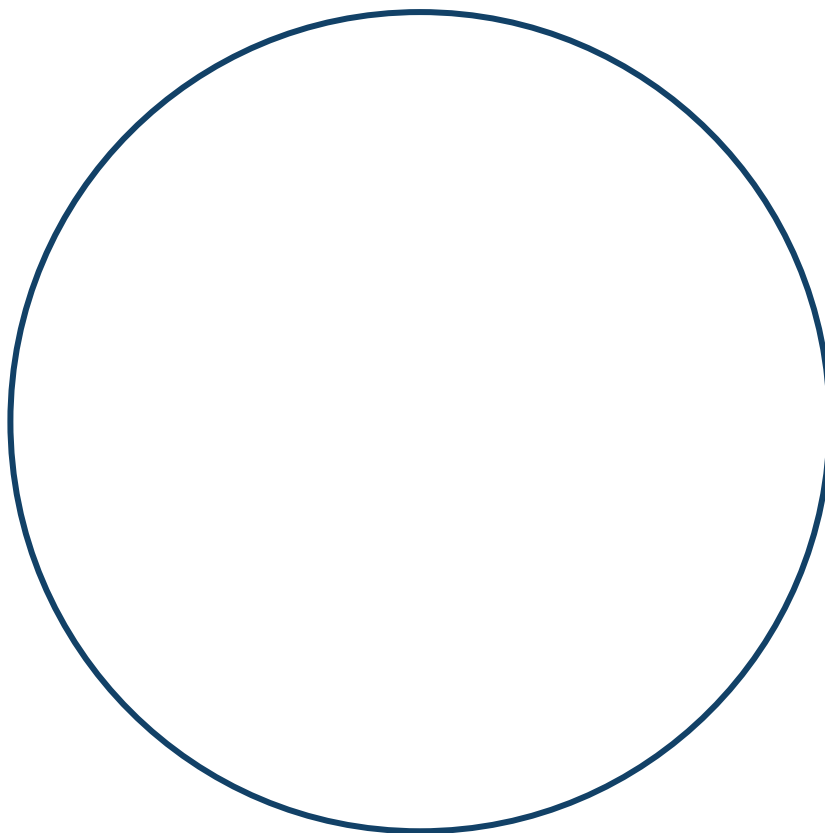


[The Great Seal - National Museum of American Diplomacy \(state.gov\)](http://state.gov)



Make Your Own Seal

Directions: Use the circle below to create a new Great Seal. Consider some of the symbols that you think should be included. Think about how the country has changed over time, founding principles in action today, how identity and culture are represented, and what may be important in the future.





How does your Great Seal represent your perspective, experience, and culture?

Symbol Identify Your Symbols	Meaning What Do They Represent?