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HVL LESSON TITLE:

COMMUNICATION AT SEA

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

COMMUNICATION AT SEA

GUIDING QUESTION:

**How did ships communicate
when radio silence was
necessary or when ships were in
close proximity?**

OVERVIEW:

During World War II, semaphore flags were used by naval forces for visual communication between ships, particularly when radio silence was necessary or when ships were in close proximity. This lesson will allow students to learn more about the use of these flags during the Battle of Cape Esperance, as well as become familiar with the semaphore alphabet and decoding system.



SUBJECT(S):
Social Studies



VIETNAM VETERAN(S):
Pat Patterson



DURATION:
90 Minutes

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“Each color and each denomination had a particular meaning. You would wave the flag, and those on the other ship with binoculars could pick up what that particular flag meant.”

WWII Veteran Pat Patterson

OVERVIEW:

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

During World War II, semaphore flags were used by naval forces for visual communication between ships, particularly when radio silence was necessary or when ships were in close proximity. Signalmen would use hand-held, distinctively colored flags, often red and yellow, to form specific positions representing letters and numbers. This method allowed for the rapid exchange of messages and orders over short to medium distances, although it required skilled operators and could be impacted by weather conditions.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Understand naval operations in WWII
- Communicate using semaphore flags

STANDARDS:

AL: 11: 7

Describe the significance of major battles, events, and consequences of World War II campaigns, including North Africa, Midway, Guadalcanal, Normandy, Okinawa, the Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima, and the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences.

AL: 11: 8d

Describe how World War II led to advances in mass media, medicine, science, and technology.

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[Pat Patterson, HVL Video](#)

[Intro to Lesson Slip \(Doc A\)](#)

[Naval Battle Reading \(Doc B\)](#)

[Battle of Cape Esperance 1942](#)

[Semaphore Activity Directions \(Doc C\)](#)

[Semaphore Flag Key \(Doc D\)](#)

[In Action Activity \(Doc E-Teacher Directions\)](#)

[Construction Paper \(yellow and red\)](#)

[Wooden Dowels](#)

[Glue and Scissors](#)

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Tell students that they are going to watch a video of WWII veteran, Pat Patterson. Patterson served in the Navy.
- Show the [Pat Patterson HVL Video](#).
- Distribute the Intro to Lesson Slip (Doc A). Give students a 5-minutes to complete the slip and then discuss.

ACTIVITY 02

- Distribute the Naval Battle Reading (Doc B). Explain to them that during the Battle of Cape Esperance (a part of the invasion of Guadalcanal), the ship's crew had to employ semaphore flags. Read the information on Doc B together.
- Show the [Battle of Cape Esperance](#) clip and instruct students to answer the questions at the bottom of the Naval Battle Reading (Doc. B)

ACTIVITY 03

- Distribute the Semaphore Activity Directions (Doc C). Explain to students that they will create their own Semaphore flags, using the directions and materials provided.
- Read the directions aloud as students follow along. Give students 15-20 minutes to create their flags.

ACTIVITY 04

- Following the directions on the In Action Activity-Teacher's Directions (Doc E), divide students into two groups of partners (total of 4 students).
- Distribute a copy of the Semaphore Key (Doc D) to every student.
- Before beginning the activity, all together go through the different Flag Semaphore movements for each letter a couple times using the decoding key. This will help with understanding each letter code.
- Lead students through the activity.

COMMUNICATION AT SEA

INTRO TO LESSON SLIP

DOC A



What does Mr. Patterson say about communicating at sea?

What example does Mr. Patterson give about using flags to communicate at sea?

What historic occasion did Mr. Patterson witness?

What did Mr. Patterson discuss that interested you most?

COMMUNICATION AT SEA

NAVAL BATTLE READING

DOC B



A key example of semaphore flags being used in a naval battle during WWII is the Battle of Cape Esperance, fought in October 1942. During the intense night surface engagement, U.S. Navy Admiral Norman Scott used a combination of communications methods, including signal flags.

While radio was a primary method of communication, semaphore and signal lights were still vital for reasons of security and reliability. The Battle of Cape Esperance highlights both the use of traditional naval signaling and the chaotic environment of night fighting that hampered effective communication. Semaphore and other signals at Cape Esperance

Communication plan: Before the battle, Admiral Scott sent his tactical plan to his ships via signal flag. The plan outlined protocols for combat, including using darkened blinker lights and voice codes on the TBS (Talk Between Ships) radio to maintain radio silence as long as possible.

Signaling confusion: Confusion during the night battle caused a critical mix-up with devastating consequences. At one point, Scott's ships fired on one another. An American destroyer, the USS Farenholt, was caught between the two lines and signaled its identification with a blinker tube.

1. How did the signal (semaphore) flags come in handy during the Battle of Cape Esperance?
2. What was the critical mixup in communications during the battle and what was the result?

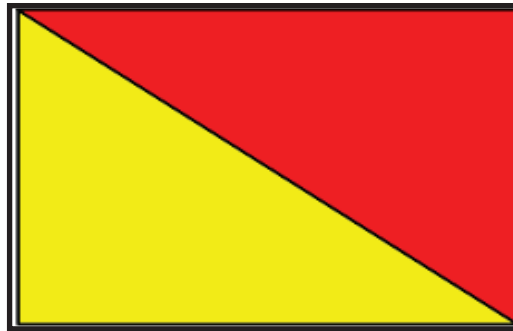
COMMUNICATION AT SEA

SEMAPHORE ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

DOC C



Directions: You will use construction paper and wooden dowel to create two Semaphore flags.



STEPS TO CREATING FLAG:

1. You will be given a sheet of red construction paper and a sheet of yellow construction paper.
2. Cut one of the sheets of construction paper diagonally. Glue the diagonal color to the other full sheet of paper to create the pattern above. Do the same with the other sheet of paper.
3. Glue each of the construction flags to a wooden dowel.

COMMUNICATION AT SEA

SEMAPHORE FLAG KEY

Letter	Flag	Letter	Flag	Letter	Flag
A ALPHA		J JULIET		S SIERRA	
B BRAVA		K KILO		T TANGO	
C CHARLIE		L LIMA		U UNIFORM	
D DELTA		M MIKE		V VICTOR	
E ECHO		N NOVEMBER		W WHISKEY	
F FOXTROT		O OSCAR		X XRAY	
G GOLF		P PAPA		Y YANKEE	
H HOTEL		Q QUEBEC		Z ZULU	
I INDIA		R ROMEO			

COMMUNICATION AT SEA

IN ACTION TEACHER'S DIRECTIONS

DOC E



1. Write the following maritime words on a post-it note sized pieces of paper and put the words into a bowl or jar.

Bow
Stern
Port
Starboard
Deck
Hull
Keel

2. Divide students into two sets of partners for a total of four students. Each partner group will have an opportunity to draw a word. One partner or group member begins, choosing one member from their team to stand in front of the other partner/group with the Semaphore flags. The partner or group member is given a maritime related word to spell out to the other partner or group with the flags using the correct Semaphore positions. Each team works together to decode the word, and find the definition in the dictionary. You can use a physical copy or an online dictionary. The first group to find the correct word and definition wins the round. If the team of the individual using the flags wins, the team earns two points. If another team gets the point, one point is earned. Choose a new group for each round. If possible, every individual should be able to participate at least once with the Flags Semaphore.

3. At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins.

4. As a group altogether, discuss the challenges each group found in communicating their message. What challenges did the audience have in understanding the code? What are the benefits of using non-verbal communication on a ship?