In the spring of 2021, the Museum of the American Revolution worked with artisans to recreate the flags flown by 18th-century ships while at sea during the Revolutionary War. This project, called the True Colours Flag Project, helped us learn about the people who made flags and what those flags meant in the 1700s. Use this guide to discover the stories behind the True Colours flags and other flags around the Museum!

Thinking about all the flags you’ve seen today, use the space below to create your own flag! What message do you want it to send? What would a flag about you look like?

The Museum is also grateful to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) for their generous support of our family programs.

As you walk through the Museum, look for these flags. What do you notice that they have in common? How are they different? What do they tell you about the American Revolution?

1. A flag that went into space
2. This flag in front of a tent
3. A flag that’s almost all red
4. A flag with a pine tree on it
5. A flag that’s being carried on a boat
6. A flag that went into space
7. A flag that went into space
8. A flag that went into space

True Colours Flag Project is presented by The Color Guard

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EVERY ship in the 18th century kept a collection of flags, or a “suit of colours,” on board so that they could try to safely sail through enemy waters. But if threatened with an attack by another ship, both ships had to fly their “true colours,” revealing their true loyalties. The flags shown here are just some of the flags you would have seen sailing into the ports and on the high seas during the Revolutionary War. Visit amrevmuseum.org/truecolours to learn more about how these flags were reconstructed using 18th-century techniques.

FLAGS have been a system of communication between ships since even before the Revolutionary War. In the 18th century, signals varied depending on where a ship and a crew were from. But even today, ships use a system of letters and numbers to send each other signals that ask for help, give warnings, or send instructions.

Though usually only one or two letters are used in a coded signal, look at the flags above and use the space provided to write your first name in flags!!

Find the words below in the box. Words can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal.

PENDANT: A long, narrow banner flown at the very top of a ship’s mast.

ENSIGN: A large flag flown over the back of the ship.

JACK: A smaller standard flag flown from the front of the ship.

COLOR the ship and its flags!

UNITED STATES

BRITAIN

SPAIN

SWEDEN

PORTUGAL

FRANCE

THE NETHERLANDS

COLOR the ship and its flags!

PENDANT
Ensign
Jack
Mast
Colours
Privateer
UStates
Britain
France
Starboard
Port
Hoist