

## SESSION 1.1: GUIDE: Background Information - 30 minutes

### Introduction to Signs, Seals & Symbols

A symbol is an object that represents, stands for, or suggests an idea, visual image, belief, action, or material entity. Symbols take the form of words, sounds, gestures, or visual images and are used to convey ideas and beliefs. For example, a red octagon may be a symbol for "STOP." On a map, a picture of a tent might represent a campsite. Numerals are symbols for numbers. Alphabetic letters are symbols for sounds. Personal names are symbols representing individuals. A red rose symbolizes love and compassion.

1. Tell students they will be discussing symbols and signs. They are surrounded by symbols and signs in daily life. Why do we use symbols? Emojis are signs and symbols. Discuss use of emojis in communications between people. People use symbols and signs to share complex ideas in quick ways. Ask for students to discuss and write down some ideas of the meaning of the word symbol.
2. Teach students that part of the power of a symbol is that many times it is universally understood. Keep these definitions in mind during an investigation of some symbols. Hand out Symbols Worksheet and ask students to take a few minutes to identify all the symbols they are familiar with and how each symbol makes them feel.
3. Hold up the symbols provided (p. 2). The symbols become progressively more complex, from a simple smiley face to the American flag. Discuss the following questions:
  - **Smiley Face:** What does this mean? When did the smiley face start to be used? Typical answers include: happy, good job, smiley face, good.
  - **Dollar Sign:** What is it? What does it mean? Would people all over the world understand this? Typical answers include: money, dollars, US money, cash.
  - **Peace Sign:** What does this mean? What else does it make you think of? Does it have any political connections? Typical answers include: happiness, anti-war.
  - **Recycle:** What is this one? Where do you see it? Is it asking you to do something? Emphasize that this symbol is trying to motivate action – it is not neutral, it is promoting a specific type of action (recycling) and belief (that recycling is important for everyone).
  - **Universal Symbols:** symbols that are used throughout the world such as restrooms, recycle, save the planet, don't litter.
  - **American Flag:** What is this? What does it stand for? Re-emphasize that a rather simple visual image (some colored strips and small stars) has made students come up with complex ideas, events and belief systems. Typical answers include: country, democracy, freedom, soldiers

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