

Teacher Guide: International & Culture Days and Use of Flags

What gives
you hope?

What does
peace look
like to you?

How do you
cope with fear
or anger?

How do
you react
to hate?

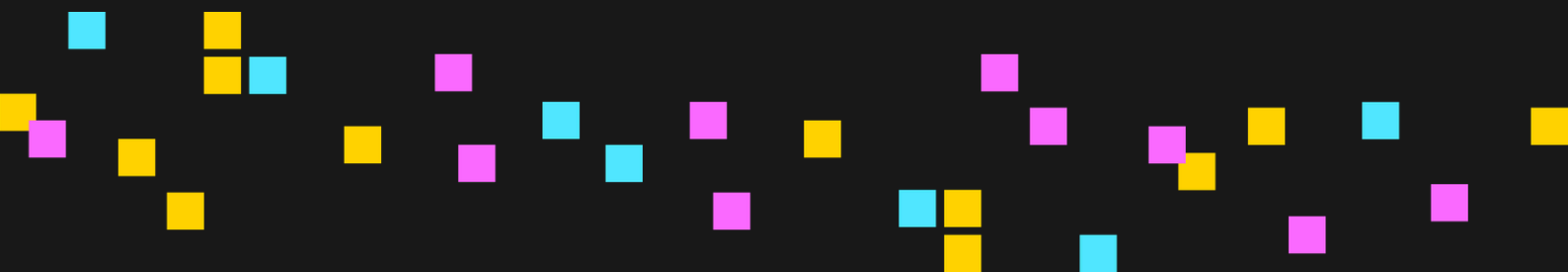
Introduction

This document has been created to provide a practical guide for teachers on navigating flags, national identity, and sensitive international topics.

International and cultural celebration days offer a valuable opportunity to celebrate cultural diversity, foster global awareness, and develop students' empathy and critical thinking.

However, when students bring flags and symbols associated with ongoing conflicts, the day can also raise questions for teachers about how to manage national identity expression sensitively and fairly.

This guide gives you a clear, principled framework for handling these situations—drawn from SNS' experience supporting schools on conflict-sensitive education.

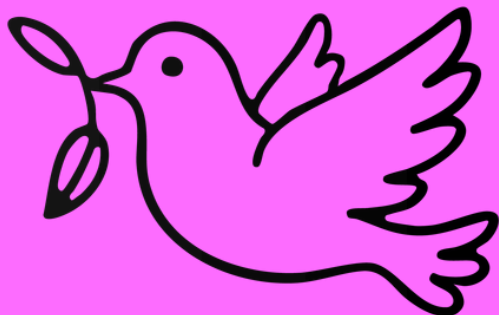


Understanding the Aims of International and cultural celebration days

International/Cultural Celebration Days in schools typically aim to:

- Celebrate students' diverse cultural heritage and national identities
- Raise awareness about global issues and current events
- Promote international solidarity, unity, and shared humanity
- Rally interest in active citizenship and positive change
- Recognise human achievements across the world's communities

These are overlapping aims, and it is this overlap that can create tension. A student may wish to display a flag both as a cultural identity marker and as a political statement. Your role is not to suppress either, but to create a structure that holds them both thoughtfully.



Navigating Flags and National Symbols

The General Principle: Don't Ban—Structure

We recommend against banning flags outright. A blanket ban can feel dismissive of students' cultural identities and may disproportionately affect students from communities experiencing ongoing conflict—often those who most need to feel seen.

Instead, take control proactively through structure:

- Decide in advance how flags will be displayed
- Communicate clearly to all students what will and won't be permitted
- Ensure no single flag dominates or appears provocative in isolation



Key Principle

A well-curated collective display of flags is far less likely to cause tension than ad hoc individual wearing or carrying of flags—especially those of countries in active conflict.

What to Allow: Personal Identity Flags

Students should always be permitted to display or wear the flag of their own country of heritage or national identity. This is an expression of who they are, not a political statement.

For example: if you have a Palestinian student or an Israeli student in your school, they should be supported in expressing that part of their identity—just as any other student would be.

What to Manage: Advocacy Flags

Students may also want to display flags to show solidarity with a country or cause they care about—even if it's not their own heritage. This is a legitimate part of International Day's solidarity purpose, but it needs careful management to avoid creating a hostile environment for other students.

Practical Approach: A Collective Flag Display

We recommend organising a whole-school flag display in advance. Here is a step-by-step approach:

1. Invite students to submit which flags they would like included, by a set deadline before the day.
2. Include one of each flag requested—no duplicates needed, no flag given more prominence than others.
3. Review the list for potential tensions. Where a flag from one side of a conflict has been requested, make sure the other side is also represented. Add additional flags to ensure balance—for example, if a Ukrainian flag is requested, include a Russian one; if an Israeli flag is requested, include a Palestinian one, etc.
4. Ask students not to wear or carry flags or national symbols that are not their own cultural heritage flag/national symbol, explaining that this helps everyone feel equally welcomed.



Why This Works

A collective display that includes all sides reframes the exercise from one of competing claims to one of shared international awareness. It also gives you, as the teacher, natural oversight of what is being shown and why.



Turning the Day into a Learning Opportunity

If your school is using International Day to raise awareness of political causes as well as cultural heritage, consider building in a structured presentation activity around the flag display.

Student Presentation Activity

Invite one student to represent any particular flag in the display with a short presentation — prepared in advance with teacher support. This could include:

- What the flag represents and its cultural or historical significance
- The key issues or events connected to that country right now
- What they would want their peers to understand or think about

This approach:

- Gives students voice and agency
- Develops research, communication, and empathy skills
- Ensures advocacy is channelled through structured dialogue rather than symbolic display alone
- Allows teachers to review content in advance, supporting appropriate framing



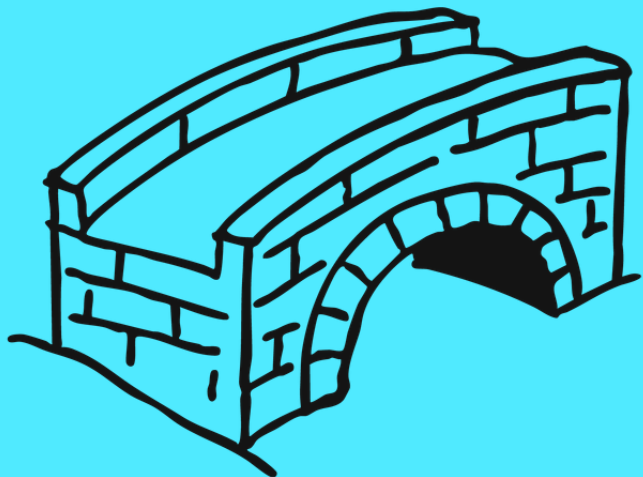
SNS Tip: Paired Perspectives

Where possible, for countries in active conflict, invite two students to present paired perspectives—one representing each side. This models the SNS approach: conflict literacy built on hearing multiple narratives, not just one. Parallel Histories provides some excellent resources for this. If this isn't possible, a single student can present with guidance to acknowledge that the situation involves more than one perspective.

If Tensions Arise on the Day

Even with good preparation, unexpected moments can occur. Here are some principles for responding:

- Stay calm and curious—respond with questions rather than reactions
- Avoid singling out individual students in front of their peers
- Name the principle rather than the specific flag: "Our approach today is that all flags are represented in our display" rather than "You shouldn't be holding that flag"
- If a student is distressed, take the conversation private and listen before responding
- Remind students of the day's shared purpose: understanding the world, not winning an argument
- Familiarise yourself with our 'avoiding hate speech' guide, to be ready to address any hateful language, particularly towards Muslim or Jewish people around the issue of Israel-Palestine



Quick Reference: Flag Display Guidelines

Situation	Guidance	Why
Student wearing own heritage flag	Permit and welcome	Cultural identity expression
Student wearing another country's flag	Redirect to the collective display; discourage individual wearing	Prevents individual flags from dominating or causing distress
Conflict-related flags in the display	Include both/all sides; provide context	Balance avoids the display becoming one-sided
A flag banned entirely	Avoid—unless it represents a proscribed organisation	Bans can feel discriminatory and inflame tensions



Thank you

@ItMakesSNS
team@sns.space
sns.space

