

LEADERSHIP LIVES

EXPLORING LEADERSHIP / NAVIGATING LIFE

Here are some fun, hands-on exercises for homeschoolers based on *America's Star-Spangled Banner* story. They're designed to be flexible for different ages (roughly 7–14) and mix creativity, history, and a bit of drama.

(Note: some of the details referred to here are not mentioned in the Young Readers version of the story.)

1. Flag-Making Workshop (Craft + History)

- Recreate 3–4 of the early flags from the story using paper, felt, or fabric: the “Join or Die” snake, Gadsden “Don’t Tread on Me,” Pine Tree “An Appeal to Heaven,” Grand Union, and the original 13-star Stars and Stripes.
- Bonus challenge: Make a tiny version of Mary Pickersgill’s giant 30×42-foot Fort McHenry flag (scale it down to something like 12×18 inches).
- Discuss why each design mattered at the time.

2. “Dawn’s Early Light” Poetry Challenge (Creative Writing)

- Imagine you are Francis Scott Key on the British ship at dawn. Write your own short poem or extra verse describing what you see and feel when the flag is still flying.

- Younger kids can write 4–6 lines; older ones can try matching the rhythm of the real anthem.
- Optional: Set it to the tune of “To Anacreon in Heaven” (or just hum it) and perform it.

3. Living Timeline (Active + Visual)

- Create a long timeline on the floor or wall using string and index cards. Place key events from the story (Join or Die 1754 → Official flag 1777 → 15-star flag 1794 → Bombardment 1814 → Anthem 1931 → Moon landing).
- Kids walk the timeline and act out or narrate each moment. Add drawings or small props at each stop.

4. “Sew Like Mary” Mini-Project (Hands-on + Math)

- Measure and cut simple fabric or paper stars and stripes. Calculate how many stars and stripes would be needed for different years (13, 15, today’s 50).
- Talk about how long it took Mary Pickersgill’s team - more than a month - to make the real giant flag all by hand—then time yourselves making a small one.

5. Fort McHenry Defense Game (Role-Play + Strategy)

- Build a simple model of Fort McHenry with blocks, Legos, or cardboard. Use cotton balls or paper balls as “rockets and bombs.”
- One team defends the fort (protecting a small paper flag); the other “bombards.” After the “night,” see if the flag is still standing. Then read Key’s words together.

6. Symbol Detective (Observation + Discussion)

- Look closely at the real Star-Spangled Banner photos from the Smithsonian (or the ones in the presentation).
- List everything you notice: missing stars, holes, repairs, the giant size. Discuss what those details tell us about the battle and the flag's long life. (Note: some pieces were cut out as mementos by permission.)

7. Design the Next Flag (Creative Design)

- The story shows the flag changing as the country grew. Invent a new American flag for the year 2050 (or for a made-up new state).
- Explain your design choices using symbolism the way Franklin explained the rattlesnake.

8. Family Anthem Night (Music + Performance)

- Learn the full first verse (and maybe the less-common later verses).
- Record a family video of yourselves singing it while waving a handmade flag, then watch it together and talk about what the words mean after learning the real story.

These activities turn the presentation into something kids can *do* rather than just watch. You can pick 2–3 per week or turn them into a full “Flag Week” unit. Enjoy!