

Name: _____

English 7/Flag Burning Issue

Period _____

Veteran's Day Topic

Flag Burning: A Hot Issue

by Sylvia Whitman

1	<p>Americans do not torch "Old Glory" often (there were fewer than forty-five incidents between 1777 and 1989), but the act has always sparked a fiery debate. For protesters, it is a powerful—even patriotic—way to express anger or dissent. In 1861, just before the Civil War, demonstrators in Mississippi burned a flag because President Abraham Lincoln refused to allow Confederate states to leave the Union. In 1966, New York bus driver Sidney Street set fire to a flag after he heard that civil rights activist James Meredith had been shot during the March Against Fear in Mississippi. Street, an African American veteran of World War II, felt betrayed by his country. A rash of flag burnings took place between 1966 and 1970, when many young people rallied in opposition to the Vietnam War. They hoped that their dramatic demonstrations would convince Congress and the president to change a foreign policy they considered bad.</p>	<p>How many incidents of flag burning were there between 1777 and 1989?</p> <p>What did the Vietnam flag burning protesters hope would happen?</p>
2	<p>For many Americans, burning the symbol of the nation is the ultimate disrespect. Some believe that doing so should be treated like treason; the flag is so sacred that the First Amendment guarantee of free speech should not apply. Others maintain that flag burning is behavior, not speech. Since it offends most citizens, communities should have the right to ban it.</p>	<p>Name <u>three</u> beliefs of people against flag burning.</p>
3	<p>States began outlawing flag desecration (intentional disrespect and mistreatment) around the turn of the century. At first they aimed to stop politicians plastering the campaign trail with the flag and companies decorating products with stars and stripes. A few people even said that postage stamps should not feature flags because the postmark would</p>	<p>Using a dictionary, define the word "desecration".</p> <p>Name two early examples of flag desecration.</p> <p>1)</p>

	<p>desecrate them. But the public grew to accept commercial and promotional uses of the flag. States prosecuted only those flag “abusers” who seemed to be criticizing the government. At the height of the Vietnam War, Congress passed a law making flag burning a federal offense.</p>	<p>2)</p> <p>When was the first federal law against flag burning passed?</p>
4	<p>During the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, police arrested Gregory Lee Johnson for burning a U.S. flag in front of City Hall. A jury found him guilty under a state law forbidding flag desecration and sentenced him to a year in prison and a fine of two thousand dollars.</p>	<p>What was Greg Lee Johnson’s <u>sentence</u> and <u>fine</u> for burning a US Flag?</p>
5	<p>Johnson's lawyers appealed his conviction all the way to the Supreme Court. They argued that setting fire to a flag in protest is “symbolic speech,” protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution. Attorneys representing Texas insisted that the state has the right to outlaw desecration in order to prevent public disorder and preserve the flag as a symbol of national unity.</p>	<p>What was the argument presented by Johnson’s lawyers?</p> <p>What did the Texas lawyers argue?</p>
6	<p>When <i>Johnson v. Texas</i> finally reached the Supreme Court in 1989, the justices ruled in favor of Johnson, a member of a Communist youth group. They said that flag burning is a form of political expression protected by the First Amendment. “The Government may not prohibit expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable,” the Court declared.</p>	<p>Summarize the Supreme Court ruling of Johnson v. Texas in 1989.</p>

7	<p>This ruling angered many Americans. Congress quickly passed the Flag Protection Act, but in 1990 the Supreme Court also struck down that law. "Punishing desecration of the flag dilutes the very freedom that makes this emblem so <u>revered</u>, and worth <u>revering</u>," the majority ruled.</p>	<p>Using a dictionary, define the word "revere".</p> <p>Name something besides a flag that you <i>revere</i>.</p>
8	<p>Since the Supreme Court based its ruling on the First Amendment, conservative politicians decided to try to pass a new constitutional amendment that specifically outlawed flag desecration. They met with a lot of resistance. Many citizens who found flag burning offensive did not agree that it was such an important issue that the United States should change its Constitution to prevent it. Wording of the amendment also raised many questions. If the United States was protecting patriotic symbols, why not the White House or the national anthem as well as Old Glory? How would "flag" be defined? Could citizens burn an old forty-eight-star flag? Or one painted on wood? How would "desecration" be defined? Could manufacturers still print stars and stripes on underwear or T-shirts?</p>	<p>What was wrong with the wording of the amendment?</p>
9	<p>In 1995, the Senate narrowly defeated the flag desecration amendment. The controversy continues, however, as a museum in Phoenix, Arizona, discovered in March 1996. Its exhibit of modern flag art, including a sculpture of the flag draped over a toilet, drew three hundred protesters, mostly veterans of the military, who wanted the show closed. (The show remained open.)</p>	<p>What group mostly protested the museum exhibit in Arizona?</p>
10	<p>Although actual flames are rare, flag desecration in any form makes many Americans burning mad.</p>	<p>Even though it is currently legal, why do you think flag burning makes people so mad?</p>

State your opinion on burning the American Flag:

Give 3 Reasons for Support:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Even though it is currently legal, why do you think flag burning makes people so mad? (no one sentence answers)

