

Design a Great FLAG: how to use Vexillology in your writing

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/designing-a-great-flag-how-to-use-vexillology-in-your-writing/>

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In the storybook writing class I'm currently teaching, we're wrapping-up the complexities involved in creating a protagonist that feels real. Part of that process can sometimes include things like designing a coat of arms, a hot object, or even the flag of an imaginary place.

I'm always looking for new and better ways to help/improve my writing process and part of that is in learning about some of the deeper details in a topic I wouldn't generally know a thing about... like flags.

The highly recognized Canadian Flag so many envy.

Great TED Talk from Roman Mars... a must watch, even if you don't care about flags!

There are simple reasons the beloved Chicago flag is found all over that state, while few people *have ever seen* the Milwaukee flag. People don't fly silly looking flags, which means that flag isn't doing what it is meant to do: bring people together.

Fantastic Chicago FLAG!!!

The incredible thing about learning new things – perhaps especially those you wouldn't think to be all that special or important – is that they become relatable and relevant to everything else in your life. It can be really surprising sometimes, and knowing about flag design is no exception.

Roman Mars presents a very entertaining and inspiring talk about Vexillology (the study of flags) that argues the need for better, smarter and more inspiring designs on American municipal flags. It's an 18-minute talk that is definitely worth your time (below).

I know. You're thinking of Sheldon Cooper's *Fun with Flags*, right? You got me. I love trains, too. But I wouldn't have imagined that something as obscure as Vexillology would become something that I could apply to everything that interests me.

ouch.

Vexillology Rules: there are five

What should a flag design entail? How do I know if a flag design is successful or not? The design of a good flag should:

1. Be simple enough that a child can draw it from memory,
2. Use meaningful symbolism,
3. Use two to three basic colors,
4. Never include lettering or seals, and
5. Always be distinctive.

In fact, really no words at all should ever be on a flag. A 3X5-foot flag raised 100 feet (at least) into the air and flapping in the wind *cannot be read*. Municipal seals are meant to be stamped onto official documents, not flags, and yet many city and state flags do exactly that.

Hilariously, Vexillologists call flags with a municipal seal on them an SOB: Seal On a Bedsheet.

As Mars explains, if you have to label the flag by printing the name of the place it's representing (as done on the San Francisco flag and others), then your symbolism has failed.

From Land of Enchantment, the New Mexico flag. This is the one I grew up with.

I'm from New Mexico, which according to Vexillologist Ted Kaye, author of "[Good Flag, Bad Flag: how to design a great flag](#)," my state has a great flag design. It's true, too. Everywhere you look, there is the New Mexico flag. (See? It's right there, just above.) It's on pins, clothing and all around major shopping

areas - not just government buildings.

How to do it right: the procedure

To successfully create a good flag design, limit yourself to a simple 1" X 1.5" (one inch by one and a half inch) rectangle. Your eyes are about 15 inches from that rectangle when you sit down to design it.

That is the ratio you need to use, because that is how a full sized flag appears to our eyes when it is on a flagpole.

Vexillology in Story

As a storyteller, you are a creator of places and those places almost always have a flag. Does your fantasy flag design require good design? No. But if it's a really ugly flag, that's a *particular* of your story decision-making. You should design it poorly on purpose, not accident.

You need to know what makes a good flag in order to write a bad one. Just like any other kind of detail you would want to write into a story. A lot of writing is about researching what you want to write about.

In the case of Roman Mars' talk, I think you'll find his perspective wry and inviting. You'll want to sit down and make tiny little flags. Even if you don't ever use a flag design in your writing, this talk will enrich you. Click on the video below and you'll see what I mean.

Watch it through to the end to find out which flag has been voted the worst flag in America. (It's amazingly bad.)

[Ted Talk](#)

Keep creating, no matter what.

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