

Grade 3 - Narrative

Anna and the Flag

Anna paid close attention to making tiny, neat stitches on the piece she was sewing. She felt a cool breeze on her neck. The weather was mild in Philadelphia today—72 degrees Fahrenheit. Anna sat in the sewing room where Aunt Betsy had taught her to do needlework. It was next to the shop where Aunt Betsy worked. Today, members of the flag committee were visiting Anna’s aunt. Anna listened carefully, trying to hear every word of the conversation in the next room.

“I believe that five-pointed stars will look better than six-pointed stars, gentlemen,” said her aunt. “Let me show you.” As she spoke, Aunt Betsy folded a white linen cloth, cut once with her scissors, and created a five-pointed star.

Anna peeked into the shop to get a glimpse of the men who were talking to Aunt Betsy. She recognized George Ross, Betsy’s uncle, who often came to the shop. Everyone knew General George Washington, but Anna did not know Mr. Morris, the third member of the flag committee.

The committee was impressed with Betsy Ross and immediately asked her to make a flag for the new nation. The flag was to have thirteen stripes, alternating red and white. Thirteen white stars, representing the colonies, would be on a blue rectangle. The five-pointed stars would be placed in a circle so that no colony would be viewed as better than any other.

After the gentlemen left, Aunt Betsy started work on the flag. She instructed Anna to gather plants from the garden to make dye for the cloth. “The blue color must be very bold and dark,” Aunt Betsy said. “The white stars will be stitched on it to look like a constellation in the night sky.”

Anna grabbed the big herb basket and went to the garden. She enjoyed the smell of the fragrant mint leaves, but she did not choose them. They made a soft, buttery yellow dye. Anna also bypassed the rosemary plants, which produced brown dyes. She decided the mulberries would be just right for the deep blue dye Aunt Betsy wanted.

Anna took the berries to Aunt Betsy’s shop. There, a worker crushed the berries and added them to a bubbling pot over hot coals to make the dye. When the dye had boiled for an hour, Anna watched the worker add white cotton fabric to the liquid. The cloth was left soaking in the dye overnight.

The next morning, Anna gasped as the cloth was lifted from the dye. The cloth was purple, not blue!

“What is that?” asked a stern voice behind her. Anna turned to see her aunt staring in disbelief at the plum-colored cloth.

“I thought the mulberries would make blue dye,” said Anna, close to tears.

Aunt Betsy replied, “It is indigo that is needed. The flag must be finished in a few days. I’m depending on you to correct this mistake.”

Anna ran to the garden and collected handfuls of leaves from indigo plants. Back at the shop, she waited anxiously as a new batch of dye was made.

A few days later, Anna watched General Washington inspect the flag her aunt had completed. He examined the brilliant white and crimson red stripes. Then he looked with satisfaction at the dark blue rectangle with the circle of white stars.

“I understand we almost had a purple flag,” Uncle George said to Anna. She was upset until Uncle George smiled at her, and she realized he was just teasing.

General Washington nodded at Anna and then turned to her aunt. “Thank you, Mrs. Ross,” he said. “This flag will proudly represent the United States of America.”