

## Grade 11 Informational

### Bald Eagle

Ask a United States citizen to make an inventory of symbols associated with America, and the information will delineate the bald eagle near the top of America's nationalist icons. The bald eagle's history in America has its roots with the beginning of America itself.

Before 1782, the bald eagle enjoyed no national renown. However, when the new country's Second Continental Congress convened to select a national seal, many archetypes were suggested and considered as worthy of placement as the national emblem. Although legend has suggested that an extensive debate occurred between the founding fathers, the bald eagle was accepted as the national emblem on its first appearance before the committee. Its competition included the rattlesnake, suggested by Benjamin Franklin, the rooster, and even scenes from the Bible. So, where does the story about Benjamin Franklin suggesting the turkey get its origin? Franklin was not pleased with the selection of the bald eagle as evidenced in a letter written to his daughter. In this letter, Franklin even compared the bald eagle in an unflattering way to the turkey. He argued that the turkey was more deserving than the bald eagle as a national representative on a larger scale. Saying the bald eagle was "lazy" and even exhibited "bad moral character" in its hunting, Franklin did not support the bald eagle as the national choice. The point was moot; the bald eagle had quickly and quite easily moved through committees to arrive as the national emblem of the United States.

Chosen predominantly for its uniqueness to North America, the bald eagle makes its habitat in every state of America except Hawaii. With a wingspan of 6 to 8 feet and a length of 29 to 42 inches, the bald eagle carries its 7 to 15 pounds at a speed of 44 miles per hour in flight. Surviving mainly on a staple of fish, the bald eagle also consumes small animals, including ducks and rabbits, and the occasional carrion.

Placed on the endangered species list in 1967, the bald eagle has seen resurgence in population changing its classification to "threatened" in 1995. Today, half of the world's population of 70,000 bald eagles subsists in Alaska primarily feasting on salmon. Yet, illegal hunters, traps, power lines, windmills, and poisons along with natural predators still threaten the species' existence.

Despite its historic beginnings in America's history, the bald eagle remains a symbol of perseverance, survival, and national pride.

## Grade 11 Narrative

### Uncle Wilbur

My uncle Wilbur used to spend hours every day checking on the lightning rods that stood guard on the roof of his house. We get a lot of storms here in Alabama. Sometimes we see wind up to sixty miles per hour and baseball-size hail. Lightning, Uncle Wilbur says, is a living thing, and like a cat, it will strike anything that moves. You'd better not tempt it, he always told us, because you never know when you'll be walking along one day and—"bam!"—you'll find yourself charred like a piece of chicken gristle that got left in the grease too long. He advised my cousins and me to always be mindful of the nearest sheltering tree. He said we should be prepared to drop to the ground like a hot potato at the first sound of thunder. Knowing that lightning is attracted to the tallest thing around, Uncle Wilbur worried constantly about my cousin Jared, who, at sixteen, was 6'2" and still growing.

Uncle Wilbur has always been a smart man. We all listened as he dismissed the automobile as a passing fancy. Every year it seemed more and more Model Ts came rolling into town, but Uncle Wilbur insisted that nothing could replace the reliability of a good old-fashioned mule when it came to transportation, work, or even entertainment. Yes, Uncle Wilbur's Mule Olympics, complete with obstacle courses and a long jump, was known far and wide as one of the most exciting events of the year. Sadly, the Mule Olympics did not survive into the next decade because the mules got too old and lost interest.

Nonetheless, my uncle Wilbur continued to predict future trends and warn us of impending tragedy. To this day, he reminds us that he foresaw the stock market crash of 1929, and that's why he kept his money wrapped in a handkerchief under his mattress. (Considering that a large portion of it was Confederate money, he didn't have much to begin with, but even if he had, he would not have trusted it to banks, the federal government, or any such gambling operation as the New York Stock Exchange.) When they started collecting income taxes a few years back, Uncle Wilbur refused to share his wealth with Uncle Sam, believing that one day someone would challenge this highway robbery in a court of law. He felt that by refusing to pay taxes now, he was just saving the government that extra step of having to return his money in the future. Unfortunately, Uncle Wilbur soon faced possible jail time for back taxes, which he promptly paid, still insisting that the money was just a temporary loan.

Suspicious of all bureaucratic officials, Uncle Wilbur did not take kindly to the power company man who came knocking one day in 1936. This was the year the government launched a campaign to bring electricity to rural areas like ours. Most folks, like Uncle Wilbur, were a little wary of having electricity in their homes. Many of us had running water, and we just weren't sure that the two mixed. Nevertheless, Uncle Wilbur was downright floored when the man said he wanted to string power lines up to the house. Nearly losing his temper, Uncle Wilbur exclaimed, "Here I am doing everything in my power to keep from getting struck by lightning, and you want to bring it right to my doorstep?" He sent the man on his way with a "No, thank you," and a "Good day, sir," but in the months that followed, we all eventually relented and let in the light. I must admit, playing checkers in the dark is a talent you can easily

lose without daily practice.

Many things have changed since those times. Uncle Wilbur still lives in mortal fear of a lightning strike, but because he doesn't get out much anymore, most of his lightning rods have rusted through and fallen to the ground. Now that he's retired, Uncle Wilbur lives mostly on Social Security, which he proudly proclaims as his victory. (See, he says, the government did *eventually* give his money back.) He probably spends more time reminiscing about the past than he does making future predictions, but Uncle Wilbur will be the first to tell you that television will never be as popular as radio, and the idea of a human traveling into outer space is just plain crazy!