

Massachusetts State Flag

Bay State • Capital: Boston • Statehood: 1788

Overview

A white field with a blue shield: an Algonquin figure holding a bow, a star above. An arm brandishes a sword as crest, while the motto proclaims By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty. Spare in colour, weighty in meaning.

Flag specifications

Adopted: 1971-06-18
Designer: Based on colonial arms
Ratio: Not specified in law
White field with coat of arms and motto ribbon.

Colors

  
#FFFFFF #002D72 #FFD700

Symbolism

Native American figure	Represents the people of Massachusetts.
star	Signifies Massachusetts as one of the original states.
motto	'Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem' means 'By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty.'

Historical timeline

- 1788: Massachusetts admitted as 6th state.
- 1971: Modern flag design confirmed.
- 1908 — Earlier design featured coat of arms on one side and pine tree on reverse.

Notable facts

- One of few state flags depicting a Native American.
- The reverse side of earlier flags once showed a pine tree.
- The figure represents an Algonquin Native American holding a bow. The arrow points downward as a symbol of peace.
- The blue shield sits on a white field.
- The state motto appears on a ribbon beneath the shield.
- The motto 'Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem' means 'By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty.'
- The current single-sided design was standardized in 1971.

Seal deep dive

nativeFigure
A Native American figure holding a bow and arrow on a blue shield.
Meaning: Representation of the Indigenous peoples of Massachusetts and a gesture of peace

star
A single white star placed near the figure's head.
Meaning: Massachusetts as one of the original thirteen states

armAndSword
A gold arm holding a broadsword positioned above the shield.
Meaning: Readiness to defend liberty and justice

motto
A ribbon bearing the Latin motto 'Ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem'.
Meaning: By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty

Vexillology notes

Design type: State seal with heraldic crest

Complexity: 8/10

Readability: 4/10

Printable reference sheet for classroom use.