

# The Star-Spangled Untangled: A Poetic Unfolding of the U.S. Flag

## A writing activity with Ciona Rouse

Let's create what we'll call a "flag sonnet." A sonnet is a 14-line poem, and it translates to mean "little song." Sonnets often focus on one topic and then offer a turn in the last two lines. For the purposes of our flag sonnet, we won't commit to any of the various rhyme schemes or rules of a sonnet (there are so many, depending on the type of sonnet). Simply follow these prompts for each line of the poem.

Using the flag on the next page, write the first 13 lines on each stripe and then use the Union in the upper left canton of the flag for your 14th line. Your words will become the stars in this poetic experience.

Don't overthink the language. See what you can build.

1. Write a line about exchanging. What does it mean to exchange what's damaged for something new? What do you need to exchange? What do we as a nation need to exchange? What do you wish someone would offer to exchange?
2. Let the phrase "American-made" inspire you. What question do you have for that term? What do you want to proclaim or claim or maybe even disdain in that term? Write it.
3. Make an "I" statement about liberty and freedom. For example, "I am free because . . ." or "I believe liberty means . . ." or whatever statement you want to make—just make sure it's about you.
4. Borrow from a line in one of your favorite America-related songs. Put it in quotes, of course.
5. Write a line about the color red.
6. What feels like it's fraying? Write a line about it.
7. What do you want to say to Justice? Or ask of Justice?
8. Write a line about the white stripes.

9. The earliest etymology of the word “pledge” is French. It meant “hostage, security, bail.” It was a way to guarantee a hold on something. In Germanic use, it went on to mean “to care for, to promise responsibility.” Consider the word “pledge.” What will you pledge?
10. Write a line about service. What does it mean to serve?
11. Make the United States \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blank.
12. Write a line about the blues.
13. Make a “we” statement about liberty. It can even begin with “We, the people . . .”
14. The Union: Our flag should be \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blank.

We’d love to see your flags. Use #FlagsAtTheFrist when you post them on social media, or send them to us at [flagpoems@FristArtMuseum.org](mailto:flagpoems@FristArtMuseum.org).

Or, you may want to take your words off the flags and make more art with them—chalking them on a sidewalk, putting them on fabric or in a painting . . . however you choose to share your poems, we welcome them all.


# Frist Art Museum

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