

Understanding the Meaning of THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

You may find it helpful to read this brief lesson to your students while using the Gateways Pledge of Allegiance poster as a visual aid.

The Pledge of Allegiance is something we like to say because it reminds us of the wonderful things about America. But, a lot of us say the Pledge and never stop to think about what it means. Today, let's spend a few minutes learning about each part of the Pledge.

The first thing we say in the Pledge is, "**I pledge allegiance.**" What does it mean to make a pledge? [Invite answers]

To make a pledge means to make a promise. What does the word allegiance mean? [Invite answers] Allegiance means to be faithful or loyal. It means people can count on you to be on their side.

So we say, "**I pledge allegiance to the flag.**" Why the flag? [Invite answers] Because, the flag is a symbol of our fifty states joined together to be one country. When we say the Pledge, we are promising to be faithful to our country.

The next thing we say in the Pledge is "**of the United States of America.**" That's our country. Then we say, "**and to the Republic for which it stands.**" One of the really good ideas that bond us together as Americans is our loyalty to the way we govern ourselves—as a republic. That simply means that we elect people to represent us when they lead our country for a certain amount of time. They are accountable to us for the job they do.

Then the Pledge describes our republic as "**one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.**" Let's think about each part of that.

"**One Nation under God.**" The people who started our country (people like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson) believed that the government doesn't give us our freedom. They believed that our freedom really comes from God. They created our government to make sure that our God-given freedom is protected. That's what they wrote in the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence is a very special thing they wrote in 1776 to declare (or announce) why they were wanting to be a separate (or independent) country from England. They wrote:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident (that means just common sense), that all men (that means all people) are created equal, that they are endowed (that means blessed) by their Creator with certain unalienable rights (that means freedoms that cannot be taken away), that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that to *secure* these rights, governments are instituted (started) among men..."

So, when we say "**one Nation under God**" in the Pledge we are reminding ourselves of the idea that our country's founders had—that God is really the one who gives us our freedom and our government is there to protect our freedom. Abraham Lincoln talked about the importance of this in the Gettysburg Address, and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about it in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Then, we say in the Pledge, "**indivisible.**" What does that mean? [Invite answers] It means we won't be divided. It means that we pledge ourselves to stay together as a country, even when we disagree with each other.

The Pledge ends with the phrase, "**with liberty and justice for all.**" Liberty means freedom, and we commit ourselves to such liberties as the freedom to worship, the freedom to gather together with other people, and the freedom to speak our minds. We also commit ourselves to justice, which means being fair and right in our judgment of people. By reciting the Pledge, we remind ourselves of our commitment to these wonderful things about America. *Let's all stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance.*