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AP English Language and Composition

13 January 2025

Year of the Flags: Where the Banners Are Waving, Hopes and Dreams Are Rising

The *Stars and Stripes*, the *Tricolor*, and the *Flag of Palestine* are just a few examples of the flags that have connected the world over the past year, serving as symbols of unity, pride, and purpose, tying together the events that shape lives. For a long time, the flag has represented hope, struggle, and identity. Flags unite and also divide people. With the growth of patriotism and nationalism, flags have become not only symbols of governments but also representations of the identity of the people, creating a sense of care for the flags and pride in waving them. Evolving with time, flags have not only represented political entities, but also groups of people with the same social beliefs, advocating for changes for a better world. Seeing the flags of different colors is seeing the exemplary diversity the world has come to. The past year was a year when people had many opportunities to wave their flags. Flags were waved for different causes, whether it was a political victory, a milestone of progress, or when the pure spirit of sports ignited a surge of patriotism. The sight of flags stirred blended emotions, as each of them represents a unique, exultant, and heroic story of a people. No matter what happens, no matter how different the flags are, the human race still stands, because where the flags still wave with pride and honor is where dreams and hopes remain, vitality continues to spread, and people will paint a bright future.

To start, the past year was a year of elections, a pivotal mark in the timeline that signified the triumph of democracy worldwide, and in that moment of praise, people raised their flags to profoundly express their love for their nation. It was a great year when people around the world practiced their rights and raised their voices through the votes, namely in Indonesia, Portugal, South Korea, the European Union, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, and the United States. The world has witnessed many ruling parties being replaced by their oppositions, such as the Democratic Party losing the U.S. election to the Republican Party, and the Conservative Party giving up its rule to the Labour Party in the United Kingdom. But no matter who the triumph belonged to, whether it was the Left or the Right, the victory belonged to the people, the powerful majority. And with political victories, flags were seen flying bravely and joyfully in almost every single corner of the Earth, as hopes for a better future, in the thick of economic challenges, soaring and roaring. Massive, diverse crowds gathered, breathless yet proud, and raised their banners with hope. It is rare to see that many elections in one single year, and that is what made the past year unique and unprecedented. Looking at elections is looking at how chaotic the world has been for many people. That said, it is a representation of hope, of changes for a better future. Elections prove that people still have their voice in society, which deserves to be celebrated. And there is no better way to do so than by bringing the flag down the road and letting it fly in the winds of the new era. Seeing the images of flags where democracy thrives proves that people still celebrate and believe in the values of freedom, which they have been fighting hard for. When people look at the image of waving flags, they see a people filled with desire and passion; a burning fire that leads people to a bright future, through political means. The world has been turning, and the people have been carrying their banners and singing the

songs of hopes and dreams for their common home to be a better place; the past year has seen it amplified to a much greater scale, and perhaps, a greater impact on history.

While political victories highlighted progress, they also came with the challenges of division that went against the values of the flag. Political polarization has become more and more of an issue, as seen in the United States. The *Star-Spangled Banner*, the flag that represents the last stronghold of freedom, seemed to be tearing apart. But it has proved itself to be the representation of the nation that keeps moving forward in optimism, so tough to be destroyed, and so proud to be displayed. After four years, the political battleground between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party was heated again, and it was hotter than ever. Twenty-three years earlier, all fifty states were united as one in condolence to the victims of the terrorist attack in New York City, sharing the collective will to defeat the enemy who dared to lay their hands on the foundation of American freedom. Two decades later, it sounded like a fever dream. Conflict erupted throughout the country. It came in the form of verbal, personal assaults against the other presidential candidate during televised debates. It also came in the form of attempts to assassinate a former president. People questioned whether the fifty stars on the flag could remain unchanged. They were standing on the same land, saying the same thing about America, and carrying the same flag, while driven by opposing and clashing intentions. The mutual respect between the two parties was no longer the same after what the people had seen from the presidential election. Despite being on the verge of a second Civil War, the American people were fortunate enough to not see any seceding states, instead, America was still standing, and the flag was still flying across the continent. Recall the image of former president Donald Trump punching the fist in the air. No matter which side the interpreter leans to, the image should

represent the heroic characteristic of America, where problems are solved with the votes of the people and not with guns and violence. The American flag flying in the background of that image exemplifies the values that the American people hold dear. The flag should also represent the hopes of the people for a better future after years of hardship; to them, a change was necessary. After all, the American people have pledged allegiance to the flag, stating that America is “one Nation, under God, [and] indivisible.” The polarization stemmed from many factors, but in the course of time, the United States remained united, and the people stayed determined to make their country great under the same flag that represents their glory, hopes, and dreams.

By the same token, the past year was also marked by pain and struggle, with the horrific conditions in the Gaza Strip and the tragic, ongoing war in Ukraine, yet despite the endless suffering, the flags continued to wave bravely, symbolizing fierce resilience and the story of the oppressed striving to break the chains and create a better future for their people. In the past year, the conflict between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel had climbed to a new climax as Hamas, in the name of independence for the Palestinian people, launched an attack against Israeli civilians. The Israel Defense Forces, claiming they were fighting against anti-Semitism and terrorism, launched a counterattack that resulted in a human rights crisis in the Gaza Strip and instability in the region. The conflict continued throughout the year 2024 and seemed to overshadow the cause of the Ukrainians, who were fighting fiercely in their third year against Russian aggression, now with the help of North Korean soldiers. Amid the gunfire, explosions, and chemical warfare, the young men fighting, who only wish for peace, share a common bond: their pride in their nation's flag. It was painful for everyone around the world to follow the events

and get horrified by the things that were happening. Every house is destroyed, every family suffers both material and spiritual losses, and every crime is being exposed that should not have happened. In an era where international law seems to be enough to deter the powers, they still commit terrible acts while innocent people are suffering. Bombs can destroy buildings, but they cannot destroy the love of people for their homeland. And this love lives on as long as the flags still fly. To the people who are bravely protecting them on the battlefield, they should feel proud because the flags were also waved around the world, in protests against brutality, and in hope for peace on Earth. The protests against the wars in Gaza and Ukraine reminded people of the anti-war movement in the United States during the height of the Vietnam War. It was also the young men who suffered due to the decisions of the rich and powerful. But the people controlled how history should progress, and the flags of the “enemy” were seen in protests as a way to advocate peace, for both America and Vietnam. It was obvious that the red flags no longer represented the terror of communism as described by Cold War narratives, but rather freedom and hopes for a beautiful future. The same image was once again seen in the past year. From the river to the sea, from the houses to the roads, from real life to the Internet, people chanted the songs of love and united under the same flag they saw as righteous and humane. The protests and the waving flags across the globe carried a message not about picking a side, but about finding a peaceful solution where people can live together harmoniously and children can grow up protected and loved.

That said, flags are not always tied to tragedies; in the past year, people in Syria waved their flags with hope, witnessing progress through a change in leadership, and though the flag may have changed, their dreams for a better life and a better future remain. The story of the coup

d'état in Syria was not simply about groups of rebels overthrowing a government. It was a story of a people living under a totalitarian regime, in constant fear, without any saying. The people's anger towards the government grew, after each repression, after each bombing of their very own civilians. And, as the last straw that broke the camel's back, the overthrow broke out and finished quickly as the Syrian leader no longer received enough support from Moscow. To people who were not aware of the situation, it sounded like a bad thing just happened in the currently very unstable Middle East. But the images of people carrying their flag, a very different flag, in joy and excitement, created the panorama of a renewed Syria. It had always been a chaotic country, immersed in smoke and bombs, and seemingly unable to see the sun. But the times had given the Syrian people a chance to stand up and take control of their lives. Amidst the most volatile period of a tumultuous year, news from Syria came to the world as a message of positive change. In joy, the new Syrian flag was raised right in the capital, a message to the whole world from the Syrian people about a country that is old but new, a future that is happier, more promising, and more just. However, it is unpredictable whether other factions of Syria will continue to fight to prolong the civil war, despite it being against what people want. But what could be more wonderful than seeing Syria united under one flag, a flag of innovation and progress, representing Syria that would be integrating with the world? Once again, the world saw flags flying where dreams were taking flight, where hope for a colorful future had replaced a time of hopelessness and uncertainty. The world learned that even in regions troubled by instability, people's desire for change and hope for a better future can still triumph. The new flag of Syria, the new chapter of Syria will be brighter and more hopeful in the history of the world.

In the same way, flags in the past year symbolized triumph and victory for freedom and human rights, as the resounding victories of justice in France and South Korea were captured through images of flags flying proudly. In the spring of 2024, France officially made abortion a constitutional right. As a way to express their happiness, people took to the streets to celebrate, with flags not only of France but also of the organizations that have fought so hard for the rights of French women. A moment that would set the stage for other countries to follow suit and become more progressive. Unlike the way the French celebrate the freedom of their body, the Koreans expressed their belief in political freedom. Toward the year's end, South Korean people were under martial law imposed by their president. To express their discontent, people went down the streets with the South Korean flag that the youth of this country have always tried to protect. People had recorded bustling moments when the flags fluttered among the crowd as K-pop songs played in the background. Although the two events seemed unrelated, they both represented the younger generation's belief in the values of freedom and human rights. In those two moments, people became a part of history, without any riot or demolition. The atmosphere they created was not one of chaos and destruction, but of faith and hope for a better tomorrow, filled with the flags they are proud of. That was a positive signal to see the young generation realizing the importance of freedom and human rights. More than eighty years ago, these values came dangerously close to being destroyed. The images of waving flags emphasized the enthusiasm of young people in participating in building their liberty and individual freedoms. As the world progresses, hopes and dreams continue to come true as long as freedom still stands, and though human rights are relatively recent, the young generation is determined to uphold them, symbolized by their proud raising of the flags.

Surrounded by the political turbulence and societal challenges, flags were seen waving excitedly and enthusiastically in a very vibrant summer, where national pride was boosted, people were connected, and love was spread by the pure emotions of sports. In contrast to the previous four years when the world was suffering heavy destruction by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2024 witnessed the unimaginable return of the UEFA EURO and the Olympics. The most precious soccer tournament in Europe took place in multiple cities in Germany. There, flags from twenty-four countries made a wonderful scene that highlighted the beauty of the king of sports. Flags fluttered in the streets and the stadiums, creating a bustling and memorable month for all the teams and fans. The yellow and red flag painted Berlin on the final day as the Spanish men's national team was crowned champions of Europe. Shortly after that, the biggest sporting event in the world, the Olympics, took place in the heart of France. Athletes from hundreds of countries around the world gathered on the Seine River during the opening ceremony, proudly and joyfully waving the flag of the nation they represented. Despite the controversies, the event was a celebration of good sportsmanship. Amidst a year of chaos and instability, the two sporting events, along with many others that were happening throughout the year, came as a way to connect nations and erase divisions. They were not merely a field for athletes to compete, but a stage where sportsmanship and unity had a chance to shine for a worldwide audience. In that exhilarating moment, the sight of flags from different countries waving in unison sent a powerful message: the beauty of sports can connect people despite their differences. By proudly waving their flags, people demonstrated the hopes and dreams of nations around the world both within and outside of sport. For Spain, after many setbacks in continental and international competitions, they finally seized the chance to reclaim the glory of their golden age in the early

2010s. A vibrant new generation, filled with passion, ambition, and dreams, was expected to lead Spain to future victories. For the world, the sporting events once again displayed humanity's enduring desire to thrive, connect, and celebrate together in harmony. The sight of people from around the world gathering in one place, having fun interactions with each other, and waving their flags side by side, was the strongest testament to their shared desire. The return of global sports events taught people that joy and unity were essential for healing after years of isolation and hardship. Players, coaches, and fans, representing the same team of humanity, proved that people could find happiness together. In that mission, the flags became a significant symbol of the celebration of sportsmanship, diversity, and unity.

To conclude, the past year was truly unprecedented and chaotic, yet hopes and dreams continued to flourish, vibrant and beautiful, where banners soared in the wind, carrying the emotions and determination of the people. The values of hope, unity, and resilience remain firm despite struggles, divisions, and challenges. A chain of events, both connected and disconnected, united by the pride of the flags. Each image of a flag tells a story of hope and aspiration, inspiring people toward a brighter future. When people wave flags with emotion and passion, it signifies they still hold on to their purpose in life. Imagine an authoritarian regime, where flags are everywhere, yet the people show no emotion when they look at them. This contrasts with what people see in most of the world, where flags are waved with deep emotions, be it joy, pride, or something else. Flags, in their many forms, are powerful representations of human connection, identity, and hope. They carry with them the history of struggles, triumphs, and dreams that shape the world. Life will continue, no matter what happens. Let the flags be a representation of different cultures and values that harmonize with the common song of humanity, not a symbol of

hatred and division marking the doom of civilization. By understanding the significance of the flags, humanity reminds itself of the universal desire that unites people all in their pursuit of a better world, a world where the flags they raise truly embody peace, unity, and progress for all.