

EXPLORERS' CORNER

Hidden History: Messages and Symbols in the Dollar Bill

by Pat Purnell, Education Associate



Messages and symbols often take the form of words or visual images that are used to express ideas, beliefs and information. Our dollar bill is full of messages and symbols.



The two circles on the back of the dollar bill are the front and back of the Great Seal of the United States. It was designed by Charles Thomson (1729-1824), one of America's Founding Fathers.

Notice the pyramid. Charles Thomson said the pyramid represented "Strength and Duration."

Look at the eye above the pyramid. Use your imagination to create an idea of what you might want that symbol to represent.

What is the significance of the Roman Numerals at the base of the pyramid? [Access an easy Roman Numeral Conversion Tool here.](#)

Examine the design on the left. What do you observe? What's going on in this image?

The Eagle holds in his talons symbols that "denote the power of war and peace." Which bundle do you think represents peace, and which one war?



Some feel that the number 13 is an unlucky number. But 13 is an important number to the United States because of the original 13 colonies/states. There are five portrayals of the number 13 in this image. Can you find two of them?

TRY THIS

Take out a dollar bill (and a magnifying glass if you have one) and study both sides. What other ideas, beliefs or messages do you think are being communicated? Can you find any other symbols?

FUN FACT

This so-called paper money is actually a cotton and linen blend; it is made out of cloth.