

United States Flag Retirement Ceremony



An American Flag retirement ceremony for Girl Scout group campfires.

Prelude:

When the United States flag (Old Glory) becomes worn, torn, faded or badly soiled, it is time to replace it with a new flag. The old flag should be retired with dignity and respect befitting our nation's flag.

There are two methods of retirement: burial or flame. Burning the flag does not mean that one should simply drop the entire flag (intact) into a fire. Tonight, we are not burning a flag, we are retiring a symbol of America's honor, courage, and strength. Therefore we request that all remain silent during this ceremony.

Ceremony:

Girl Scouts stand in flanking line on one side of the fire. Master of Ceremonies (MC) stands at rear of fire facing audience, asks audience to stand. Color Guard (3 Girl Scouts minimum) will approach fire from rear of audience, walk past line of Girl Scouts, then stop at rear of fire facing audience. Color Guard slowly unfurls flag on far side of campfire, so it shows through the flames while MC reads the script below:

MC: I am your Flag. I appear in many places. I have taken many forms and been called many names. I was authorized by Congress in 1818 in the form you see now and have remained unchanged except to add a new star each July 4th after a new state joined the union until I reached my present number of 50.

I am more than just red, white, and blue cloth shaped into a design. I am a silent sentinel of freedom. People of every country in the world know me on sight. Many countries love me as you do. Other countries look at me with contempt because they don't allow the freedom of Democracy that I represent – but country looks on me with respect. I am strong and the people of America have made me strong. My strength comes from your willingness to give help to those who are in need. You strive for world peace yet stand ready to fight oppression. You send resources and offer technology to less fortunate countries so they may strive to become self-sufficient. You feed starving children. You offer a home to anyone who will pledge allegiance to me.

Your sons gather beneath me to offer their lives on the battlefields, to preserve the Liberty I represent. That's why I love the American people. That's why I have flown so proudly.

Girl Scouts and their families are some of my favorite people. I listen to your patriotic songs. I'm there at your flag ceremonies and I appreciate the tender care you give me. I feel the love when you say your pledge. I notice that your hand covers your heart when I am on parade. How smartly you salute me as I pass by, and I ripple with pleasure when I see it.

Now I am tired and it's time for me to rest in the Sacred Flames of your campfire. My colors are faded, and my cloth is tattered, but my spirit remains unbroken.

To set my spirit loose, first cut the blue field away from my stripes.

MC pauses while color Guard leader uses scissors to remove blue field.

MC: Tear each of my 13 stripes and lay it on the fire, one at a time. As you do this, think about the 13 original colonies and the pioneers who carved a nation out of a wilderness. They risked everything to fight for the Independence which we enjoy today.

Color Guard leader uses scissors to start each stripe, then tears it; another Guard hands each stripe to the next Girl Scout waiting in line. Girl Scout takes stripe in both hands, then walks toward fire, places stripe in base of flames, salutes, then walks to form flanking line on opposite side each facing fire.

MC: *(continue slowly reading through next section, timing each state to a fresh stripe)* My first state was Virginia, then Massachusetts, then New York, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and finally Georgia.

As you cut and rip me apart and watch me burn, do not be sad or feel sorry for me. I have had the great Honor of being your flag of the United States of America and the Republic for which I stand, one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.

When my stripes are gone, kiss the blue field and lay it across the fire. Then stand silently as you watch each star twinkle and fade into ashes.

Color Guard leader takes blue field, brings it to her lips, then lays it on the top of the fire. Pause silently until blue field has been consumed.

MC: Now I am just a memory, but if there is a tear in your eye or a lump in your throat; if you felt a shiver in your spine as you watched me burn, then I will be back the next time you need me and my colors will be fresh and bright and my edges won't be ragged anymore. When I climb to the top of the flagpole, I'll wave at you and remember the love and respect that you have showed me here tonight.

So when you see me, stand straight, place your right hand over your heart...and I'll salute you, waving back...and I'll know that... **you remembered!**