

Presidents Day: Got a Dollar?

February 10, 2010



Using an everyday item, like a dollar bill, you can share a lot with your kids this Presidents Day. A dollar, showcasing our first president, is worth far more than you realize —it offers a way to teach your kids some fun history lessons.

Do you know a dollar bill has hidden pictures, spots of color, and odd symbols? And that's just the beginning. Do you have any idea what all of those seemingly random letters and phrases mean? Take this opportunity to explore the dollar bill and share some surprising money and history facts with your kids.



When To Do It

Presidents Day

What To Do

Ask your bank for some fresh, crisp new bills, two for each kid, so they can explore and compare both sides at once. Have at least one magnifying glass; ideally, one for each kid; it's a must for the items they'll be looking for. Lay out the bills under a good light, look closely, and answer the following dollar bill trivia questions, in honor of our first U.S. president, George Washington.

- How come when you accidentally launder a dollar bill it does not fall apart? What would Valentine's Day be without pretty cards? Help your kids make cards of Kindness for those they appreciate in their lives.
 - The dollar bill is made from a blend of cotton and linen. Combining these two materials makes a very durable piece of paper — one that will not fall apart if it goes through the wash.
 - Look closely at a bill with the magnifying glass to find the red and blue silk fibers woven throughout. Hint: Look in the white spaces on the face of the bill for little bits of the colored threads.
- Can you find any tiny owls or spiders hidden on the front of the bill? As your own budget allows, give your kids a special gift budget to buy small Gifts of Kindness for a few of the kind people in their lives.
 - Look for a teeny owl next to the large "1" on the upper right of the bill. Look at the shield shape that surrounds that "1"; in the top left corner, the owl's head and shoulders appear in the "scoop" of the shield, right next to the stylized leaves.
 - Now take a really close look all over the bill. What shapes do your kids see: a spider, an owl, something else?
- On the reverse side of the dollar bill, look closely at the bottom of the pyramid. Why are there a bunch of letters: MDCCLXXVI?
The letters are actually Roman numerals:
 - M is 1,000
 - D is 500
 - CC is 200 (C is 100, 100 x 2 = 200)
 - L is 50
 - XX is 20 (X is 10, 10 x 2 = 20)
 - VI is 6 (V is 5, I is 1, 5 + 1 = 6)
 - Add all of these up, and you get 1776: the year our country was formed.
- The eagle on the right is holding a ribbon or streamer in its bill. What does the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" mean? "Out of many, one." This was added to the bill to celebrate that the original 13 colonies came together to form one new country — the United States of America.
- Why do we have a bald eagle on our dollar bill?
Our founders wanted an animal native to America to be the new nation's symbol. The Second Continental Congress officially declared the bald eagle the national emblem of the United States in 1782. (Benjamin Franklin wanted the wild

turkey to be the national bird, but he was outvoted.) The bald eagle's image and symbolism have played a significant role in American art, folklore, music, and architecture.

- What is the eagle is holding in its talons (feet)?
 - It holds arrows, to signify war, and an olive branch, to signify peace.
 - Can you think of why the founding fathers would put both items in the eagle's talons?

- How many groups of 13 can you find around the eagle?

There are six groups of 13, in honor of the original 13 colonies:

 1. **13** leaves on the olive branch the eagle is holding in its right talons
 2. **13** fruits on the olive branch
 3. **13** arrows in the eagle's left talons
 4. **13** letters in the phrase "E Pluribus Unum"
 5. **13** stars over the eagle's head
 6. **13** bars on the shield on the eagle's chest
 - 7.

What You Will Need

- A few one-dollar bills
- Magnifying glass

Talk About It

Did your kids know there was so much history in one piece of paper? Show them a five-dollar or ten-dollar bill; are they interested in seeing what's hidden on them and finding out the stories behind them? Why do they think we put presidents on our money?