

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



# America's National Bird: Eagle or Turkey?



*By Kelly Hashway*

When we think of turkey, we think of Thanksgiving. When we think of symbols for America, the bald eagle comes to mind. But did you know that Benjamin Franklin once said the wild turkey would be a better symbol of America than the bald eagle?

When the bald eagle became the official symbol of America in 1782, Benjamin Franklin had some objections. He even wrote a letter to his daughter explaining why he thought the bald eagle was a poor choice to represent our country. In the letter, Franklin said the bald eagle was a lazy thief because it let other birds catch fish in rivers and then swooped down to steal their dinners. He also said that the bald eagle was a coward because it ran away from smaller birds protecting their nests. Franklin didn't want a bird that could be seen as a thief and a coward to represent America. He thought the symbol should be something that was both brave and honest.

Franklin's other complaint was that the drawing of the bald eagle used in the great seal actually looked more like a wild turkey. This made Franklin compare the two birds, and he decided the wild turkey would have been a better symbol for our country. He said that the turkey was a more respectable bird since it was not afraid of others birds and was native to America.

Did Franklin really want the wild turkey to be the national symbol? We may never know for sure, but he definitely was not happy about having a symbol that could be associated with laziness, theft, and cowardice either. Franklin only expressed his concerns through a letter to his daughter, but imagine what it would have meant for our country if Franklin had rallied people around the wild turkey being used as our national symbol. Thanksgiving may have been very different.

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1. Why did Benjamin Franklin think the bald eagle was a lazy thief?

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2. Why did Benjamin Franklin think the bald eagle was a coward?

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3. Why did Franklin think the wild turkey would be a better symbol for America?

- a. Wild turkeys are a symbol of Thanksgiving.
- b. Wild turkeys are brave.
- c. Wild turkeys can fly higher and faster.
- d. Wild turkeys are smarter than bald eagles.

4. If the wild turkey was a national symbol for America, do you think people would still eat it on Thanksgiving? Explain your answer.

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Tell whether each statement is a fact or opinion.  
Write out the word *fact* or *opinion* on each line.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The bald eagle has been an official symbol for America since 1782.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The wild turkey would be the best symbol for America.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to his daughter explaining that the turkey would be a better symbol for America.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The drawing of the bald eagle on the great seal looks more like a turkey than an eagle.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The bald eagle is one of the bravest birds in America.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Bald eagles sometimes steal fish from other birds.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Many American families eat turkey on Thanksgiving.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Turkey is the most delicious part of Thanksgiving dinner.

Write your own opinion about wild turkeys, eagles, or Thanksgiving.

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## ANSWER KEY



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1. Why did Benjamin Franklin think the bald eagle was a lazy thief?

**He thought the bald eagle was a lazy thief because it lets other birds catch fish, then swoops down and steals them from them.**

2. Why did Benjamin Franklin think the bald eagle was a coward?

**He thought the bald eagle was a coward because they run away from other birds who are protecting their nests.**

3. Why did Franklin think the wild turkey would be a better symbol for America?

- a. Wild turkeys are a symbol of Thanksgiving.
- b. Wild turkeys are brave.**
- c. Wild turkeys can fly higher and faster.
- d. Wild turkeys are smarter than bald eagles.

4. If the wild turkey was a national symbol for America, do you think people would still eat it on Thanksgiving? Explain your answer.

**Answers will vary.**

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## ANSWER KEY



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Tell whether each statement is a fact or opinion.  
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1. fact The bald eagle has been an official symbol for America since 1782.
2. opinion The wild turkey would be the best symbol for America.
3. fact Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to his daughter explaining that the turkey would be a better symbol for America.
4. opinion The drawing of the bald eagle on the great seal looks more like a turkey than an eagle.
5. opinion The bald eagle is one of the bravest birds in America.
6. fact Bald eagles sometimes steal fish from other birds.
7. fact Many American families eat turkey on Thanksgiving.
8. opinion Turkey is the most delicious part of Thanksgiving dinner.

Write your own opinion about wild turkeys, eagles, or Thanksgiving.

**Answers will vary.**

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