

# WHAT IN THE WORLD?



LEVELS 1 & 2 (GRADES 5 AND UP)

## Taking a Knee

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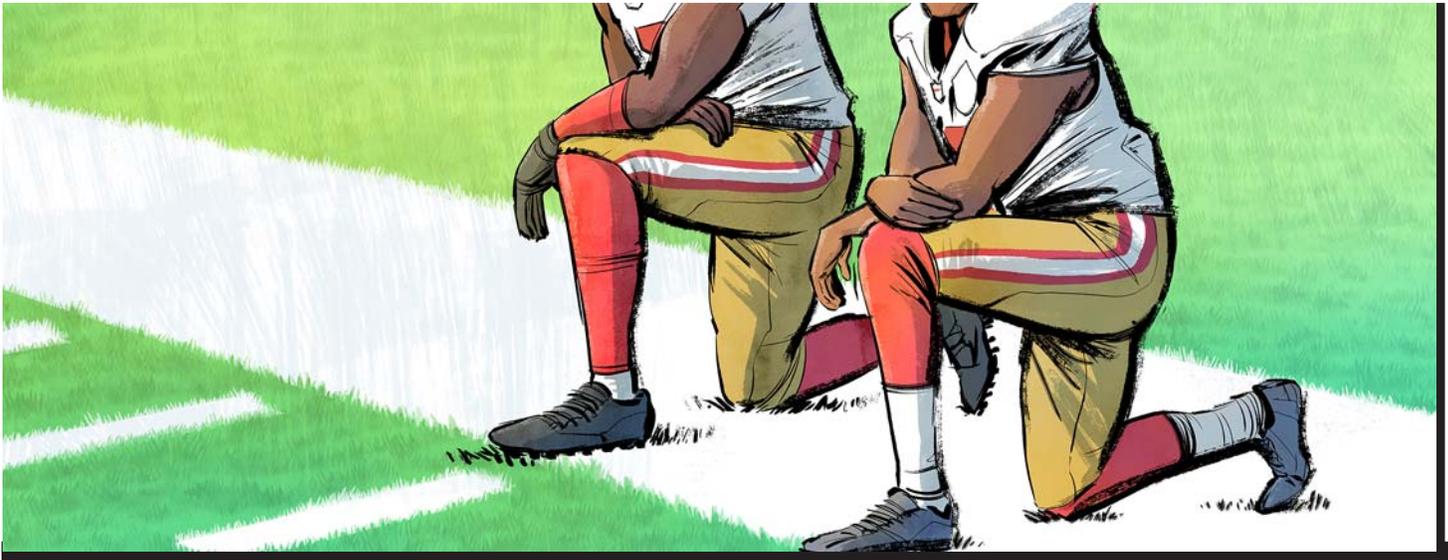
**BREAKING NEWS**  
NOVEMBER 2017



A monthly current events resource for Canadian classrooms

Routing Slip: (please circulate)

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In August 2016, NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a stand on racial inequality. He wanted to protest how some police treat minorities in America.

The star San Francisco 49er felt too many unarmed African-Americans were dying at the hands of police officers. He was angry that these officers often weren't being held accountable for their actions. So he refused to stand at attention for the national anthem before the start of a pre-season game. Instead, he remained seated.

"I'm going to continue to stand with the people that are being **oppressed**," Mr. Kaepernick said at the time. "To me this is something that has to change. When... I feel like that flag represents what it's supposed to represent, [that] this country is representing people the way that it's supposed to, I'll stand."

### THE MOVEMENT GROWS

Mr. Kaepernick pledged to donate one million dollars to social justice groups. He also kept protesting throughout the 2016-2017 football season. He took a knee during the anthem at the start of each game. Soon, other NFLers and athletes from other sports joined in.

At the start of the 2017-2018 NFL season, very few of the of league's roughly 1,800 players were protesting. Mr. Kaepernick wasn't one of them; he opted out of his contract with San Francisco in March. Since then, no NFL team has signed him, even though he was a top quarterback in the league.

On September 24, however, the number of protesters suddenly grew. That day, over 250 players and team staff either sat, kneeled, raised a fist, or didn't go on the field during the national anthem. Why the surge? Many players were angry about remarks President Donald Trump had days earlier.

### ABOUT THE NFL

The National Football League (NFL) is a professional American football league. Formed in 1920, it consists of 32 teams. They're divided into two conferences: the National Football Conference (NFC) and the American Football Conference (AFC).

All teams compete in a 17-week regular season from September through December. Then, the top four teams and two wild card teams from each conference advance to the playoffs. Winners play in the Super Bowl, usually on the first Sunday in February.

The NFL is the most popular sports league in the United States. It has the highest average attendance (67,591) of any sports league in the world.

### DEFINITIONS

**OPPRESSED:** suffering from unfair and cruel treatment by a more powerful person or government



# NATIONAL TAKING A KNEE

– NFL PLAYERS RESPOND TO INJUSTICE, ANTHEM PROTESTS, & THE PRESIDENT

## THE PRESIDENT’S VIEW

Mr. Trump is a long-standing critic of the protests. He believes the players’ actions show disrespect for the national anthem, the flag, the military, and America itself.

But at a September 22 rally in Alabama, he took his criticism further. He used a swear word to describe protesting players. He also proclaimed that NFL owners should suspend or fire anyone who didn’t stand for the anthem.

On September 23, he tweeted “If a player wants the privilege of making millions of dollars in the NFL ... he should not be allowed to disrespect... our Great American Flag ... and should stand for the national Anthem. If not, YOU’RE FIRED!”

## SEEING BOTH SIDES

Many players and team owners were upset by the president’s remarks. Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers spoke for many when he said the protest wasn’t about **patriotism**.

“We’re patriotic,” he said. “We love our troops. This is about something bigger than that.”

Pittsburgh Steelers offensive lineman Alejandro Villanueva agrees – but he understands the point of view of protesters’ critics, too.

On September 24, many of Mr. Villanueva’s teammates wanted to protest Mr. Trump’s comments.

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

In 2015, the Washington Post began tracking fatal police shootings in America. It found that blacks are 2.5 times more likely than whites to be shot and killed by police – and five times more likely if they’re unarmed. This injustice is at the core of a civil rights movement called Black Lives Matter. It campaigns against violence and racism towards black people.

The movement began in 2013 with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media. It started after George Zimmerman was found not guilty of shooting and killing Trayvon Martin, an African-American teen from Florida. It gained the national spotlight in 2014 during protests sparked when two African Americans died at the hands of police: Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York.

In July 2016, Black Lives Matter was involved in riots and demonstrations that sprang up after police killed African Americans Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. These events prompted Colin Kaepernick’s protest.

Racial injustice troubles many NFL players because about 70 percent of them are African American. To them, racism is personal.

Michael Bennett is an example. In August, the Seattle Seahawks player was in Las Vegas. He heard gunshots and started running with other people. He said police singled him out, ordered him to the ground, handcuffed him, and held a gun to his head. “All I could think was ‘I’m going to die [because] I am black and my skin color is somehow a threat,’” he said. He believes he was released just because officers realized he was a famous football player.

But not Mr. Villanueva. He is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. Was he upset with the other players?

“I take no offense; I don’t think veterans... take any offense,” he said. “They actually signed up and fought so someone can take a knee and protest peacefully...”

“People are... just trying to protest the fact that there are injustices in America. And people who stand... it

doesn’t mean that they don’t believe in these racial injustices. They’re just trying to do the right thing.” ★

## DEFINITIONS

**PATRIOTISM:** feelings of love, respect, and duty for a country



# INTERNATIONAL TAKING A KNEE

## ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Which NFL team did Colin Kaepernick play for last year?

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2. What did he do before the start of a pre-season game in August 2016?

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3. Explain why he did this.

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4. For how long did this protest continue? What did Colin Kaepernick do that was different?

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5. How did other athletes react to his protests?

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6. How did President Trump feel about these protests?

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7. What did President Trump say in late September that caused more players to protest?

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8. Describe how some NFL players reacted to Mr. Trump's comments.

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9. How do the protesting players explain their reasons for not standing during the national anthem?

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# INTERNATIONAL TAKING A KNEE

## BETWEEN THE LINES

An *inference* is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A *plausible inference* is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that Colin Kaepernick was not signed by an NFL team this year?

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## JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. If you were an NFL player, what position would you take on the issue of taking a knee during the anthem? Give reasons to support your response.
2. Many have suggested that professional athletes should not publicly express political opinions. What reasons can you suggest to explain this position? Do you mostly agree or mostly disagree with this position? Explain.

## ONLINE

1. Watch a call-to-unity NFL Network advertisement called “Inside These Lines” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvKBdrx4quA>
2. Watch an NFL Films mini-doc about Green Beret and former Seahawk Nate Boyer’s reaction to Colin Kaepernick’s protest at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOYmmr2QGrg>
3. Read an open letter from Nate Boyer to Colin Kaepernick at <https://www.armytimes.com/opinion/2016/08/30/an-open-letter-to-colin-kaepernick-from-a-green-beret-turned-long-snapper/>. Then read his extraordinary follow-up letter to all Americans from October 2017 at [http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/21003968/nfl-2017-ex-green-beret-nate-boyer-writes-open-letter-president-donald-trump-colin-kaepernick-nfl-united-states-america](http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/21003968/nfl-2017-ex-green-beret-nate-boyer-writes-open-letter-president-donald-trump-colin-kaepernick-nfl-united-states-america)
4. Read a Washington Post investigation into 2017 police shootings in the U.S. at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/number-of-fatal-shootings-by-police-is-nearly-identical-to-last-year/2017/07/01/98726cc6-5b5f-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c3ca29d950a2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/number-of-fatal-shootings-by-police-is-nearly-identical-to-last-year/2017/07/01/98726cc6-5b5f-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13_story.html?utm_term=.c3ca29d950a2) ★



([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Colin\\_Kaepernick#/media/File:Colin\\_Kaepernick\\_in\\_Super\\_Bowl\\_XLVII.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Colin_Kaepernick#/media/File:Colin_Kaepernick_in_Super_Bowl_XLVII.jpg))

**ACROSS**

3. politician who strongly opposed player protests
4. President Trump says NFL owners should \_\_\_\_\_ protesting players
5. Green Bay quarterback
6. football player who started protests
7. the two top NFL teams play for the Super \_\_\_\_\_
9. NFL = \_\_\_\_\_ Football League
11. Black \_\_\_\_\_ Matter

**DOWN**

1. position that Colin Kaepernick played
2. to express a strong objection to something
4. Colin Kaepernick played football for the San \_\_\_\_\_ 49ers
8. unfair treatment of people based on the opinion that one race is better than another
10. The Star-Spangled Banner



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