

## Tricolore, the Flag of Italy



Italy's flag is composed of green, white, and red bands. You may notice that it looks much like the flag of France; the reason for that is that Italy was once a territory of France. Before 1796, many different flags were used throughout the different territories that make up Italy, each representing the different local rulers and their coats-of-arms; each with different color schemes. In 1796, however, the French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, declared that "the national colors to adopt are the green, the white, and the red." The same year, Bonaparte united two areas of land formerly known as the Cisalpine and Transpadane Republics. In 1802, that became the Italian Republic and at that time a new flag shape was created: the flag was solid red, with a green rectangle and a white *lozenge* (horizontal diamond) in the middle. In 1805, a golden eagle, representing Napoleon himself, was added to the green rectangle. The State flag also included a crown, and sometimes another coat of arms was added to the white area. The design was becoming very crowded!

Finally, on June 19, 1946, the modern flag with its green, white, and red bands was officially adopted. It is known as the "Tricolore," from "tri," the Latin word for *three*, and "colore," for *color*.

Like most national flags, the Tricolore has a size ratio of 2:3, meaning that it is two parts tall by three parts wide; for example, a flag two feet high is always three feet wide.

There are several different theories behind what the colors mean. The Civic Militia of Milan had green and white uniforms; later, when those troops became the National Guard of Italy, some red parts were added to the uniform. Others say that the green represents Italy's beautiful plains and hills, the white represents the snowy Alps mountains, and the red stands for the blood spilled in Italy's many battles for independence. The Roman Catholic church has a third interpretation: that green means hope, white means faith, and red means charity.

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Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. Why does Italy's flag look so similar to France's?
  - a. They admired French style.
  - b. Italy was once a territory of France.
  - c. Italian artists are copycats.
  - d. All European flags must look similar.
2. Who chose green, white, and red for Italy's flag?
  - a. Julius Caesar
  - b. Napoleon Bonaparte
  - c. Benito Mussolini
  - d. Giorgio Armani
3. Which of the following was *not* once part of Italy's flag?
  - a. A golden eagle
  - b. A crown
  - c. A leaping elk
  - d. A coat of arms
4. What does *Tricolore* mean?
  - a. Three colors
  - b. A tricky story
  - c. Three battles
  - d. A small flute
5. How is the Italian flag sized?
  - a. Two by three
  - b. Three by four
  - c. Square
  - d. A horizontal diamond
6. What is *not* a source of the colors' meanings?
  - a. Civic Militia and National Guard uniforms
  - b. Money, pasta, and tomato sauce
  - c. Hope, faith, and charity
  - d. Beautiful plains, snowy Alps, and bloodshed

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### Answer Key

#### Reading Comprehension

1. b
2. b
3. c
4. a
5. a
6. b