

## Flags: reading

During the World Cup in 2006 many English people started to fly the English flag. There were flags from car windows, from the top of houses and in the street. English flags were everywhere. Some people thought it was great because it made everyone feel happy. Other people thought it was terrible. They said flags from car windows were dangerous, and flags on houses didn't look good. However, during World Cup month England was a sea of red and white!



Before 1996 English people usually waved the British flag during football matches, but now they wave the English flag. This is because during the 1996 European Football Championship England played against Scotland. English football supporters didn't want to wave the 'Union Jack' because it includes the Scottish flag. However, the Union Jack was flying at the World Cup, but not for England. It's in the Australian flag.

Sweden, who was in group B with England, has a different opinion of their flag – they fly it all year round. In private gardens, in public parks and in town the blue and gold Swedish flag is a familiar sight all the time, not just during the World Cup.

What about other flags that were flying in the World Cup in 2006? Well, they included the only two flags which have writing on them that can be easily seen: the flags of Saudi Arabia and Brazil. The former is in Arabic, and the latter is in Portuguese. In fact, because of the religious words on the Saudi Arabian flag it can't be used on T-shirts etc. The flagpole is on the left of the flag so that the writing can be read from left to right. In addition, there's a sword on this flag. But it wasn't the only flag in the competition with a weapon on it. The Angolan flag includes a machete – a large heavy knife. However, the only country with a modern weapon on it wasn't in the competition: Mozambique's flag includes an AK-47.

Only two national flags are square and one of those was flying in the World Cup in 2006: the flag of Switzerland. Symbols for the ICRC include a red cross on a white background (a reversal of the Swiss flag) a red crescent and, since 2005, a red crystal. Only one country was flying the Islamic crescent: Tunisia.

The oldest tricolour, the flag of the Netherlands, was flying as well as the French tricolour. The latter influenced the flag designs of Costa Rica, Italy and Mexico – all seen flying in the World Cup in 2006. In addition there were no less than ten other countries which had flags of three different coloured bands, either horizontal or vertical. But one tricolour flag will not be seen again after the World Cup. Just before the competition Serbia and Montenegro decided to become independent states. So their football team represented a country that no longer existed. And Paraguay's red, white and blue may have the most common colours, but it's unique among national flags. This is because it's got two different sides. On one side is the national coat of arms but on the reverse side there's a different emblem.

But my favourite flag, the only one with 5 sides, didn't appear in any German stadium. That's because the Nepalese are much more interested in cricket than football!