

# We Made STATE HISTORY

## Students in Kansas helped their state get a new symbol.

Nearly two years ago, a group of fourth-graders at Sabetha Elementary School in Kansas started a conversation about fruit. It wasn't because they were hungry. These students wanted to know why Kansas

### WORDS TO KNOW

**legislature** *noun.* a group of people with the power to make and change laws

**designate** *verb.* to choose or set aside for a special purpose

didn't have an official fruit, like more than 30 other states do.

A fruit is one example of a state symbol—an object that represents a state's traditions and values. Other state symbols include flags, flowers, and birds.

The students at Sabetha Elementary decided that Kansas should have its own state fruit. And they were determined to make it happen.

"They really worked as a team to accomplish this goal," says

their teacher, Jobi Wertenberger.

But the process wasn't easy. The kids were about to find out what it takes to create a new law.

### Learning About Laws

In 2021, Wertenberger asked a state lawmaker to speak to the class. Representative Randy Garber explained all the steps it would take to get a new state symbol. Most important, it would require that a new law be passed.

Garber explained that the Kansas state legislature normally meets for 90 days

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each year. He didn't think they had enough time to get a bill—a plan for a new law—passed.

The kids had to wait until 2022 to submit a bill. By then, Wertenberger's students had moved up to fifth grade.

But he continued to work with them. He got his new fourth-graders involved too.

### A Team Effort

While researching, the kids learned that an attempt in 2020 to get an official state fruit had failed. Thomas Richardson had an idea. The 11-year-old suggested they get more kids involved. Wertenberger emailed teachers at other schools. Before long, more than 400 fourth- and fifth-graders from 24 schools were working together.

In January 2022, it was time

to pick a fruit.

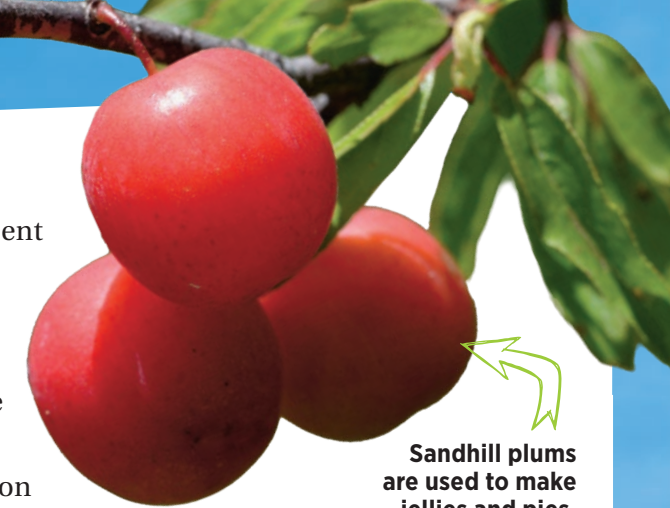
Wertenberger's class sent ballots to the other schools. When all the votes were tallied, the sandhill plum was the clear winner. It is the most common type of wild plum in western Kansas.

Garber wrote a bill that would **designate** the sandhill plum as an official Kansas state symbol. He introduced the bill into the state legislature.

Then the kids wrote letters to their state representatives and some of them spoke before the legislature. The kids convinced lawmakers to approve the bill!

### Making History

On April 12, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly signed the bill into



Sandhill plums are used to make jellies and pies.

law. The sandhill plum is now the official state fruit of Kansas.

The kids' hard work and determination had paid off.

"It felt great to know that we made a difference," says 11-year old Tanith Montgomery.

Thomas and Tanith want other kids to know that if they put their minds to something, anything is possible.

"We're a part of history," Thomas says.

—by Alicia Green

## Steps to a STATE SYMBOL

Here's how kids in Kansas helped pick a new symbol for their state.

### Step 1

Students at Sabetha Elementary School narrowed down the choices to four fruits native to Kansas: American persimmons, gooseberries, red mulberries, and sandhill plums.



### Step 2

Kids from 24 schools voted by secret ballot. The sandhill plum got the most votes.



### Step 3

After writing letters to Kansas state representatives, some of the kids spoke before the state legislature. The state representatives were impressed and approved the bill.



### Step 4

Once the bill was approved, the governor of Kansas, Laura Kelly, signed it into law. Some of the students were there to celebrate the special moment.



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