Fun with flags and signals - teacher instructions

Rationale
Flags have played a vital role for the young colony of Sydney from the 1820s. Over the years hundreds of flags were designed to communicate to Government House in Parramatta. Several flag stations relayed the signals from South Head to Flagstaff Hill (Sydney Observatory), Gladesville, Brush Park and finally Mays Hill. The local communities soon learnt to read the flags and frequently formed long queues at post offices to eagerly await mail from England.

Instructions
Our recreation of the flag mast thanks to the Bruce and Joy Reid Foundation now flies astronomical, meteorological and maritime flags and is possibly the only one of its type in the world. With the aid of decoders and iPads your learners can experience the past by coding, transmitting and receiving signals. Here’s how:

1. Learners complete their worksheet first using the loan Flag Decoders. When everyone is ready, gather back together.

2. Divide into two teams, Team A and Team B. Each team gets one iPad2 and a double sided sheet of dates with data (Moon phase, temperature, planets, constellations, any additional astronomical flags, maritime flags).

3. Separate the teams physically, perhaps from one side of the lawn or courtyard to the other. This is a simple simulation of the flag route used in the past.

4. Team A will choose a date from side A and Team B will chose a date from side B. Teams will then select the flags that signal these data corresponding to that date. We recommend that the teams jumble the order of the flags to avoid a set and predictable pattern. Keep temperature last as this will be the definitive signal.

5. Team A then “signals” Team B by displaying a slideshow of their selected flags. Team B refers to side A to identify the date that Team A has chosen.

6. Team B then has a turn doing the same, and Team A identifies Team B’s date.

7. If there is time, teams can take more turns.