

**Title of Lesson:** The Star-Spangled Banner - Fact or Fiction

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**Grade Level:** Upper Elementary/Middle

**Duration of lesson:** One 50-minute class period

Baltimore stood as a key British target during the War of 1812. Starting on early September 13<sup>th</sup> 1814 and finally ending on the morning of September 14<sup>th</sup>, the British fleet attempted to sail around Fort McHenry en route to Baltimore. American troops fired the Fort's cannons hoping to halt the advance. The British cannons continued to pound the Fort until 7:30 the second morning, after which time they retreated and Major Armistead hoisted a 42' x 30' American flag, sewn by Baltimore resident Mary Pickersgill. Watching the battle from aboard a British ship, American detainee Francis Scott Key wrote the poem "The Star-Spangled Banner." In this lesson students will examine primary sources concerning the bombardment of Fort McHenry in order to determine if Key's account is historically accurate.

**Content Standards:**

**Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)**

**Standard 1:** United States territorial expansion between 1801-1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.

A. The student understands the international background and consequences of the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine.

**Historical Thinking Standards:**

**Standard 2: Historical Comprehension**

A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative and assess its credibility.

**Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation**

D. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations

G. Consider Multiple Perspectives

**General Objective:**

Students will examine primary sources concerning the bombardment of Fort McHenry in order to determine if an individual's account is historically accurate.

**Maryland VSC Indicators and Objectives:**

- **Content Objective- 2.C.1.f-** Analyze factors that contributed to armed conflicts, such as the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, border disputes, and freedom of the seas.
- **Skills and Processes Objective- 6.F.2.a-** Use historically accurate resources to answer questions, make predictions, and support ideas.

## Historical Narrative:

### Early Fort History

In 1776, the Maryland Constitutional Convention, the state's ruling body, declared that fortifications must be built to defend Baltimore. Hired by its delegates, two amateur engineers surveyed the land surrounding Baltimore. Eventually they decided on a plot known as "Whetstone," named after its mineral despoils. By 1778, a star-shaped fort was built at Whetstone, containing 38 cannons, a company of soldiers and a barracks-hospital. After the Revolutionary War, the new United States Congress instructed that sixteen new forts, including an expanded fort at Whetstone called Fort McHenry, be built along the coastline. The fort was named after James McHenry, the Secretary of War at the time. The improved fort could repel both naval and land attacks while defending the Port of Baltimore. This new fort was equipped with twenty-four pounder guns, an enclosed powder magazine, soldiers' barracks and officers' quarters. Baltimore seemed safe from any attacks.<sup>1</sup> Also with these new fortifications, some Americans began to feel a sense of military confidence and wanted to flex their muscles. They would have a chance during the War of 1812.

### Causes of the War of 1812

During the period of the early Republic, American politics were dominated by two parties, the Democrat-Republican and Federalist parties. After a series of British provocations, a faction within the national Democrat-Republican Party, led by Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, argued that the United States must declare war on Britain.<sup>2</sup> These "war hawks" cited numerous reasons why war was necessary. Provocations included British support of Native American attacks against American settlers and Britain's impressments of seamen into the Royal Navy. These "war hawks" became outraged at Britain's naval blockages (Britain tried to stop the US from trading with France), and seizing of American trade ships (again to stop them from trading with France). These politicians hoped to capitalize on America's growing sense of nationalism, which led some to believe that the United States should control the entire North American continent including Canada, Spanish-controlled Florida, and lands west of the Mississippi. Hawks also felt that this war would be the perfect opportunity to showcase America's military capacity, while defending its honor and earning international respect. By 1807, the hawks grew tired of diplomacy and successfully passed a trade embargo against both France and Britain.<sup>3</sup>

This embargo angered merchants, especially those in New England, who relied on these trade alliances. The embargo had a lesser effect on the British and the French. Unlike farmers, American merchants could not economically sustain themselves without trade. Leading the anti-war opposition was Congressman John Randolph of Virginia and the national Federalist Party.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheads, Scott. *Fort McHenry*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America., 1995, 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Borneman, Walter R. *1812: The War that Forged a Nation*. New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishing, Inc., 2004, 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

Federalists thought a war with Britain was unnecessary and on a practical level they knew that the United States lacked an organized national army and navy capable of defeating the British.<sup>4</sup>

### **The War of 1812**

The Federalists were correct that the United States military was not prepared for war. With a small national army, they mainly relied on militia throughout the war.<sup>5</sup> Many of its soldiers' only military experience came from fighting Indians. Few of these soldiers and officers had fought in the Revolutionary War or any other European-style conflict. Additionally, they only had an insignificant navy that was no match for the Royal Navy. While the hawks had envisioned an offensive war, the United States military was better suited for a defensive war.

Nevertheless, in June 1812 the United States military invaded Canada. They believed that Canadians would embrace Americans as their liberators and together they would overthrow the British.<sup>6</sup> But in fact, many Canadians had been loyalists during the Revolutionary War and immigrated to Canada to remain under British rule.<sup>7</sup> By 1813, the Americans realized that their assumptions were incorrect, as they failed to establish a foot-hold in Canada. In 1814 after the British defeated Napoleon (whom they viewed as a greater threat to their interests), they went on the offensive against the United States. In response to America's actions, the British tried to create a naval blockade. On the Great Lakes, both navies stood ready for the others' attack. On land, the invading British burned Washington, D.C. When Americans halted the British Navy at Baltimore and on New York's Lake Champlain, war hawks declared a stalemate. On Christmas Eve 1814, American and British forces signed the Treaty of Ghent, which preserved each county's existing boundaries; however, General Andrew Jackson did not learn of the treaty until after the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>8</sup>

After Jackson's January 1815 defeat of both the British and allied Creek forces in New Orleans, the hawks declared that America had won the war. This declaration was mostly political as the Treaty of Ghent declared the war a stalemate. The treaty confirmed pre-war boundaries and agreed to end hostilities. Hawks celebrated their belief that they could defeat the British while Napoleon and the French could not. The Federalist Party, which had opposed the War, essentially ended. Believing that the United States won, American nationalism soared, along with expansionist desires.<sup>9</sup> Britain halted many of its pre-war actions due to international politics more than as a result of treaty terms. No longer needing the additional sailors to battle Napoleon, Britain stopped impressing American sailors. Additionally, no longer seeing Native Americans as a powerful ally or essential trading partner, Britain stopped supplying raiding tribes.

### **The Fort, Baltimore and the War of 1812**

By the time of the war, Baltimore had established itself as America's third largest city with a population of 50,000 residents.<sup>10</sup> Due to the trade embargo, numerous merchants and

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<sup>4</sup> Skeen, C. Edward. *Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999, 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Pickles, Timothy. *New Orleans 1815*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, Inc., 2004, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation*, 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Norton, Louis Arthur. *Joshua Barney: Hero of the Revolution and 1812*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2000, 168.

sailors had refocused their economic pursuits to raiding British ships. Such pursuits were called privateering. These seamen knew the Chesapeake Bay waters and traveled quickly on clipper ships. Maryland's reputation for privateering and the British desire to destroy mid-Atlantic cities attracted British raiding parties to the Chesapeake beginning in 1813. Throughout 1813, the British raided cities from Havre de Grace, Maryland to Hampton, Virginia.<sup>11</sup>

In August 1813, after landing in Maryland, the British Army marched upon Washington, D.C. Once in Washington they set fire to public buildings, including the White House, home of President James Madison.<sup>12</sup> Hoping for an equally quick victory, the British sailed up the Chesapeake Bay towards Baltimore. The British were determined to stop the privateers and damage the American economy. However, U.S. Major George Armistead and his 1,000 troops stood ready to repel the advancing British fleet from the entering Baltimore. Starting early September 13<sup>th</sup> and finally ending on the morning of September 14<sup>th</sup>, the British fleet attempted to sail around Fort McHenry. American troops fired the Fort's cannons hoping to halt the advance. The British cannons continued to pound the Fort until 7:30 that second morning. After which time they retreated and Major Armistead hoisted a 42' x 30' American flag, sewn by Baltimore resident Mary Pickersgill. Despite the British fleet's heavy bombardment, American casualties only numbered four dead and several wounded. Luck played a factor as well, as a direct hit to the Fort's powder magazine failed to explode.<sup>13</sup>

Watching the battle from aboard a British ship, American detainee Francis Scott Key wrote the poem "The Star-Spangled Banner." Key had been briefly detained while negotiating a prisoner exchange, and after seeing the Fort's large flag, he knew that America had won the battle. Immediately after this American victory, Baltimore citizens set the poem to the tune of a popular English tavern song. This song would eventually become the national anthem of the United States.<sup>14</sup>

The British invasion of Baltimore included a land assault, to be supported by the arriving British fleet. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, Major General Robert Ross and his British troops came ashore in southern Baltimore County to march 10 miles from North Point towards Baltimore. American General John Stricker learned of the approaching army and sent a small militia detachment to slow the British advancement. Stricker also hoped that the British would become relaxed, thinking that his small troop would Baltimore's only land defense. Upon their meeting at the Gorsuch Farm, the Battle of North Point ensued. Stricker's plan worked and the overconfident British gave the American reinforcements time to arrive. Understanding that he did not have enough troops without the fleet's help to defeat the American forces and capture Baltimore, General Ross's replacement, Colonel Arthur Brooks, reluctantly ordered a retreat. Baltimore citizens felt relieved that their city would not suffer the same fate as Washington, D.C.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Fort after the War**

After the War of 1812, funding from Congress provided for the construction of a new granite sea wall and brick boundary to encircle the Fort, which had started to suffer from erosion. The fort's inner walls were reinforced in preparations for future attacks. Life at the Fort remained

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<sup>11</sup> Heidler, David and Jeanne T. Heidler. *The War of 1812*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002, 112.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Sheads, *Fort McHenry*, 37, 39, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Heidler and Heidler. *The War of 1812*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Sheads, *Fort McHenry*, 35-39.

quiet until the Civil War. From 1861 to 1865 the Fort served as a prison for Confederate soldiers and local citizens suspected of sympathizing with the South. Among the detainees, ironically, was local editor and Francis Scott Key's grandson, Frank Key Howard.<sup>16</sup>

After the Civil War, the Fort's military buildings were left to deteriorate. Without the threat of attack, commercial pressure persuaded Congress to lease some of the Fort's lands for private use. Not until World War I did the U.S. Army use for the Fort again, this time as a hospital and rehabilitation center for wounded soldiers. In 1925, The Society of 1812, an organization whose members claim ancestry to the war's veterans, convinced the War Department to restore the aging Fort. In 1933 the National Park Service received control over it. During the 1930s Works Progress Administration (WPA) worked to restore the fort to its 1812 condition. Since the 1930s, the Fort has remained a symbol of national pride and a reminder to America's actions during the War of 1812.<sup>17</sup>

### **Vocabulary:**

- **bombardment**- attack by cannons
- **gallantly**- honorably
- **hail**- to praise
- **o'er**- over
- **perilous**- very dangerous
- **privateering**- A ship privately owned and crewed but authorized by a government during wartime to attack and capture enemy vessels.
- **ramparts**-the walls of a fort

### **Teaching Procedures:**

### **Materials Needed:**

- Image of Ft. McHenry from the *Martin Star*, Resource 7
- Instrumental version of "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- Student copies of worksheet titled, History Mystery: The Truth behind "The Star-Spangled Banner," Resource 6
- Access to the Digital Story "By George," found at <http://asp1.umbc.edu/newmedia/sites/chetah/player.cfm?media=3>
- Primary Source Packet containing:
  - Resource 1.2- The complete written account of Major George Armistead to Secretary of War, James Monroe, to be used with the Digital Story video accessed from the link in resource #1.1
  - Resources 2 and 3- Paintings/Illustrations of the Bombardment of Fort McHenry
  - Resource 4- Map Showing British Strategy
  - Resource 5- Artifacts

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<sup>16</sup> Sheads, *Fort McHenry*, 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 60-61, 70, 79, 89-90.

## **Introduction:**

Display a copy of the magazine cover from the *Martin Star*, Resource 7. This is a photograph of Fort McHenry in July of 1951. Students will be answering two questions about this photograph:

1. List three things you might infer from this photograph.
2. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

The teacher should use the answers to these questions to assess what prior knowledge students have about Ft. McHenry, its location, and connection with the War of 1812. Lead students through the discussion to the creation of our National Anthem and its association to this location and event. Ask students: How many of you can recite all the words to our National Anthem? Either individually or in pairs, have students write the words to the first verse of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Teacher may play an instrumental version of “The Star-Spangled Banner” for inspiration. Post a transparency of the first verse of the poem. A copy can be obtained at the National Museum of American History website at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/the-lyrics.aspx> . Reflect on student accuracy of the words to the actual first verse of the poem.

Explain to students that Francis Scott Key, being held prisoner on a ship during the bombardment of Ft. McHenry, was inspired to write a poem about the event which was set to a tune and in 1931 became our National Anthem. He was briefly detained on this ship while he was there to negotiate a prisoner exchange. However, was Key accurate in writing the poem from the actual events of the battle or was he just inspired and wrote with imagery?

## **General Procedures:**

Hand out the worksheet titled, History Mystery: The Truth behind “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Read through the lines of the poem with the students, paraphrasing each in the second column as a class. Now that students have a better understanding of the meaning of the National Anthem, it will be up to them to determine whether or not Key was factual in his writing of the poem.

Divide students into small groups. Give each group a primary source envelope containing copies of Resources 1.1-5. (Note: For Resources 1.1 and 1.2, students will not only have the complete written account by Major Armistead of the bombardment, but a differentiation of the account via a digital story video as well which can be accessed through Resource 1.1 which contains the clip as a Flash movie, accessed at <http://asp1.umbc.edu/newmedia/sites/chetah/player.cfm?media=3>.) Instruct students to work together through the primary sources to determine if what Key included in his poem is accurate in conjunction with other primary sources. Students should complete the chart, History Mystery: The Truth behind “The Star-Spangled Banner” by determining which source(s) proves that the line may be factual and citing the evidence through direct quote or by a specific visual interpretation of the student. For example, Line 1 can be deemed factual through Source A, for Major Armistead comments, “the bombardment continued on the part of the enemy until 7 o’clock on Wednesday morning.” This would prove that it was early in the morning around dawn.

Summarize the chart as a class. Discuss the following questions:

1. Which lines of the poem are to be considered factual? Are some lines more supported through many sources compared to other lines?

2. Are there any lines of the poem that are not referred to by the primary sources?
3. Are some lines inferred as compared to others that are proven through the sources?
4. Consider the author of the sources. Look at the dates. Do these play a part in the determination of what is factual or fiction?

### **Closure:**

Have students discuss the following: If Armistead had never requested a "...flag so large that the British should have no difficulty seeing it from a distance..." then what might have Francis Scott Key have written into his poem? Students should consider new information learned from the sources to write a "new" line for the poem which would not include details about a flag.

### **Assessment:**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the bombardment of Fort McHenry by responding to the following writing prompt:

Explain whether or not "The Star-Spangled Banner" is an accurate account of what happened during the bombardment of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. Cite evidence to support your response.

### **Extension Activities:**

- Investigate why the British chose to attack Baltimore. Discuss the importance of Baltimore to the shipbuilding business of the United States, the history of clipper ships, and other events that led the British to call Baltimore a "nest of pirates."
- Research how the citizens of Baltimore prepared for this attack and the Battle of North Point. How did they assist before, during, and after the battle(s)? Are their primary source accounts that corroborate Key's poem and Armistead's report?
- Have students investigate the historical and current debates surrounding our National Anthem. "The Star-Spangled Banner" did not become our National Anthem until 1931. Many heirs of Key, Armistead, Pickersgill and Statesman Linthicum worked continuously to have it designated as the National Anthem, however, there are still discussions today questioning whether or not the song is relevant or best summarizes our country's history.
- Have students learn more about the history of Fort McHenry. Fort McHenry, not only served our country during the War of 1812, but also played a part in the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.

### **Primary Source Annotations**

**Resource 1.1 - "By George"** This digital story was written, directed, and produced by Jamie Higgins, Lane Muth, Wendy Schanberger and Jodie Virago, all teachers in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). Excerpts from Lt. Colonel George Armistead's letter to President James Monroe, dated September 24, 1814, were read by Ken Raykovics, BCPS. A statement from the editor of the *National Intelligencer*, dated September 1814, was read by Paul Iwancio, UMBC New Media Studio. Images of Fort McHenry are courtesy of Christine Ferrera and Wendy Schanberger. Other images are used with the permission of the Maryland Historical Society and the Fort McHenry National Monument and Shrine.

**Resource 1.2 - “Account of the Bombardment of Fort McHenry”** Maj. George Armistead's report on the bombardment to Secretary of War James Monroe was published in *Niles' Weekly Register* on Oct. 1, 1814. Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society. Students will use the report to determine the accuracy of the account in the *Star Spangled Banner*. The report confirms that the attack lasted through the night until early the next morning. It also confirms the British fleet's position and that most of the bombs burst over the Fort itself.

**Resource 2 - Image Title: “Bombardment of Fort McHenry”** Depicted Date: 1814 Specific Material Type: Prints Item Physical Description: 1 print : b&w ; 9 x 10 cm. (3 1/4 x 4 in.) Notes: Written on border: “1854.” Source: Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection/ American history -- 1810s Source Description: 5 folders (192 pictures) Location: Mid-Manhattan Library/Picture Collection Catalog Call Number: PC AME-181 Digital ID: 808990 Record ID: 701764 Digital Item Published: 10-28-2005; updated 7-11-2008. This image proves the close proximity of British ships to the Fort, as well as the presence of the Fort's large American flag. The American flag contains stripes and stars -- not all historic American flags of the time had these features. The dark sky indicates a nighttime battle.

**Resource 3 - Image Title: “Bombardment of Fort McHenry -- Major Armistead”** Depicted Date: 1814 Specific Material Type: Prints Item Physical Description: 1 print : b&w ; 10 x 12 cm. (4 x 4 1/2 in.) Notes: Printed on border: “223.” “See page 271.” Image has foxing. Source: Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection/American history -- 1810s Source Description: 5 folders (192 pictures) Location: Mid-Manhattan Library/Picture Collection Catalog Call Number: PC AME-181 Digital ID: 809004 Record ID: 701763 Digital Item Published: 10-28-2005; updated 7-11-2008. This image shows a land view of the battle.

**Resource 4 - “Map Showing British Strategy”** The British aimed to destroy Fort McHenry so that their ships could sail into Baltimore's inner harbor and support the troops that were attacking the city by land. Courtesy Maryland Historical Society, adapted from a map prepared by the National Park Service. This aerial view proves the positioning of British ships and Fort McHenry. It also shows the significance of the Fort's location to Baltimore, which the British fleet had hoped to attack.

**Resource 5 - “Congreve Rocket of the type fired on Fort McHenry”** Bombshells that exploded into deadly fragments were Britain's most formidable weapon against Fort McHenry. Seamen launched the bombs from ships, known as bomb vessels, using mortars with a range of about 2.5 mi. Photograph of Congreve rocket taken by Wendy Schanberger. Artifacts of bomb fragments found at the Fort prove the British attack on the Fort. These 1812 era rockets match Francis Scott Key's description of “bombs bursting in air.” Their discharge would have produced a red light. With a range of 2.5 miles, the British ships were in an exact position for their rockets to explode over the Fort.

**Resource 7 - Image of Fort McHenry from the *Martin Star*, July 1951** Courtesy of the Glenn L. Martin Museum. Image to be used for pre-lesson evaluation of prior student knowledge of the Fort, its location and its connection to the War of 1812.



Educational materials were developed through the Making Master Teachers in Baltimore County Program, a partnership between Baltimore County Public School System and the Center for History Education at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

### **Useful Websites**

Fort McHenry official site <http://www.nps.gov/fomc/>

Library of Congress Teacher Resources <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/>

Maryland State Archives On-line <http://www.aomol.net/html/index.html>

National Archives and Records Administration Educator and Student Resources  
<http://www.archives.gov/education/>

Smithsonian “Baltimore in the Balance” lesson  
<http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/baltimore-in-the-balance.aspx>