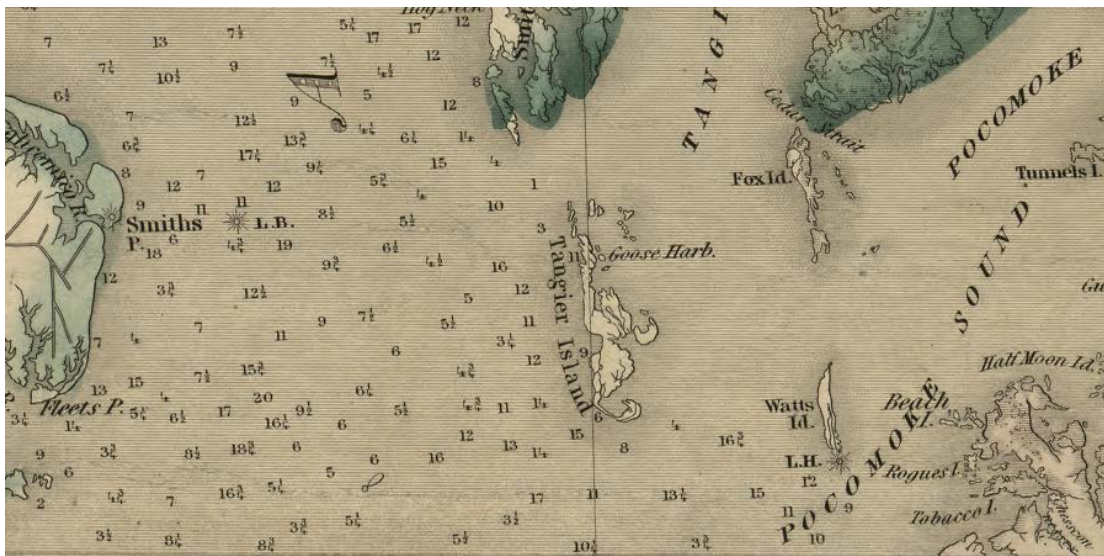


Teaching with Historic Places

Tangier Island: African Americans and the War of 1812

Tangier Island: African Americans and the War of 1812 A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places



Tangier Island, ca. 1859, *Virginia Places*, George Mason University

The War of 1812, which pitted the United States, Great Britain and their allies against each other over the course of three years, turned into an opportunity for enslaved African Americans to advocate for their freedom. Between the summers of 1813 and 1814, 4,000-5,000 fled to the side of the British, in the hopes of securing freedom and safe passage for themselves and their families. The British established Fort Albion on Tangier Island off the coast of Virginia in the Chesapeake Bay in April 1814, and nearly 1,000 slaves found refuge at the site. With the help of this lesson, students will be able to unpack a complicated maritime history of agency, race, and war.

Since it was first accurately mapped in 1850, the size of Tangier Island has changed over time. The island's total area is currently 1.236 mi². The people who came to settle on the island permanently arrived in the 1770s. They were mostly farmers, but then began to harvest crabs and oysters starting in the late 19th century, a practice which continues to today. The Tangier Island National Historic District on Tangier Island, Virginia is part of the Star-Spangled Banner Historic Trail. Recently, there have been efforts to further preserve the island's significance, as it is significant not only for its importance to African-American history, but also for its religious, military, and environmental heritage. The materials here introduce students to these topics through evidence-based investigations and skill-building exercises.

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About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration files for Tangier Island and other sources.

It was published in October 2018. This lesson was first written in 2018 by Porsha Dossie, a public historian and National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) intern. It was edited by Park History Program and Teaching with Historic Places staff. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into classrooms across the country.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to discuss some of the factors that shaped slave resistance, and how larger world events might impact the decisions of individuals.
2. Discuss strategic British military operations launched from the base at Tangier Island and describe Fort Albion on the island in relation to the experiences of the enslaved African Americans who traveled there.
3. Identify and describe why some African Americans decided to volunteer to fight during the War of 1812, and present their findings as a class.

Materials for students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer, projected on the wall, or printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. One map about the British attacks launched from Tangier Island in the Chesapeake.
2. A historic map of Tangier Island that shows the location of Fort Albion.
3. Two readings: one discusses the effect of enslaved African Americans on policy during the War of 1812, and the events affecting African Americans in the Chesapeake during the conflict and directly afterward. The second reading, located in the Post Activity section, takes a look at a single individual and his participation during the war.
4. One political cartoon, from the American Antiquarian Society

Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Topics: This lesson could be used in American history, social studies, government, and civics courses in units on the War of 1812 and the early Federal period, African-American history, and on American political history.

Time period: Early 19th century

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Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

US History Era 4

Standard 1A: The student understands the international background and consequences of the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine.

US History Era 4

Standard 2D: The student understands the rapid growth of “the peculiar institution” after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.

Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme I: Culture

- Standard A: The student compares similarities and differences in the way groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.
- Standard B: The student explains how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives, and frames of reference.
- Standard D: The student explains why individuals and groups respond differently to their shared physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.
- Standard E: The student articulates the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups.

Theme II: Time, Continuity, and Change

- Standard C: The student identifies and describes selected historical periods, and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the rise of civilizations, the development of transportation systems, the growth and breakdown of colonial systems and others.
- Standard D: The student identifies and uses processes important to reconstructing and interpreting the past, such as using a variety of sources, providing, validating, and weighing evidence for claims, checking credibility of sources, and searching for causality.
- Standard E: The student develops critical sensitivities such as empathy, and skepticism regarding attributes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts.
- Standard F: The student uses knowledge of facts and concepts drawn from history, along with methods of historical inquiry, to inform decision-making about and action-taking on public issues.

Theme III: People, Places, and Environments

- Standard A: The student elaborates mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size, and shape.

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

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- Standard G: The student identifies and interprets examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism.
- Standard H: The student works independently and cooperatively to accomplish goals.

Theme V: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- Standard A: The student demonstrates an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.

Theme VI: Power, Authority and Governance

- Standard A: The student examines issues involving the rights, roles, and status of the individual in relation to the general welfare.
- Standard B: The student describes the purpose of the government and how its powers are acquired.
- Standard C: The student analyzes and explains ideas and governmental mechanism to meet wants and needs of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security.
- Standard D: The student describes the way nations and organizations respond to forces of unity and diversity affecting order and security.

Theme IX: Global Connections

- Standard B: The student analyzes examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations.

Theme X: Civic Ideals and Practices

- Standard A: The student examines the origins and continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law.
- Standard E: The student explains and analyzes various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions.
- Standard F: The student identifies and explains the roles of formal and informal political actors in influencing and shaping public policy and decision-making.
- Standard H: The student analyzes the effectiveness of selected public policies and citizen behaviors in realizing the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government.

Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10

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Getting Started

What motivated enslaved African Americans to volunteer to fight in the War of 1812?

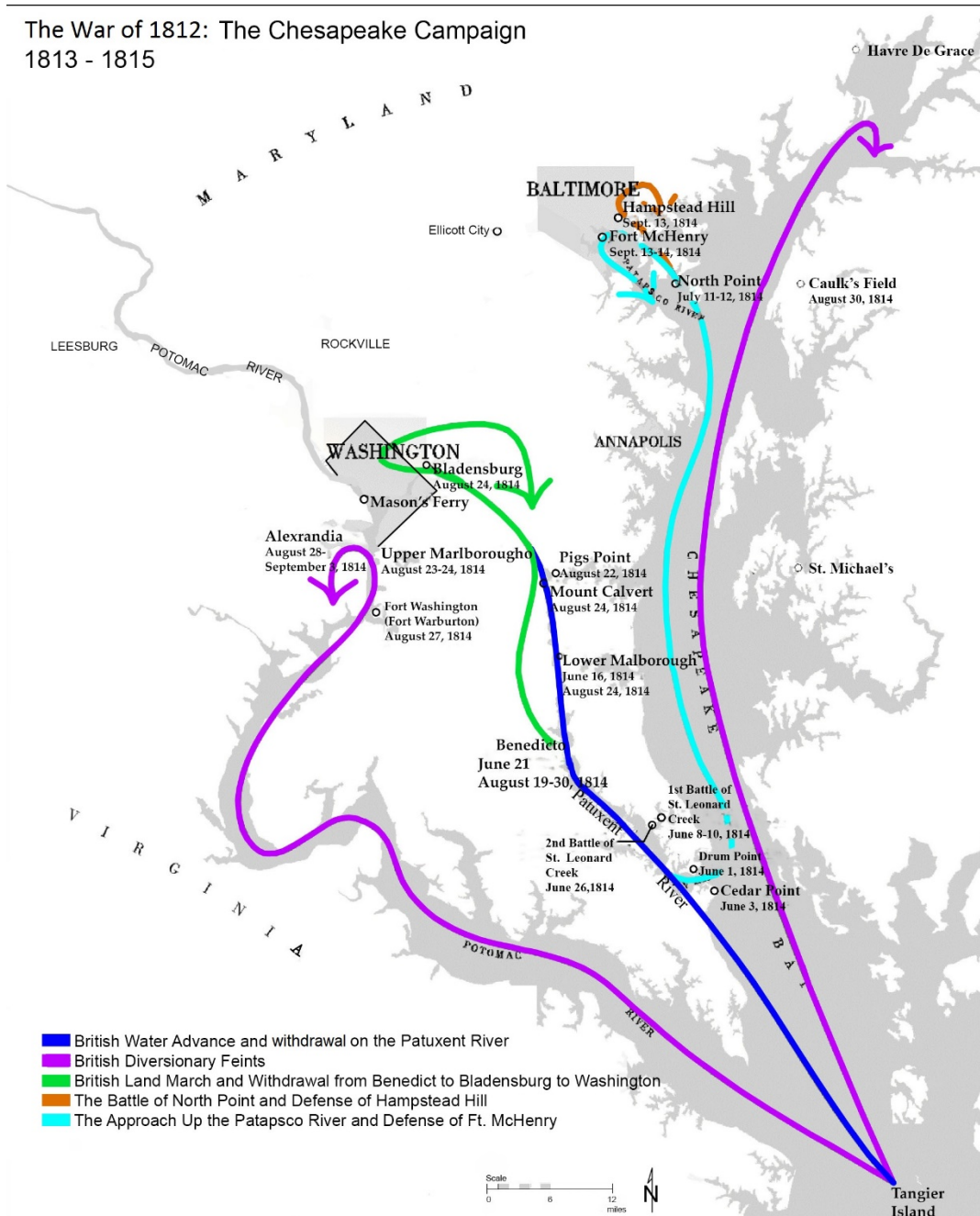
What historic place might you study to answer this question? Why?

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Locating the Site

Map 1:



A map of the British Campaign in the Chesapeake Bay, *National Park Service*

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Questions for Map 1

1) Based on its location in the Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Island was chosen as a base for British forces. What were the advantages of this location? What do you think would be some of the disadvantages, if any? Provide evidence to support your answer.

2) Using the map as reference, identify the three cities the British attacked. First, what made these areas vulnerable to attack? Second, how did British forces reach them? Did the British use waterways, or land routes, or both?

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Map 2: Fort Albion on Tangier Island

Fort Albion was located on the southern tip of Tangier Island. Established in April 1814, the fort contained a number of amenities, including a church, gardens, parade grounds, a hospital, and barracks. Fort Albion is also where hundreds of African Americans were housed during the war after they escaped from the mainland. A number of African American men trained as colonial marines (soldiers) there, before joining British military campaigns along the Chesapeake.



Historic Map of Fort Albion on Tangier Island: John Wood, 1820, *Library of Virginia*.

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Questions for Map 2

1) As a class discuss the map of Tangier Island below. In addition to Map 2, refer back to Map 1 for further context if necessary. Why would the British establish the fort on the southern tip of the island? What were the advantages?

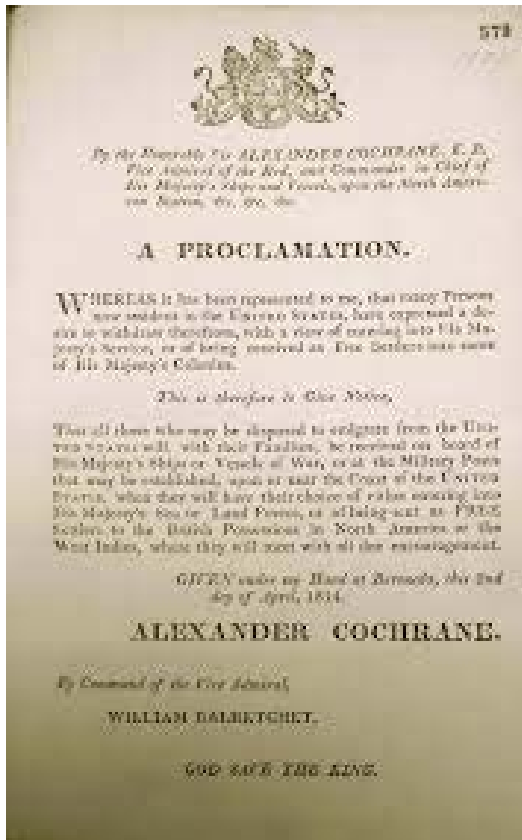
2) What other forts did the British establish during the War of 1812? Have students break up into groups to research one fort per group. What were some of the similarities and differences? Did slaves attempt to flee to those forts as well? Allow students to report their findings as a class presentation.

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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Fight for Freedom: African Americans and the War of 1812



The War of 1812 provided opportunities for enslaved blacks in a number of ways. In the Chesapeake Bay region, the British used tactics that took advantage of the fears American planters had of slave rebellions. The British had previously used a similar strategy during the American Revolution (1775-1783). As early as 1813, British army officers were told to “provide shelter, protection, and evacuation to [African-American] refugees.” In April 1814 it became formal policy. British Admiral Alexander Cochrane declared that all enslaved people who promised to fight for the British would be sent as free settlers to the British colonies:

“...it has been represented to me, that many Persons now resident in the UNITED STATES, have expressed a desire to withdraw therefrom, with a view of entering into His Majesty's Service, or of being received as Free Settlers into some of His Majesty's Colonies. This is therefore to Give Notice,

That all those who may be disposed to emigrate from the UNITED STATES will, with their Families, be received on board His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or at the Military Posts that may be established, upon or near the Coast of the UNITED STATES, when they will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's Sea or Land Forces, or of being sent as FREE settlers to the British Possessions in North America or the West Indies, where they will meet with due encouragement.”

As a result of Cochrane's proclamation, as many as 4,000 to 5,000 enslaved people fled to the British for protection over the course of the war. Nearly 1,000 fled to Tangier Island. The British built Fort Albion on the southern tip of Tangier Island in April 1814. The fort included barracks, a hospital, a church, parade grounds and gardens. Most importantly, it served as a depot for receiving runaway slaves. Although the British had

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yet to end slavery in their own territories, enslaved blacks were considered free British citizens as soon as they set foot on British soil. In 1807 the British passed the *Abolition of the Slave Trade Act*. This made it illegal in the British colonies to engage in the slave trade. However, it did not end the continued enslavement of black people.

Nevertheless, the promise of freedom led many African American slaves to side with the British and serve in their armed forces. African American men served as soldiers and sailors in large numbers on both sides of the conflict. Some 600 former slaves served as Colonial Marines and took part in British attacks Baltimore and Washington D.C. Others chose to remain with their masters and fight on the American side. In New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, enslaved people worked alongside whites to dig entrenchments for those cities to demonstrate their civic and patriotic duty to the United States.

African American men, free and enslaved, fought in the American army. However, the American army had no official policy on allowing black men to join. There are no existing records of all-black regular army units in 1812 or 1813, so it is difficult to know how many slaves fought for the Americans. Historians do know that the British did capture nearly 1,000 and transported them to Dartmoor, a prison in England.

Along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, enslaved blacks faced similar choices as those in the Chesapeake. The Michigan territory (modern day Michigan state) also drew runaway slaves with the promise of freedom. Many slaves viewed Canada as a promised land, as it had passed the *Act Against Slavery* in 1793. The act banned the importation of slaves into British Canada. Further, it freed the children of enslaved women once the child turned 25. As a result of this legislation, Canada became the final stop on the Underground Railroad. Escaped slaves believed they could finally be free.

On the Gulf Coast, slaves found additional choices. Some joined with the Spanish, or with Native American tribes, and others with American General Andrew Jackson. Jackson gave promises of freedom, although most of the slaves who fought for his campaign did not gain their freedom even after the war and remained enslaved.

The War of 1812 ended with the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814. It caused no geographical changes, though there were social and political consequences for both African Americans and Native Americans in the U.S. In Spanish Florida, American troops destroyed free communities of color. Later, the removal of American Indians east of the Mississippi River helped set the foundation for the southern plantation system. This worsened race relations in the years before the Civil War in the 1860s

On March 21, 1815, the British withdrew from Tangier Island. Admiral Sir George Cockburn ordered that “on no account [is] a Single Negro [to] be left, except by his own request.” The British continued to send former slaves as soldiers and citizens to settle British colonies in the Caribbean and Canada. Some were left on a segregated naval base in Bermuda. Others lived in refugee camps in Canada and parts of Trinidad in the British West Indies. Many continued to struggle economically in their new homeland, but unlike their American counterparts, they were free.

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Once the evacuation of Tangier Island was complete, the British military burned Fort Albion to the ground. Nothing remains of the fort or the surrounding area today. Where the site once was is now underwater.

While the War of 1812 provided greater chances for achieving freedom for African Americans, it did not necessarily lead to widespread emancipation for blacks who remained in the United States. Sadly, their efforts during the war had not changed white opinions. In addition, American public memories of the war largely ignored their contributions. Ultimately, the “forgotten war” did not lead to the equality and freedom blacks had imagined for themselves.

Sources:

Barron, Christin. 1812; The Forgotten War. The Washington Post.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/the-war-of-1812-for-kids/2012/06/07/gJQAHWKcNV_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b877dc6be949

Cassell, Frank A. "Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812." The Journal of Negro History 57, no. 2 (1972): 144-55. doi:10.2307/2717218.

Hickey, Donald R. The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Kormann, Carolyn. Dispatch: Tangier, The Sinking Island in the Chesapeake. The New Yorker. June 8, 2018.

Smith, Gene Allen. "Fight for Freedom: African Americans and the War of 1812," in The War of 1812: Official National Park Service Handbook, 94-107. (2013)

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Questions for Reading 1

1) Based on the reading, why would some African Americans fight for the British, while other African Americans decided to fight on the side of the United States? Provide evidence for your answer.

2) What makes Tangier Island significant to the history of the Chesapeake during this time? Present evidence from the passage that supports your answer.

3) In your own words, write 3-5 sentences to describe Fort Albion's history and why it's important. What evidence of African Americans soldiers do you think might be buried on the island? Why do you think that evidence is important for historians?

4) Sketch a map of the Atlantic World and label places the following places: "United States", "north America," "West Indies," and Britain. You may also include the names of places that weren't mentioned.

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Visual Evidence

Photo/Image 1



“Modern Philanthropist,” Published by Smith New York. American Antiquarian Society, ca. 1813.

The text on the paper reads, “Liberté des Negroes”, or Free the Negroes (Blacks).

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Questions for Photo/Image 1

1) What do you think might be taking place in the cartoon? What political issue is the cartoon referring to? List 3-5 pieces of evidence to support your answer.

2) What do you think is the artist's opinion of the British? What do you think is his opinion of enslaved African Americans? Explain your answers with evidence from the Image. Refer to the reading if necessary.

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Optional Activity 1: The Life and Times of Charles Ball

Have students read the following excerpt from the National Park Service about Charles Ball who served during the War of 1812 (<https://www.nps.gov/people/charles-ball.htm>). In groups, have them discuss his experience fighting on the American side with what they know now about African Americans who fought for the British.

As a class, compare and contrast these varying accounts and why they are important to understanding the African American experience as a whole in the Chesapeake at that time. How did Charles Ball's experience differ from African American men who decided



to fight for the British instead? On their own, have students research individual African Americans who served in the military during any war that took place in the 19th century (War of 1812, Mexican-American War, the U.S. Civil War, etc.) This will allow students to make valuable connections between these various conflicts and the individuals who risked their lives to serve in them.

“Charles Ball was born into slavery on a Maryland tobacco plantation sometime around 1781. He lived there with his mother and siblings until about 1785. The owner’s death that year forced the slaves to be sold away. Ball was sold to Jack Cox, a farmer with several slaves, who treated Ball “with humanity.” But at around age 12 following Cox’s death, Ball was sold again to a much more severe owner who furnished little food or clothing for his slaves, keeping Ball in a constant state of cold and hunger. When he

was approximately 20 years old, around 1800, Ball’s master hired him out to the Navy.

When Ball arrived at the Washington Navy Yard, he was stationed as a cook aboard the USS Congress. For a hungry young man used to a hard life as a field slave, this hardly seemed like work at all. Ball was eager to please officers, and in turn was gifted with hand-me-down clothing and for the first time in his life some spending money. After nearly two years in the service of the Navy, Ball encountered a novelty – a free man of color and sailor from Philadelphia. Together, they devised a scheme to smuggle Ball to freedom in the North, but no sooner did they complete their plan than Ball’s former master returned to reclaim him and sell him again, eventually away from his family down to South Carolina.

After seven years in slavery in South Carolina, Ball escaped back up to Maryland to be closer to his family. Declaring himself a free man, Ball worked at small farms until war broke out in the Chesapeake. Although Ball could have secured his freedom by joining with the British and being

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evacuated from the United States, instead he chose to stay and enlist under Commodore Joshua Barney as a free man, attempting to convince other escaped slaves to stay in the United States and fight rather than defect to the British. Ball served as a seaman and a cook in the Chesapeake flotilla, serving at the Battle of Bladensburg and later he helped man the defenses at Baltimore. In an 1837 memoir, Ball reflected on the Battle of Bladensburg: "I stood at my gun, until the Commodore was shot down... if the militia regiments, that lay upon our right and left, could have been brought to charge the British, in close fight, as they crossed the bridge, we should have killed or taken the whole of them in a short time; but the militia ran like sheep chased by dogs."

After the war, Ball remained in Baltimore, living as a free man and eventually purchasing land for a home. This peace would be short, however: in 1830, he was seized as a fugitive slave and sold to a plantation in Georgia. Although he eventually escaped and returned to the north, living outside Philadelphia, he never was able to reunite with his family."

Source: "Charles Ball." Ft. McHenry National Monument and Historic Site, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/people/charles-ball.htm>

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Optional Activity 2: Community Service: Investigate Historic Preservation Efforts in Your Community

As a class, identify historic places in your local community that have a connection with U.S. military history. These sites may be endangered in some way, whether environmentally, due to development, or issues with site maintenance for example. In groups, allow students to research their chosen historic site and what efforts, if any, are being made to preserve it. Have each group present their findings in a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation to the class. As a community service learning project students may develop an action plan to address the endangered status of the site(s).

Additionally, a veterans' group, historical society, or local preservation board may also be interested in hearing the students presentations, allowing their research and findings to make an even larger impact in their community.

For a list of historic places that may be of interest, see the National Register for Historic Places database for more information: <https://www.nps.gov/nr/research/>

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References and Contributing Resources for

Reading 1

Reading 1 is an adaptation of Dr. Gene Allen Smith's "Fight for Freedom: African Americans and the War of 1812" in *The War of 1812: Official National Park Service Handbook*, 94-107. (2013); information from the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail site on Tangier Island, which can be found at the following link: (<https://www.nps.gov/places/tangier-island.htm>); additional information on black colonial marines and their whereabouts after the war can be found here: (<http://www.blackpast.org/gah/british-corps-colonial-marines-1808-1810-1814-1816>).

Additional Sources:

Barron, Christin. 1812; *The Forgotten War*. *The Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/the-war-of-1812-for-kids/2012/06/07/gJQAHWKcNV_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b877dc6be949

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Kormann, Carolyn. *Dispatch: Tangier, The Sinking Island in the Chesapeake*. *The New Yorker*. June 8, 2018.

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Additional Online Resources

National Park Service, Tangier Island

The National Park Service's article ([website](#)) on Tangier Island gives a brief overview of the island history and significance.

National Register of Historic Places, Tangier Island

The National Register of Historic Places ([website](#)) is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. This entry is for the Tangier Island Historic District.

The Historical Marker Database

The Historical Marker Database ([website](#)) is an illustrated searchable online catalog of historical information on roadside and other permanent outdoor markers, monuments, and plaques. It contains photographs, inscription transcriptions, marker locations, maps, additional information and commentary, and links to more information. This entry provides information on Fort Albion, the British base of operations on Tangier Island during the War of 1812.

Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail

The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail ([website](#)) is a 290-mile trail stretches from Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia. The landscape of the trail includes the Potomac, Patuxent, and Patapsco Rivers and the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, along rural roads in Southern MD and on the Eastern Shore at Caulk's Field and Tangier Island, provides opportunities for the public to stand in places that look much as the British and Americans saw them almost 200 years ago.

The Civil War Trust

For more information on black soldiers who served as Colonial Marines during the War, Percoco's article serves as a concise, yet informative primer for students and general audiences ([website](#)).

"Freedom Bound"

Historic Annapolis ([website](#)) is the leading nonprofit preservation and history organization in Annapolis, Maryland. The videos included in "Freedom Bound," give voice to the enslaved through performances from actors who reenact the lives of enslaved individuals from the Chesapeake region during the late 18th and 19th centuries.

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Norfolk Public Library

The Norfolk, Virginia public library ([website](#)) created an extensive annotated bibliography with both nonfiction and fiction titles for adults and children. This is a helpful resource for teachers and librarians looking to incorporate these materials in the classroom.