



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry



(Maryland Governor's Office)

The man standing on the deck of the sailing ship had opposed the war. Now he watched helplessly as ships of the greatest navy in the world rained shot and shell on the little fort protecting the city of Baltimore, Maryland. He found he cared very much about the outcome. The bombardment had lasted for more than 24 hours. He strained to see through the morning mist. What he saw was a huge flag, big enough to show the enemy that the fort had survived. Francis Scott Key was overcome by "joyful triumph" and began to jot words down on a piece of paper: "O say can you see"

Key wrote his poem in 1814, in the last year of the War of 1812. The United States had declared war on Great Britain in June 1812. At first, the British were too busy fighting the French to devote much energy to the pesky Americans. Once Napoleon abdicated in April 1814, the British set out to teach their former colonies a lesson. In August, fifty ships sailed up Chesapeake Bay. After occupying Washington on August 24, and burning the Capitol, the White House, and other public buildings, the British turned their attention northward. Fort McHenry stood between the British navy and the city of Baltimore. When the fort refused to be subdued, the ships sailed away, to the cheers of the defenders. For many Americans, the War of 1812 was the "Second War of Independence."

Few people remember the War of 1812 today, but the poem it inspired, almost immediately set to music as "The Star Spangled Banner," has become the

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"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

national anthem of the United States and a potent source of inspiration and
community for Americans in times of crisis.



Document Contents

National Curriculum Standards

About This Lesson

Getting Started: Inquiry Question

Setting the Stage: Historical Context

Locating the Site: Map

1. Map 1: Baltimore and Fort McHenry in 1814

Determining the Facts: Readings

1. Reading 1: Armistead's Account of the Battle
2. Reading 2: Francis Scott Key and the Writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner"
3. Reading 3: "Defence of Fort McHenry"
4. Reading 4: After the Battle

Visual Evidence: Images

1. Illustration 1: Fort McHenry in 1814
2. Photo 1: The Walls at Fort McHenry
3. Illustration 2: The Battle of Baltimore
4. Illustration 3: "A View of the Bombardment of Fort McHenry"
5. Photo 2: Fort McHenry Today
6. Photo 3: The Star-Spangled Banner Today
7. Illustration 4: "Star-Spangled Heart"

Putting It All Together: Activities

1. Activity 1: "You Are There"
2. Activity 2: Debating the War of 1812

Teaching with Historic Places

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

3. Activity 3: "The Theme of Our Nation"
4. Activity 4: Whose "Star-Spangled Banner"?
5. Activity 5: Places That Define the Community



Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: Mid-19th to mid-20th century

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 and on American political history.

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, War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine.

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 C: The student explains and gives examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.

Theme II: Time, Continuity and Change

- Standard A : The student demonstrates an understanding that different scholars may describe the same event or situation in different ways but must provide reasons or evidence for their views.
- Standard B: The student identifies and uses key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.
- 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.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

- Standard D: The student identifies and uses processes important to reconstructing and reinterpreting the past, such as using a variety of sources, providing, validating, and weighing evidence for claims, checking credibility of sources, and searching for causality.

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.
- Standard B: The student creates, interprets, uses, and distinguishes various representations of the earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs.
- Standard G: The student describes how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like.
- Standard I: The student describes ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity

- Standard B: The student describes personal connections to places associated with community, nation, and world.
- Standard C: The student describes the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.
- Standard E: The student identifies and describes ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.
- Standard F: The student identifies and describes the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity.
- Standard H: The student works independently and cooperatively to accomplish goals.

Theme V: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- Standard B: The student analyzes group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture.

Theme VI: Power, Authority and Governance

- Standard C: The student analyzes and explains ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet wants and needs of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security.
- Standard F: The student explains conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among nations.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

- Standard G: The student describes and analyzes the role of technology in communications, transportation, information-processing, weapons development, and other areas as it contributes to or helps resolve conflicts.
- Standard I: The student gives examples and explains how governments attempt to achieve their stated ideals at home and abroad.

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 republican form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law.
- Standard C: The student locates, accesses, analyzes, organizes, and applies information about selected public issues--recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.
- Standard D: The student practices forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.

Relevant Common Core Standards:

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

Key Ideas and Details

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

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

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



About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, "[Fort McHenry](http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/66000907.pdf)" (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/66000907.pdf>) (with [photographs](http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Photos/66000907.pdf) (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Photos/66000907.pdf>), on *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Making of an American Icon*, written by Lonn Taylor, Kathleen M. Kendrick, and Jeffrey L. Brodie, and on materials prepared for Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. It was published in 2009. This lesson was written by Marilyn Harper, former Teaching with Historic Places historian. It was edited by 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. To describe the events of September 12-14, 1814, as related by the commander of Fort McHenry;
2. To describe the fort in relation to the British bombardment;
3. To explain how "The Star-Spangled Banner" came to be written and to analyze the meaning of its text;
4. To identify ways in which the American victory and "The Star-Spangled Banner" contributed and continue to contribute to Americans' pride in and identification with their nation;
5. To identify and investigate places that are important to the local community's identity and civic pride.

Materials for students

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

1. One map showing Baltimore Harbor and Fort McHenry,
2. Two documents: the official report on the bombardment and the original broadside version of the "Defence of Fort McHenry,"
3. Two readings about the composition of the poem that would become "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the later history of the War of 1812 and the song,
4. Four illustrations: an image of the fort, two representations of the battle, and a World War II poster,



5. Three photos of the fort and the preserved flag today.

Visiting the site

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine is located at 2400 East Fort Avenue in Baltimore, Maryland, about three miles southeast of the Baltimore Inner Harbor and just off I-95. Brown "Fort McHenry" directional signs along all major routes direct visitors to the park. Visits should begin at the Visitor Center, which is open daily from 8:00 A.M. to 4:45 P.M., except on Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1, when the park is closed. There is an entrance fee to the historic area of the park; the fee is good for seven days. For more information, visit the Fort McHenry website at <http://www.nps.gov/fomc> . Teachers may apply for an educational fee waiver or special presentations by park rangers. Details are available on the park's Group Arrangements website at <http://www.nps.gov/fomc/forteachers/grouparrangements.htm> .



Getting Started



(National Park Service)

What do you think this photograph shows?



Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, and activities--do you notice?

Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Setting the Stage

The long conflict between revolutionary France and Great Britain began in 1793 and continued, with only one brief intermission, until 1815. It was profitable but risky for American merchants. The French and the British blockaded each other's ports, trying to cut off supplies. The United States was neutral, not allied with either party. American traders who could get through the blockades made handsome profits, but they risked confiscation of their cargoes.

President John Adams had narrowly averted war with France in 1800. By 1812, the United States was moving close to war with Great Britain. The powerful British navy stopped more American ships than the much smaller French fleet. The English also seized any American sailors they suspected of being British subjects, forcing them into service in the British navy. For most Americans, this practice of "impressment" amounted to kidnapping. Many westerners blamed the British for inciting Indian tribes, threatening settlements on the western frontier. Some members of the group of southern and western congressmen known as the "War Hawks" also hoped to seize British Canada and Spanish Florida. On June 18, 1812, Congress declared war against Great Britain under the slogan "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights."

For almost two years, the English were too busy fighting the French to bother much with the Americans, although troops already stationed in Canada had little trouble defending that British colony against an American invasion. With Napoleon's abdication in April 1814, England was able to send military and naval reinforcements to join the conflict with the young and militarily unprepared United States. Four months later, a British fleet carrying thousands of army and navy veterans sailed up Chesapeake Bay, intent on giving the upstart Americans "a complete drubbing." They did just that at the Battle of Bladensburg and went on to burn the White House, Capitol, and other public buildings in the new federal capital of Washington. Then they turned their attention to Baltimore. The city was a hotbed of anti-British feeling. It was also the home port of many privateers. For the British, the owners of these vessels, who had grown rich preying on British merchant shipping, were no better than "pirates."

Baltimore city leaders did a better job of preparing for the invaders than the politicians in Washington had. A force of about 15,000 men under Maj. Gen. Samuel Smith and several hundred sailors under Commodore John Rodgers manned a line of hastily built fortifications on Hampstead Hill east of the city. The British landed a force of about 5,000 soldiers at North Point, 13 miles southeast of Baltimore, on September 12. The city's defenders slowed the British advance in the Battle of North Point. An American sharpshooter killed General Ross, the popular British commander, spreading consternation in the ranks. The invaders stopped two miles short of the American fortifications to await the outcome of the bombardment of Fort McHenry, the key to the harbor and the city.



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Locating the Site

Map 1: Baltimore and Fort McHenry in 1814



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Questions for Map 1

1) About 46,000 people lived in Baltimore in 1810, making it the third largest city in the United States in terms of population. What clues can you find in the map to help you figure out how big the city was physically? What does that suggest about what most American cities were like during this period?

2) Find the Chesapeake Bay on Map 1. Next find the Patapsco River and Baltimore. How far is Baltimore from the Bay?

3) Baltimore was an important center for shipping. In what ways do you think the city's location might be good for merchants? How might it create problems?

4. Why do you think Fort McHenry was located where it is?

5. Find Lazaretto Battery. "Battery" is a term used for a group of big, long-range guns. Why do you think the Lazaretto Battery might have been located where it was?



“The Rockets’ Red Glare”: Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Armistead’s Account of the Battle

Major George Armistead was the commander at Fort McHenry in September, 1814. This reading is transcribed from his report on the bombardment of the fort. As an official government document, the original report is the property of the National Archives and Records Administration.

The Honb^{le} James Monroe
Secretary of War
Washington

Fort M^cHenry 24th September 1814

Sir,

A severe indisposition, the effect of great fatigue and exposure, has prevented me heretofore from presenting you with an account of the attack on this Post—On the night of Saturday the 10th ins^t the British Fleet consisting of Ships of the line, heavy Frigates, and Bomb vessels amounting in the whole to 30 Sail appeared at the mouth of the River Patapsco with every indication of an attempt on the City of Baltimore. My own Force consisted of one Company of U.S. Artillery under Cap^t Evans, and two Companies of Sea Fencibles under Captains Bunbury and Addison, of these three Companies 35 Men were unfortunately on the Sick list and unfit for duty. I had been furnished with two Companies of Volunteer Artillery from the City of Baltimore under Cap^t Berry and Lieut Command^r Pennington—to these I must add another very fine Company of Volunteer Artillerists under Judge Nicholson, who had profferd their Services to aid in the defense of this Post whenever an attack might be apprehended, and also a Detachment from Commodore Barney’s flotilla under L^t Rodman. Brigadier Gen^lWinder had also furnished me with about six hundred Infantry under the Command of L^t Co^l Steuart & Major Lane, consisting of detachments from the 12th, 14th, 36th, & 38th Regt^s of U.S. troops, the total amounting to about one thousand effective Men.

On Monday morning very early, it was perceived that the Enemy was landing troops on the East side of the Patapsco, distant about ten Miles. During that day and the ensuing night He had brought Sixteen Ships (including five Bomb Ships) within about two Miles and an half of this Fort. I had arranged my force as follows: The Regular Artillerists under Capt. Evans, and the Volunteers under Cap^t. Nicholson, manned the Bastions in the Star Fort. Captains Bunburys, Addisons, Rodmans, Berrys, and L^t. Comd^t Penningtons commands were stationed on the lower works, and the Infantry under L^t Col. Steuart & Major Lane were in the outer ditch, to meet the Enemy at his landing if He should attempt one.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

On Tuesday morning about Sun rise, the Enemy commenced the attack from his five bomb vessels, at the distance of about two Miles, when finding that his Shells reached Us, He anchored, and Kept Up an incessant and well-directed Bombardment. We immediately opened our Batteries and kept a brisk fire from our Guns and Mortars, but unfortunately our Shot and Shells all fell considerably Short of him; this was to me a most distressing circumstance as it left us exposed to a constant and tremendous Shower of Shells without the most remote possibility of our doing him the slightest injury. It affords me the highest gratification to State, that although we were left thus exposed, and thus inactive, not a Man Shrank from the conflict.

About 2 OClock, P.M. one of the 24 pounders on the South West Bastion under the immediate command of Cap^t Nicholson, was dismounted by a Shell, the explosion from which killed his 2nd Lieut and wounded several of his Men; the bustle necessarily produced in removing the Wounded and remounting the Gun probably induced the Enemy to suspect that We were in a state of confusion, as He brought in three of his Bomb Ships to what I believed to be good striking distance; I immediately ordered a fire to be opened, which was obeyed with alacrity through the whole Garrison, and in half an hour those intruders again Sheltered themselves by withdrawing beyond our reach. We gave three Cheers and again ceased firing.

The Enemy continued throwing Shells with one or two Slight intermissions, till one OClock in the Morning of Wednesday, when it was discovered that He had availed himself of the darkness of the Night and had thrown a considerable force above to our right; they had approached very near to Fort Covington, when they began to throw Rocketts, intended, I presume, to give them an opportunity of examining the Shores, as I have since understood, they had detached 1250 picked Men with Scaling ladders for the purpose of Storming this Fort. We once more had an opportunity of opening our Batteries, and Kept up a continued blaze for nearly two Hours, which had the effect again to drive them off.

In justice to Lieu^t Newcomb of the U.S. Navy, who commanded at Fort Covington with a Detachment of Sailors, and Lieut Webster of the Flotilla, who commanded the 6 Gun Battery near that Fort, I ought to State that during this time they kept up an animated and I believe a very destructive fire, to which I am persuaded We are much indebted in repulsing the Enemy. One of their sunken Barges has since been found with two dead Men in it, others have been seen floating in the River. The only means We had of directing our Guns was by the blaze of their Rocketts, and the flashes of their Guns, had they ventured to the same situation in the day time, not a man would have escaped.

The Bombardment continued on the part of the Enemy until seven OClock on Wednesday Morning, when it ceased and about nine, they Ships got under weigh and Stood down the River. During the Bombardment which continued 25 Hours, (with two slight intermissions) from the best calculation I can make, from fifteen to Eighteen hundred Shells were [thrown] by the Enemy, a few of these fell short, a large proportion burst over us, throwing their fragments among us, and threatening destruction, many passed over, and about four hundred fell within the Works. Two of the public buildings are materially injured, the others but slightly. I am happy to inform you (wonderful as it may appear) that our loss amounts only to four Men Killed, and

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

twenty four Wounded, the latter will all recover. Among the Killed, I have to lament the loss of Lieut Clagget, and Sergeant Clemm, both of Cap^t Nicholsons Volunteers, two Men whose fate is to be deplored, not only for their personal bravery, but for their high Standing, amiable Demeanor, and spotless integrity in private life. Lieut. Russel of the Company under L^t Pennington received early in the attack a severe contusion in the Heel, notwithstanding which He remained at his post during the whole Bombardment.

Was I to name any individuals who signalized themselves, it would be doing injustice to others, suffice it to say, that every Officer and Soldier under my Command did their duty to my entire satisfaction.

I have the honor
to remain respectfully
Your Ob Serv^t
G. Armistead
Lieut Col^l U.S.A.

Honb^{le} James Munroe
Sect^y of War



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

Questions for Reading 1

1) How long after the battle did Armistead submit his official report? What reason did he give for the delay?

2) How many men did Armistead have to defend the fort?

3) How did Armistead feel when he ordered his men to stop shooting back at the British? How do you think you would have felt if you had been in the fort?

4) Using this account and beginning on Monday morning, September 12, draw up a time line of the events Armistead describes. When did the British begin their bombardment? When did the fort return their fire? When and why did they stop? When did the British attempt to attack the fort from the side? What happened?

5) Armistead signed his report "Lieutenant Colonel," the rank to which he was promoted after the battle. Why do you think he was promoted? Do you think he deserved it? Explain your answer.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Determining the Facts

Reading 2: Francis Scott Key and the Writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner"

Francis Scott Key, a successful 35-year old lawyer and amateur poet, witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry from an American ship anchored about eight miles away in the Patapsco River. A Maryland native, Key had a successful law practice in the District of Columbia. As a member of the opposition party, he opposed the War of 1812 for political reasons. As a devout Christian, he had moral objections to the attempted invasion of Canada. In 1813, he wrote a friend that he would rather see the American flag lowered in disgrace than have it stand for persecution and dishonor.¹

By the time a large British fleet moved into the Chesapeake Bay in August 1814, Key found he had changed his mind. He was present at the humiliating American defeat at the Battle of Bladensburg. He also witnessed the burning of the Capitol and the other public buildings in Washington. He wanted the war to end, but thought there was "no hope for peace."²

An errand of mercy brought Key to the Patapsco. Key was trying to obtain the release of a prominent local doctor whom the British had taken prisoner. On September 5, he set out from Baltimore to meet the British fleet. The officers on board the British flagship agreed to release Dr. Beanes, but they would not let the Americans return to Baltimore until after the coming battle. They sent the men back to their small ship, which was kept under armed guard. Helplessly, Key watched the British bombard Fort McHenry. Early in the morning of September 14, Key noticed that the British had stopped firing. He strained to see whether the flag had been struck (taken down), which would mean that the fort had surrendered.

At about the same time, Fort McHenry's garrison raised a huge flag. Major Armistead had specifically asked for a "flag so large that the British will have no difficulty in seeing it from a distance." The enemy was duly impressed. Robert Barrett, a young midshipman on a British warship, commented on the "superb and splendid ensign." When Key saw the flag, he realized that the fort had survived the bombardment. Baltimore was safe.

Many years later, he described his feelings,

Through the clouds of war, the stars of that banner still shone in my view.
. . . Then, in that hour of deliverance and joyful triumph, my heart spoke,
and "Does not such a country, and such defenders of their country,
deserve a song?" was its question. With it came an inspiration not to be
resisted; and even though it had been a hanging matter to make a song, I
must have written it. Let the praise, then, if any be due, be given, not to
me, who only did what I could not help doing, not to the writer, but to the
inspirers of the song!³



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Key scribbled down the first words of his song on the back of a piece of paper and finished it back on shore. He took the draft to Judge Nicholson, a relative by marriage who had served at Fort McHenry during the bombardment. Nicholson liked it very much. He may have been the person who took it to the *Baltimore American*. That newspaper immediately printed it as a large poster-like broadside and began distributing it around Baltimore. Each man at Fort McHenry received a copy. The text appeared in the *Baltimore Patriot* on September 20 and the *Baltimore American* the following day. By mid-October, at least 17 other newspapers on the East Coast had published the new song. Some time during the first two weeks of November, it was set to music as "The Star Spangled Banner."

The original broadside said that Key's poem should be performed to the tune "Anacreon in Heaven." This tune was popular in the United States at the time and Key himself had already written one set of lyrics for it. It was originally composed in the mid-1770s as the club song for "The Anacreontic Society," a group of gentlemen in London who liked to get together to perform music, eat a good supper, drink some wine, and generally enjoy themselves. The president of this highly respectable group usually sang the song as a solo after the supper.

Francis Scott Key died on January 11, 1843. Flags flew at half-mast in mourning in Baltimore and Washington. The *Baltimore American* published his obituary two days later. It said, "So long as patriotism dwells among us, so long will this song be the theme of our nation."



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Questions for Reading 2

- 1) How did Francis Scott Key happen to be a witness to the bombardment of Fort McHenry?

- 2) How had Key's views on the war changed since the previous year? What events had contributed to the change?

- 3) Why do you think the British refused to let the Americans return home until after the battle? Does that seem like a reasonable thing for them to do?

- 4) How did Key describe his feelings on the morning of September 14? Why do you think he said nothing about his earlier opposition to the war?

- 5) What do you think he meant when he said that he had to write the song, "even though it had been a hanging matter"? Who does he think should get the real credit for it? Do you agree?



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Determining the Facts

Reading 3: "Defence of Fort McHenry"

DEFENCE OF FORT M'HENRY.

The annexed song was composed under the following circumstances—
A gentleman had left Baltimore, in a flag of truce for the purpose of getting released from the British fleet, a friend of his who had been captured at Marlborough.—He went as far as the mouth of the Patuxent, and was not permitted to return lest the intended attack on Baltimore should be disclosed. He was therefore brought up the Bay to the mouth of the Patapsco, where the flag vessel was kept under the guns of a frigate, and he was compelled to witness the bombardment of Fort M'Henry, which the Admiral had boasted that he would carry in a few hours, and that the city must fall. He watched the flag at the Fort through the whole day with an anxiety that can be better felt than described, until the night prevented him from seeing it. In the night he watched the Bomb Shells, and at early dawn his eye was again greeted by the proudly waving flag of his country.

Tune—ANACREON IN HEAVEN.

O! say can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?
And the Rockets' red glare, the Bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our Flag was still there;

O! say does that star-spangled Banner yet wave,
O'er the Land of the free, and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected new shines in the stream,

'Tis the star spangled banner, O! long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country, shall leave us no more?
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave,
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,

And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave,
O'er the Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave.

O! thus be it ever when freemen shall stand,
Between their lov'd home, and the war's desolation,
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land,
Praise the Power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto—"In God is our Trust;"

And the star-spangled Banner in triumph shall wave,
O'er the Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave.

(Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society)



Determining the Facts

Transcript of Reading 3

DEFENCE OF FORT McHENRY

The annexed song was composed under the following circumstances—A gentleman had left Baltimore, in a flag of truce for the purpose of getting released from the British fleet, a friend of his who had been captured at Marlborough.—He went as far as the mouth of the Patuxent, and was not permitted to return lest the intended attack on Baltimore should be disclosed. He was therefore brought up the Bay to the mouth of the Patapsco, where the flag vessel was kept under the guns of a frigate, and he was compelled to witness the bombardment of Fort McHenry, which the Admiral had boasted that he would carry in a few hours, and that the city must fall. He watched the flag at the Fort through the whole day with an anxiety that can be better felt than described, until the night prevented him from seeing it. In the night he watched the Bomb Shells, and at early dawn his eye was again greeted by the proudly waving flag of his country.

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Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?
And the Rockets' red glare, the Bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our Flag was still there.

O ! say does that star-spangled Banner yet wave
O'er the Land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected, now shines in the stream:

'Tis the star-spangled banner: O ! long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country, shall leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave,
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,

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"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

O ! thus be it ever when freemen shall stand,
Between their lov'd homes, and the war's desolation,
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n-rescued land,
Praise the Power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause. it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our Trust"

And the star-spangled Banner in triumph shall wave,
O'er the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.



Questions for Reading 3

1) Try to read the document. If you can't, read the transcript . Then compare the introductory paragraph with Reading How does it differ? Why do you think that might be the case?

2) Read the first stanza of the poem carefully and compare it with Reading 1. In what ways do you think it reflects what Major Armistead reported? In what ways, if any, does it differ?

3) Next, read the other three stanzas. Summarize in your own words what they are saying. Why do you think few people sing them today?

4) Francis Scott Key was a member of a prominent white family that owned many slaves. Why do you think he saw no contradiction between his status as a slaveholder and his pride in the "land of the free"?

5) This original broadside is one of only two known to survive. Why do you think someone kept it and preserved it? Do you think it is important to have the actual physical pieces of paper associated with historic events like the Battle of Baltimore? Discuss your answers.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Determining the Facts

Reading 4: After the Battle

The whole East Coast celebrated the successful defense of Baltimore. At about the same time, the American navy beat a small British fleet on Lake Champlain far to the north. These two victories erased the shame of the burning of Washington. They also helped restart stalled peace negotiations. On December 24, 1814, American and British representatives signed the Treaty of Ghent. The treaty ended the war, but did not resolve any of the issues that had led to it.

Gen. Andrew Jackson had not heard about the treaty when he defeated the British at the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815. This splendid victory convinced most Americans that the United States had won the war. This new country had defeated the greatest military power in the world, even though it only had a tiny, badly equipped army and navy and some poorly trained volunteers. A cartoon published in Philadelphia shortly after the battle showed American soldiers outside the walls of Fort McHenry. One was poking "John Bull" with his bayonet (John Bull was a common symbol of England). Another soldier cried, "Shout, boys, shout. Huzza for Baltimore, huzza." Albert Gallatin had helped negotiate the Treaty of Ghent. He thought the war made "the people . . . more American; they feel and act more as a nation."⁴

The victory was a local one for people who lived in Baltimore. Armistead, Smith, and their men became instant heroes. Armistead himself died four years later at the age of 39. The other "Old Defenders" proudly marched in anniversary parades for the rest of their lives. September 12 is still "Defenders' Day," a public holiday in the city. Fort McHenry and other historic sites hold special celebrations on that day. There is a Battle Monument in Baltimore that commemorated the 1814 victory. It has been the official emblem of the city since 1827.

At first, people in Baltimore and Washington were the only ones who knew about Francis Scott Key's song. Published sheet music and performances in theaters and at patriotic celebrations soon introduced it to more people. "The Star-Spangled Banner" became a "national air," like "Hail Columbia" and "Yankee Doodle." In the 1830s, national political parties began to modify the words of the song to use in their campaigns. Abolitionists and advocates of temperance also adapted it for their own use.

"The Star-Spangled Banner" was very popular in the North during the Civil War. It was played when the American flag was lowered at Fort Sumter, the first battle of the war. It was played again when Union forces took the fort back at the conflict's end. It went with Union armies as they entered New Orleans, Savannah, Richmond, and many other towns in the defeated South.

The centennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1876 and the Spanish-American War in the 1890s led to a surge of national pride and patriotism. By 1905, all military posts and naval

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"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

vessels were playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at flag raising in the morning and lowering at the end of the day. All officers and men had to stand at attention during these ceremonies. Civilians also began to stand at attention during the anthem, which often opened plays, movies, and baseball games. The military made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the official national anthem for military ceremonies in 1917.

People who wanted Key's song to be the national anthem of the whole United States introduced 15 different bills in the U.S. Congress between 1912 and 1917. None of them even came up for a vote. World War I brought broad-based popular support. J. Charles Linthicum, a Maryland congressman, and Ella Hauk Holloway, the president of the Maryland State Society, U.S. Daughters of 1812, introduced yet another bill after the war. Some people opposed the designation. They thought that the song was too hard to sing. Some favored "America the Beautiful," "Yankee Doodle," or "Hail Columbia" instead. Temperance groups did not want a former "drinking song" as the national anthem. Some thought the anti-British sentiments of Key's lyrics would damage U.S. relations with Britain. Others thought it might harm the morals of the schoolchildren singing it.

Congressman Linthicum persisted. By 1929, he had the support of a number of patriotic organizations. The bill passed both houses of Congress and President Herbert Hoover signed it into law on March 3, 1931.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

Questions for Reading 4

1) What issues did the Treaty of Ghent settle? Who do you think won the War of 1812, based on the treaty? Why did most Americans think the United States won the war?

2) "The Star-Spangled Banner" was particularly popular in the Washington and Baltimore area at first. How did the rest of the country get to know it?

3) The lyrics of "The Star-Spangled Banner" were adapted for use in every national presidential campaign between 1837 and the outbreak of the Civil War. What does that show about its popularity in the United States as a whole?

4) If you lived in the Confederate states during the Civil War, how would you have felt about "The Star-Spangled Banner"?

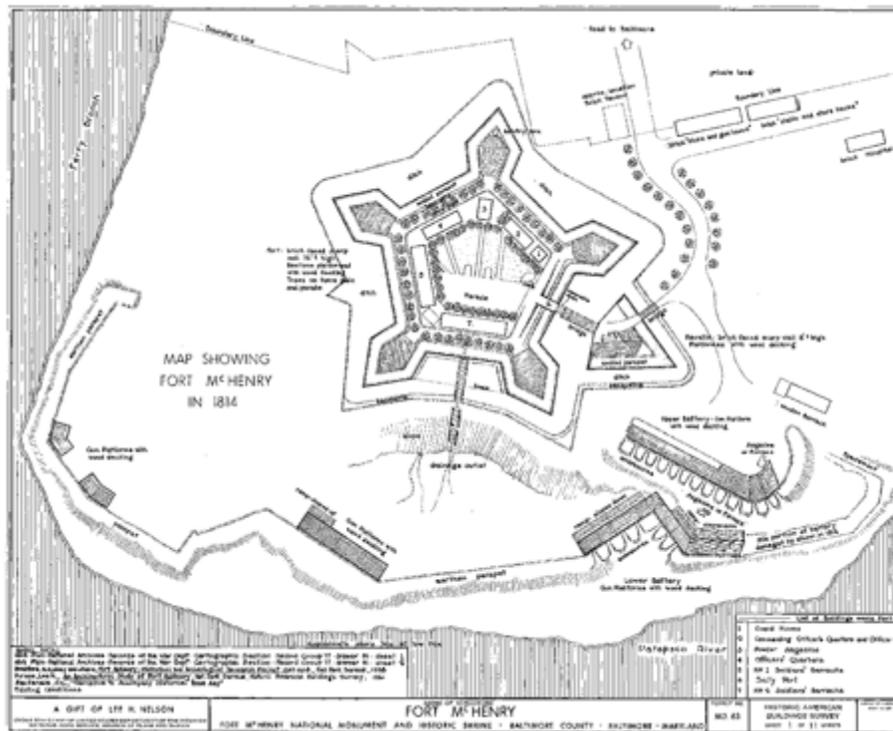
5) Why do you think it took so long for Key's song to become the official national anthem of the United States? What were some of the reasons people had for opposing its designation? Do you think those objections were valid?



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Visual Evidence

Illustration 1: Fort McHenry in 1814



(Historic American Buildings Survey)

When it was built between 1794 and 1802, Fort McHenry's basic form was essentially the same as it is today. The fort was modernized and strengthened in 1813 in anticipation of a British attack.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Questions for Illustration 1

- 1) Identify and describe the various elements shown in this drawing. Armistead mentions the possibility that the British might try a land attack. How many barriers would they have to fight their way through to get into the fort? Where is the main entrance? What protects it?

- 2) Why do you think people called forts like Fort McHenry "star forts"? Look carefully at this drawing. What advantages might a fort shaped like this have?

- 3) Refer to Map 1. What advantages would a star fort have in Fort McHenry's location?

- 4) Where did the fort's designers expect attacks to come from?

- 5) Refer back to Reading 1. Can you identify the location of each of the units Major Armistead mentions?

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"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The Walls at Fort McHenry



(National Park Service)

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"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

Visual Evidence

Photo 1, Question 1 Answer and Prompt

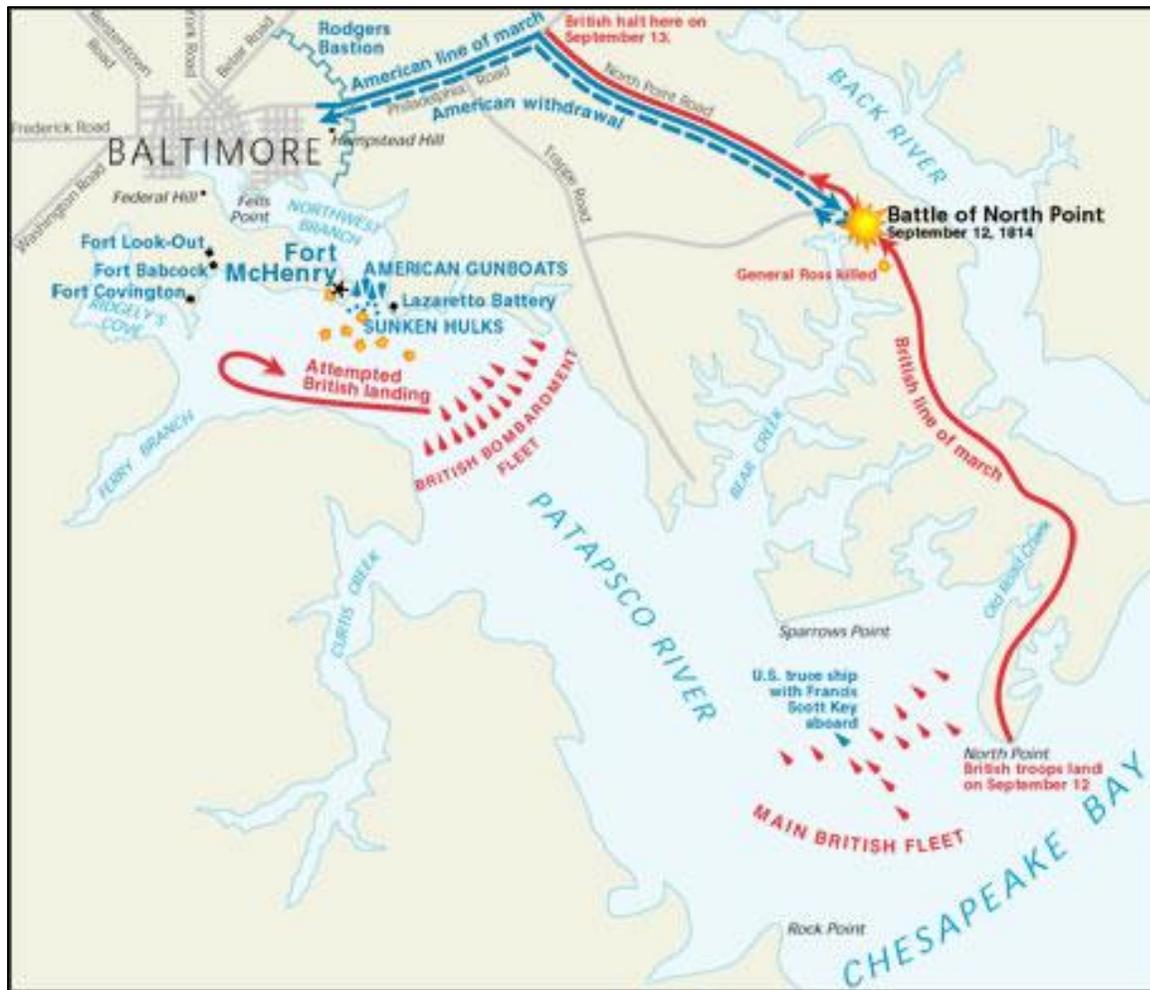
Although you may have answered 'brick,' the walls are actually packed dirt. By the early 19th century, almost all forts had thick earthen walls. Can you think of any reason why dirt walls might have been better than brick or stone ones?



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Visual Evidence

Illustration 2: The Battle of Baltimore



(National Park Service)

The British plan was for the navy, commanded by Vice Adm. Alexander Cochrane, and the army, commanded by Maj. Gen. Robert Ross, to join in attacking Baltimore. They could not do that until Fort McHenry surrendered, allowing the British ships to get into the harbor.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Questions for Illustration 2

1) Where did the British troops land? Where did they encounter the American forces? Look at the map carefully. What clues can you find to tell you what happened after that? Where were the British and Americans on September 13? Why do you think the British might have stopped where they did?

2) Find where an American sharpshooter killed General Ross. Ross was very popular with his troops. How do you think his death might have affected them?

3) Find the arrow indicating where the British tried to get around Fort McHenry to attack it from the side. Go back to Reading 1. How many of the places Major Armistead mentions in his dispatch can you find on the map? Armistead said that he thought none of the attackers would have survived if they had tried an attack like that during the daytime. Based on the map, do you think he was right?

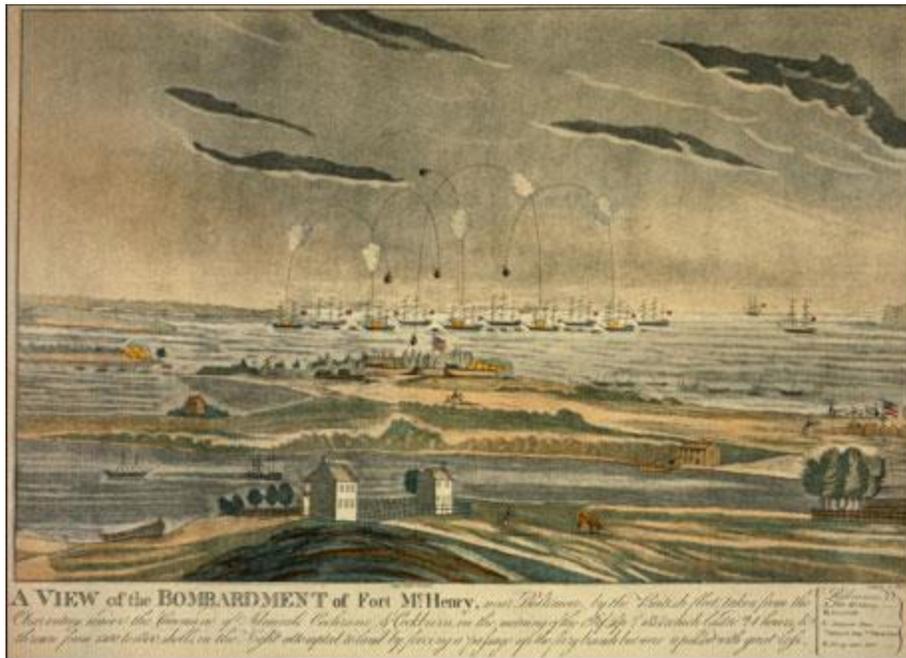
4) Find the British bombardment fleet on the map. It was about two miles away from Fort McHenry. See if you can find some place that is two miles away from your school or home. How accurate do you think the guns on the British ships would be from two miles away? How well do you think the gunners could see what they were aiming at?



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

Visual Evidence

Illustration 3: "A View of the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry"



(Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society)



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Questions for Illustration 3

1) This colored etching was created in Philadelphia around 1816. Why might a publisher in Philadelphia think that he could sell an image of something that happened somewhere else two years before?

2) Read the caption. Why might the publisher have chosen to include the information that he did?

3) Look carefully at the objects flying through the air. These are the "bombs" that Major Armistead and Francis Scott Key mentioned. They were round iron balls weighing about 200 pounds and filled with gunpowder. Compare Illustration 3 with Illustration 1. Where could a bomb do the most damage if it landed inside the fort?

4) See if you can find the bright flames on the sides of the bombs. These were fuses, timed to go off while the bombs were still in the air, raining shrapnel (heavy, sharp-edged pieces of broken metal) down on the men below. How do you think you would feel if you knew these bombs were coming, but you couldn't see them over the fort's walls?

5) Isaac Munroe described the death of a man standing next to him on one of the bastions of the fort: "a bomb bursting over our heads a piece [of shrapnel] of the size of a dollar, two inches thick, passed through his body in a diagonal direction from his navel, and went into the ground upwards of two feet."⁵ How would you feel if you saw something like that? How might you try to protect yourself against these bombs?

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National Park Service
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"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

Visual Evidence

Photo 2: Fort MCHenry Today (2009)



(National Park Service)



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Questions for Photo 2

- 1) Compare this recent photo with Illustration 1. What is the same? What features that were there in 1814 are missing? What is new?

- 2) See if you can identify the "Powder Magazine" in the illustration and in the photo. During the bombardment, a bomb landed directly on the magazine, which was full of gunpowder. What do you think would have happened if the bomb had exploded? The Army greatly enlarged the walls of the magazine after the bombardment. Why do you think that happened?

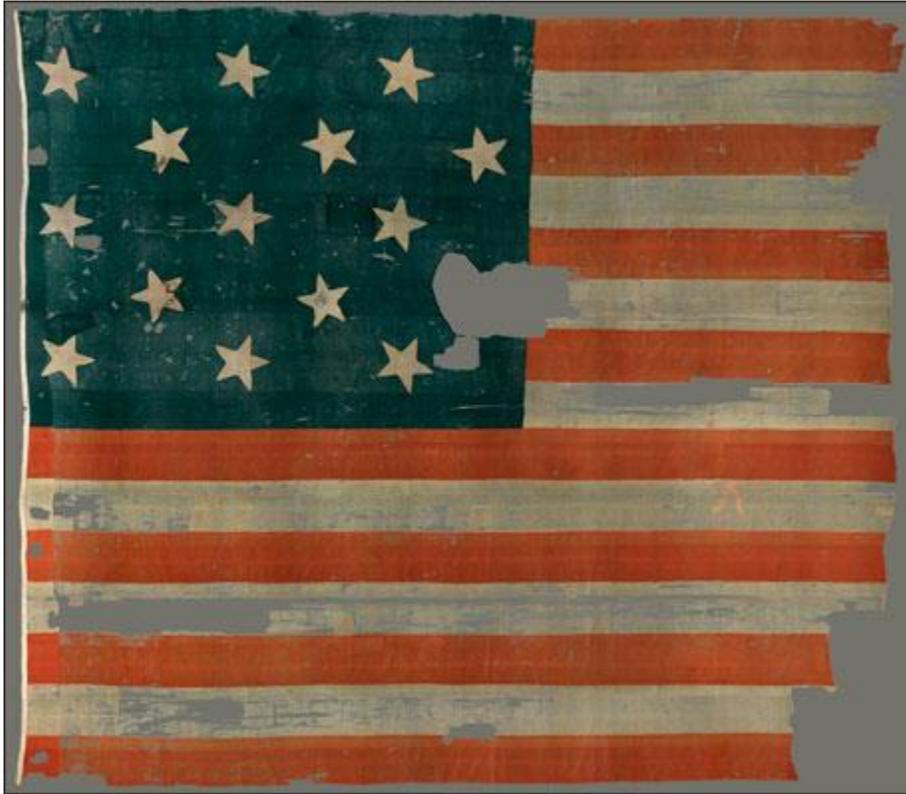
- 3) The Union Army made many changes in Fort McHenry around the time of the Civil War, when Maryland was an important border state between North and South. Why do you think they might have strengthened the fort at that time?

- 4) The flag shown in this photo is the same size as the flag Francis Scott Key saw. It was too big to fly during the bombardment itself because of the bad weather. How do you think the defenders felt when they received orders to raise this flag at the end of the bombardment, when the British were sailing away?



Visual Evidence

Photo 3: The Star-Spangled Banner Today



(Courtesy of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

This photo shows the conserved garrison flag that flew over Fort MCHenry on the morning of September 14, 1814, now on display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. The flag that Francis Scott Key saw measured 30 feet by 42 feet; it now measures 30 feet by 34 feet.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Questions for Photo 3

1) Few people knew about the Fort McHenry flag before the Civil War and fewer still had seen it. It belonged to the Armistead family, which treated it as a family heirloom, but also cut off "snippings" to give to veterans and other important people as souvenirs. This was a common practice at the time. How much of the original flag is gone? Why do you think it did not bother the family to cut pieces off the flag? Could they do that now?

2) In 1912, George Armistead's grandson donated the flag to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. He was overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for the flag and answering all the requests to display it. By this time, the flag was an important relic of the nation's history. Why do you think Americans' feelings about the flag had changed? What might have contributed to those changes? Refer to Reading 4, if necessary.

3) As the bicentennial of the War of 1812 approached, the Smithsonian Museum of American History collected more than \$18 million to restore and conserve the original flag. Why do you think Americans were willing to donate so much money to this project?

4) Many people have called the original Star-Spangled Banner a national "symbol" or "icon." Look up the definitions of both of these words. Do you think the flag fits the definitions? Explain your answers.

5) Look carefully at this image and describe what you see. In what ways is it like a modern flag? How does it differ? The Smithsonian conservation did not try to make the flag look like new. The intention was to help people see it as "an artifact as well as an icon," both a fragile piece of 200-year old fabric and a powerful symbol of the nation.⁶ What do you think would have been involved in trying to return the flag to its appearance in 1814? Do you think the decision to conserve the surviving original fabric instead was a wise one? Discuss your answers.



Visual Evidence

Illustration 4: "Star-Spangled Heart"



(Library of Congress)



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Putting It All Together

By studying "*The Rockets' Red Glare*": *Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry* students have learned about the bombardment and about how it led Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner." They have also investigated how the War of 1812 and Key's song strengthened Americans' identification with their nation. The following activities will help students integrate and expand on what they have learned.

Activity 1: "You Are There"

Ask students to imagine they are soldiers inside Fort McHenry during the bombardment. They will need to review the materials in this lesson and will also want to consult Fort McHenry's [website](#). Ask them to write a letter home describing their experience.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort MCHenry

Activity 2: Debating the War of 1812

Francis Scott Key was not the only American to oppose the War of 1812. At its start, the war was intensely controversial, with the country deeply divided along political, economic, and regional lines. After the war, however, many people called it the "Second War of Independence." Ask students to explore some of the accounts of the war in their textbooks, in other history books, and in materials listed in the "Supplementary Resources" section of this lesson plan. Have them create charts or matrixes comparing the positions of different political parties, different economic groups, and different areas of the country before the outbreak of the War of 1812, during the war, and immediately after it. Hold a whole class discussion on the question, "Was the War of 1812 a good thing or a bad thing for America?"



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Activity 3: "The Theme of Our Nation"

In its obituary for Francis Scott Key, the *Baltimore American* wrote, "So long as patriotism dwells among us, so long will this song be the theme of our nation." Just as Key embodied contradictions—between opposing the war and rejoicing over the victory at Fort McHenry, between praising "the land of the free" and owning slaves—"The Star-Spangled Banner" calls up both pride in the nation and its ideals and questions about America's ability and willingness to live up to those ideals. Ask the students to list some of the ideals that they associate with "The Star-Spangled Banner." Ask them to suggest situations where they think the nation has not acted in accordance with those ideals. The discussion may well lead to strenuous disagreement, a demonstration of how deeply Americans feel about their national anthem. Then ask the students to identify for themselves what they think the ideals of the nation should be and to write a patriotic song that represents those ideals. Ask students to volunteer to perform their songs for the class.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Activity 4: Whose "Star-Spangled Banner"?

The legislation that made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the national anthem did not say how it should be performed. In 1957, the National Music Council developed a "Proposed Official Version of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'" The performance guidelines that went with the proposal said, "the anthem should always be performed in a manner that gives it due honor and respect."⁷

Many versions of "The Star-Spangled Banner" have been sung over the years, some in celebration, some in protest. Many have been controversial, particularly the performances of José Feliciano in 1968 and Jimi Hendrix in 1969. Ask the students to bring in any recordings of "The Star-Spangled Banner" that they can find. A number of performances are available on the web. Have the class listen to them and try to determine whether they meet the standard proposed in 1957. Ask them to try to come up with their own guidelines for how the anthem should be performed.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

Activity 5: Places That Define the Community

Fort McHenry is an important part of how Baltimore defines itself. Many other communities have such iconic places, like the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., the Old Water Tower in Chicago, Illinois, or the Space Needle in Seattle, Washington. Some of these places are imposing, some modest. Some are historic, some recent. In each case, residents think that something important would be lost if the place ceased to exist.

Ask students to search out places that help create their community's identity. Perhaps the Chamber of Commerce or the local historical society uses a particular place in its advertising or on its websites or brochures. Sometimes groups of historic places in a community work together to create its character. Assign groups of students to find out more about each of these places. The National Register of Historic Places, the nation's official list of places worthy of preservation, maintains an [online database](#) that students can search by county or state. Most of the historic places listed in the National Register are the ones that people really wanted to protect. Remind the students to get current photographs as well. If they are unable to find places in the local community, suggest that they investigate their county or state.

Ask them to use what they have learned to create a walking tour that would help visitors and newcomers understand what it is that makes the community unique and special. They also may want to consider creating an on-line travel itinerary. The National Register of Historic Places "Discover Our Shared Heritage" travel [itinerary](#) for Baltimore might be a useful model. Submit the completed walking tours and travel itineraries to the local chamber of commerce or historical society.

If the students identify a historic place that is threatened by neglect or destructive change, like an old movie theater, perhaps they could volunteer to work with the local historical society or other interested group to care for or protect the place. They may even want to consider helping document the historic place for possible listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register [website](#) contains information on how to go about doing that.



"The Rockets' Red Glare": Francis Scott Key and the Bombardment of Fort McHenry

References and Endnotes

Reading 2

Reading 2 was adapted from materials on the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine [website](#) and from Lonn Taylor, Kathleen M. Kendrick, and Jeffrey L. Brodie, *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Making of An American Icon* (New York: HarperCollins for the Smithsonian Institution, 2008).

¹Lonn Taylor, Kathleen M. Kendrick, and Jeffrey L. Brodie, *The Star-Spangled Banner: The Making of an American Icon* (New York: HarperCollins, for the Smithsonian Institution, 2008), 40.

²*Ibid.*

³Quoted in Harold I. Lessem and George C. MacKenzie, *Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Maryland* (Washington: National Park Service, 1954, reprinted 1961); available [online](#), Section h, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Reading 4

Reading 4 was based on Harold I. Lessem and George C. Mackenzie, *Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Maryland* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1954, reprinted 1961) and Taylor et al., *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

⁴Quoted in Taylor et al., *The Star-Spangled Banner*, 32

Illustration 3

⁵Scott S. Sheads, "'Yankee Doodle played': a Letter from Baltimore, 1814," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 76, no. 4 (Winter 1981), 381.

Photo 3

⁶ Taylor et al., *The Star-Spangled Banner*, 9

Activity 4

⁷Richard S. Hill, "A Proposed Official Version of 'The Star-Spangled Banner,'" *Notes*, 2nd Ser., 15, no. 1 (December 1957), 33-42, cited in Taylor et al., *The Star-Spangled Banner*, 56.