

Name: _____

Introduction to the War of 1812

On July 17, 1812, **President James Madison** declared war on Britain. With an army of only 7,000 poorly trained men and a navy of just 16 ships, America was not well prepared. America's first move was to attempt take control of Canada, which was at the time under British rule. While the Americans failed to take control of Canada, American naval victories fought on **Lake Erie** and **Lake Champlain** in the north stopped the British from invading America from Canada.

In the South, a British squadron landed on **Cumberland Island** after successfully attacking the town of St. Marys, Georgia on January 25, 1814. The British leader, **Admiral George Cockburn** declared the island to be "occupied territory." He said any enslaved Africans on the island were free. Slaves seeking freedom started flocking to the island from all over the coastline. The response was so great that a group of sixty-six slaves paddled twenty-three miles in a wooden canoe to reach the island. In all, 1,483 enslaved Africans joined the British squadron on Cumberland Island.

In August of 1814, the British landed in the Chesapeake Bay area with the goal of seizing Washington D.C. As the British army of approximately 4,000 approached America's capitol, the majority of Washington residents fled the sweltering city. Even though the American army, with President James Madison in attendance, tried to defeat the British in a battle at Bladensburg a few miles from the city, they were unsuccessful. A messenger was dispatched to the White House to warn First Lady Dolly Madison of the impending arrival of the British. She and her staff fled by carriage across the Potomac - taking with her a full-length portrait of George Washington that had been torn from a White House wall.

That evening, the British army reached Capitol Hill and began to destroy all public buildings in the city, including the **Capitol Building** and the **White House**. They also set fire to most of the Virginia countryside. The British then moved north to Baltimore, but were finally stopped when they reached **Baltimore Harbor**. They were unable to take **Fort McHenry**, and upon suffering heavy losses they retreated.

The American victory in Baltimore Harbor was witnessed by **Francis Scott Key**, a young poet-lawyer who had been sent aboard a British warship anchored in the Chesapeake Bay to negotiate an American prisoner's release. While being held on the boat, Francis Scott Key witnessed the battle, and seeing his country's flag still flying over the Fort the next morning, he was inspired to write a poem, the **Star-Spangled Banner**.

As the war continued, both the Americans and the British were running low on resources. In December 1814, American negotiators met with British diplomats in Belgium and signed the **Treaty of Ghent** which declared peace. Neither the Americans nor the British won the War of 1812, yet Americans showed the world that their young republic could succeed.

Answer the following on notebook paper:

1. What were the causes of the War of 1812?
2. Do you agree with Madison's decision to declare war on Britain? Why or why not?
3. Describe the American army in 1812.
4. What prevented the British from invading America from Canada?
5. In what way did some enslaved people benefit from the War of 1812?
6. What happened to the White House in August of 1814?
7. What inspired Francis Scott Key to write what became our national anthem, *The Star Spangled Banner*?
8. How did the War of 1812 end?

Introduction to the War of 1812

Answer Key:

1. What were the causes of the War of 1812?

The British were seizing American ships and forcing American soldiers to serve in the British navy (impressments); disputes over the location of the Canada-America border; alleged British support of Native Americans to fight American settlers/presence of British forts in the West

2. Do you agree with Madison's decision to declare war on Britain? Why or why not?

Answers will vary

3. Describe the American army in 1812.

With an army of only 7,000 poorly trained men and a navy of just 16 ships, America was not well prepared.

4. What prevented the British from invading America from Canada?

*The Americans defeated the British at **Lake Erie** and **Lake Champlain** in the north, keeping the British from invading America from Canada.*

5. In what way did some enslaved people benefit from the War of 1812?

When the British occupied Cumberland Island, Admiral George Cockburn declared any enslaved Africans on the island free. 1,483 enslaved Africans joined the British squadron on Cumberland Island for their freedom.

6. What happened to the White House in August of 1814?

After seizing Washington, the British began burning public buildings, including the White House.

7. What inspired Francis Scott Key to write what became our national anthem, *The Star Spangled Banner*?

Francis Scott Key witnessed the Battle at Fort McHenry while being held aboard a British warship anchored in the Chesapeake Bay. Seeing his country's flag still flying over the Fort the next morning, he was inspired to write the Star-Spangled Banner.

8. How did the War of 1812 end?

*Since both the Americans and the British were running low on resources, in December 1814 American negotiators met with British diplomats in Belgium and signed the **Treaty of Ghent** which declared peace. Neither the Americans or the British won the War of 1812, yet Americans showed the world that their young republic could succeed.*

"The Star-Spangled Banner"

Francis Scott Key, a young poet-lawyer, witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry while under British guard on an American truce ship in the Patapsco River. Seeing his country's flag still flying over the Fort the next morning, he was moved to pen these immortal lines:

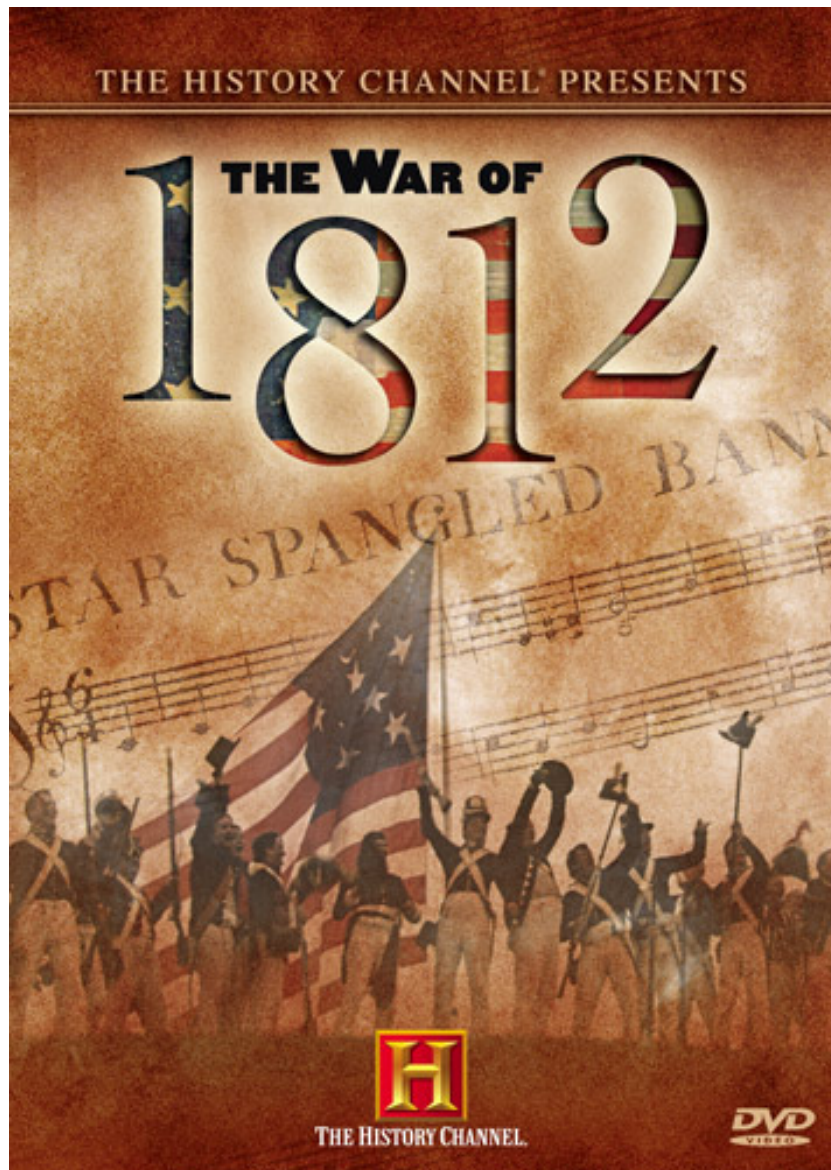
O say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming!
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through 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?

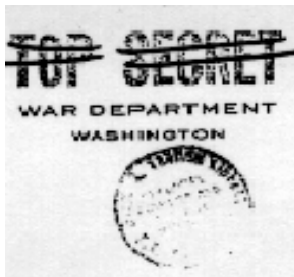
On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, now conceals, now discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the mornings' first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines on 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 should 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 loved homes and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven-rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved 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!

Movie Poster Example





June 1, 1809

Memorandum for President James Madison:

Subject: Continued problems with Britain

This memo is to update you on our pending problems with Britain.

As you know Sir, Britain and France still remain a problem to our country. Even though we as a country under former President Washington took a position of **neutrality** and vowed to not become involved in other nation's affairs, America continues to experience abuse from Britain and France.

Our Americans are continually being attacked by British and French war ships while at sea. While American shipping and trade with other countries may be important, it is currently putting us in danger. The French and British are seizing our ships and American sailors are being forced to serve in the British navy. This **impresment** (kidnapping) by the British is unacceptable.

Further, we continue to disagree with Britain over the location of the Canada and United States border. (Britain has several colonies in Canada.) Not to mention, we believe the British may be providing military support to Native Americans living here, so that they may fight Americans who are moving near their homes.

Since President Washington's term, from 1789-1796, our nation has adopted a policy of **isolationism** (avoiding alliances with other countries). It is perhaps time for you to reconsider this policy, and/or consider options for protecting our country against Britain and France. As you know, France and Britain are currently officially at war with one another. Perhaps there is some way you can use this to our advantage.

Regardless of what you decide, as President of the United States, something must be done to protect America at home and at sea. It is important to secure our country's safety with all deliberate speed.