

Defence of Ft. McHenry: The Original Star Spangled Banner

by Francis Scott Key

On September 14, 1814 young lawyer named Francis Scott Key watched the British naval forces attack an American fort named Fort McHenry near Baltimore Harbor. This was during the War of 1812. Key was inspired by the U.S. flag still flying after the assault and wrote a poem to honor the battle and the flag. The poem was later set to music, and the song was renamed "The Star-Spangled Banner." In 1931, it became the national anthem of the United States.

Defence of Fort M'Henry

O! say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd 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 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 wash'd out their foul foot-steps' 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.

Questions

1. The first sentence of the poem is as follows: "O! say can you see, by the dawn's early light, / What so proudly we hail'd 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?" Rewrite and simplify the sentence in modern language.
2. How is Key able to see the flag during the night?
3. The poet uses the alliterative phrase, "the foe's haughty host." Give another example of alliteration in the poem.
4. What is the rhyme scheme of the first stanza?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. ramparts
2. spangled
3. foe
4. refuge
5. conquer
6. triumph

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "O'er the **ramparts** we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?"

- a. trees and forest c. wide lake d. open field d. protective wall

2) "O! say, does that star-**spangled** banner yet wave..."

- a. tattered or old b. decorated c. outlined d. shaped

3) "Where the **foe 's** haughty host in dread silence reposes."

- a. friend b. enemy c. neighbor d. relative

4) "No **refuge** could save the hireling and slave..."

- a. soldier b. weapon c. school d. safe place

5) "Then **conquer** we must, when our cause it is just..."

- a. defeat b. surrender c. agree d. share

6) "And the star-spangled banner in **triumph** shall wave..."

- a. failure b. the night c. the sky d. victory