

The Star Spangled Banner Story

From 1812 to 1815, the United States fought England in the War of 1812. In September 1814, English ships fired on Fort McHenry, near Baltimore, Maryland. The fort returned fire.

Francis Scott Key, an American lawyer and poet, was on an English ship. He had come earlier, under a truce flag, to secure the release of Dr. William Beanes of Baltimore. While on board the ship he learned that the English were about to attack Fort McHenry. The English knew that if Key left the ship he would warn the Americans of the upcoming attack. They knew they could not let him leave. So they kept him on board until the battle was over. The battle lasted into the night.

A fort has very high walls to keep people from getting in. It also prevents people from seeing what is going on inside. So even though Francis Scott Key was watching from the ship, he could not tell what was going on inside. Also, at that time there were no electric lights. So Key had to rely on the light from the bombs and rockets that were being fired back and forth for his light. He still couldn't see inside the Fort, but he could see the flag flying above it. He knew that if England won the battle they would remove America's flag and fly their own. So through the night he continued to watch that flag so he would know who was winning the battle.

Key anxiously awaited sunrise. The stars and stripes still waived proudly. The fort held out! Meanwhile, Key had begun to write a poem in the light of the rocket's red glare. He finished it the next night, and it was later set to music. The poem was originally called Defense of Fort McHenry. Even though it was sung by Americans as our anthem for many years, it wasn't until March 3, 1931 that the American Congress proclaimed it as the national anthem, 116 years after it was first written.

If you listen carefully to the lyrics of the song, it explains what Francis Scott Key went through that night and you will remember the story of how it was written.

The Star Spangled Banner

Oh, 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 thru the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, 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! Oh 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!

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n 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!