

Philip F. Haxel, Sr. Patriotism Award
2008 Essay Contest

Winner & Recipient of the Baton of Patriotism

Faith E. Nowlin, Grade 4
Eagle's Nest Home School
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Wood Bridge, VA 22192

Fort McHenry and the National Anthem

Without Fort McHenry and the brave men who fought there during the War of 1812, "The Star Spangled Banner" wouldn't be our national anthem.

Fort McHenry, a star-shaped red brick fort, is located on Whetstone Point in the Patapsco River, Maryland. According to The Star Spangled Banner by Deborah Kent, one thousand American troops fought under Colonel George Armistead. The fort's cannons could fire forty-two pound shells to keep the British back.

The British wanted to attack Baltimore after burning Washington D.C. in the summer of 1814. The British and the Americans were fighting over who would control trading on the seas. The British planned to attack Fort McHenry by ship, while more troops sneaked ashore in small boats.

The British expected an easy victory. But the men who fought at the fort wouldn't give up. They wouldn't surrender to the British! They fought bravely through the night. "The rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our Flag was still there."

Francis Scott Key, the author of "The Star Spangled Banner," saw this bravery during the battle of Baltimore first-hand. He and Colonel Skinner were watching from the deck of a British ship. They were there because they had been trying to free a friend whom the British had arrested. His name was Dr. Beanes. The British set him free, but they had to stay on the ship until the battle was over in case they had heard too much of the British's battle plans. The great bravery Francis Scott Key saw inspired him to write a poem on the back of a letter. He titled it, "The Defence of Fort McHenry." It later became known as "The Star Spangled Banner."

The great Flag flying over the fort also inspired him. When he woke up in the morning, he knew the battle was over. Who had won? "Oh say does that star spangled banner yet wave, o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" Then he saw the American Flag still flying over Fort McHenry! The British had retreated. Francis

Scott Key was so thankful and so inspired that he wrote the four verses which, over the years, would become our national anthem.

Each of the four verses tells the story of the battle at Fort McHenry. Each verse ends with the words, "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

I am thankful to the brave men who fought at Fort McHenry, so I, too, can live in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Grade 3 Finalist

Destiny Presbury, Grade 3
Church Creek Elementary
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Waving Proud and Free

Our National Anthem was written during the War of 1812. Fort Whetstone was first built to protect Baltimore during the Revolutionary War. After that war, James McHenry helped raise money to make the fort stronger. To honor him, they renamed the fort, Fort McHenry.

During the War of 1812, Francis Scott Key was in Baltimore to help free his friend who was captured by the British. Colonel John Skinner helped Francis Scott Key get his friend back from the British. The three men were not allowed to go back to Baltimore until the British were finished bombing Fort McHenry. The British probably kept them out on the water so the Fort might not bomb them as much because the Americans were out there.

The British bombed Fort McHenry for 25 hours; then they stopped because they were unable to destroy the fort. After the bombing, Francis Scott Key looked at the fort to see if our Flag was still standing.

The Flag was torn but still waving. I feel proud to be a free citizen of America when I see our Flag waving strong and free. That is when he wrote a poem called, "Defence of Fort McHenry." That was a good title because Baltimore was defending the fort and won. The poem was set to music and became "The Star Spangled Banner." Later, it became our national anthem.

Grade 5 Finalist

Cecilia Morkovsky, Grade 5
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“The Creation of the National Anthem at Fort McHenry”

During the war of 1812, Francis Scott Key went with Colonel Skinner to meet with the British Royal Navy to arrange for the release of Key’s friend, Dr. Beanes. The British agreed to release Dr. Beanes, but the three men were kept on a truce ship and not allowed to return to Baltimore until after the British attacked Fort McHenry. On the morning of September 13, 1814, the three men watched as the British bombarded the fort continuously for twenty-five hours. Rockets were soaring, and bombs were bursting. The night was long, but Key watched faithfully. As the dawn began to break on the morning of September 14, Francis Scott Key saw the American Flag still waving over the fort. With his heart feeling joyful and triumphant, he began to write down the words that expressed what he saw and what he experienced during the fight. He wanted these words to honor the brave soldiers that fought so hard to save the fort and Baltimore. The poem was first titled, “Defence of Fort McHenry.” It was later renamed “The Star Spangled Banner.”

This is how the battle at Fort McHenry helped create the words that Francis Scott Key wrote, that later became our National Anthem.

Fort McHenry will always be a special place to me. It reminds me that anything is possible. You can be helping a friend, making a Flag, writing a poem, or protecting a fort, and become a special part of history, touch someone’s life, or impact a nation.

I wrote a poem that expresses my thoughts on Fort McHenry and the “Star-Spangled Banner” and how one created the other.

“Fort McHenry’s Anthem Was Born”

O’ say as you stand on this sacred ground,
Can you see the rockets’ red glare,
The bombs bursting in air?
O’ what a sight, O’ what a sound!

Through the twenty-five hours of perilous fight,
The brave soldiers worked hard to protect Baltimore,
Skinner, Beanes, and Key watched toward the shore,
Not knowing the Fort’s fate throughout the night!

By the dawn's early light, the three men would see,
That because of the brave, we were still free!
Mary Pickersgill's Flag of broad stripes and bright stars forever waves
For we are the land of the free and the home of the brave!

O' say as you stand on this sacred ground,
O' what a sight, O' what a sound!
Remember the poem that is now our nation's song,
With hand upon your heart, sing it proud and sing it strong!
You will leave here today with an everlasting memory,
For this song was written in honor of Fort McHenry!

By: Cecilia Morkovsky, 5th Grade

References

1. 1977 Historical Document Company.
 2. National Park Services: "Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine."
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