



The Star-Spangled Banner

Tune: John Stafford Smith (1750-1836)

Words: Francis Scott Key (1779-1843)

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Broad Description

The Star-Spangled Banner is the national anthem of the United States of America.

Background Information

The Star-Spangled Banner was “born” in 1814 during an unexpected victory for the Americans over the British during the Battle of Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland. Its lyrics invoke the pride and undying hope of the American spirit. The song and the banner that inspired it serve as a symbol to the world of our nation’s democratic ideas.

TUNE

The tune for our national anthem is an English song from the late 1700’s called “To Anacreon in Heaven” and also known as “The Anacreontic Song.” It was composed for The Anacreontic Society—a social club in London. (Anacreon was an ancient Greek poet noted for his praise of love and wine which is likely why our national anthem has at times been misinterpreted as a drinking song.) This group’s diverse membership included university men, actors, tradesmen, gentlemen and commoners and they met regularly for a formal concert, dinner, and a social time afterward where they entertained each other singing songs.

The song was quite popular in England and became so also in America where its light-heartedness lyrics were replaced with more serious ones pertaining to politics and current issues of the day. Prior to 1814 Francis Scott Key had written at least one other parody for this tune in 1804 under the title “When the Warrior Returns from the Battle Afar” as a tribute to Stephen Decatur, a hero of the Tripolitan War. One can conclude that he either had the tune in mind when he began his draft for “The Defence of Fort M’Henry” or he revised his text to fit the meter and rhythm of this melody when he completed his final version a few days later while staying at Baltimore’s Indian Queen Hotel. Further evidence that Key was thinking of the song “To Anacreon in Heaven” is its ending lyrics “May our club flourish happy, united and free!”

LYRICS

The story of the writing of the words for our national anthem is captivating (pun intended). In 1814, recovering from an attack by the British on Washington D.C. where the Presidential Mansion (White House) as well as other public buildings had been attacked and burned. This is the occasion in which Dolly Madison led the staff

in saving national valuables such as the silverware and George Washington's famous portrait. During the War of 1812, other important artifacts had been given to citizens to keep safe. One of these citizens was Dr. William Beanes, a physician who upheld his oath and treated wounded English as well as American soldiers. He was captured by the British and taken to Baltimore to be tried as a political prisoner. Francis Scott Key, a prominent lawyer and army veteran, was asked to obtain the doctor's release. Key took Colonel John Skinner, an expert in prisoner exchange, with him to make their case on a British ship in Baltimore's harbor where Dr. Beanes was being held. Initially refusing, the British admiral was swayed by letters Key had brought with him from British soldiers who had received kind treatment by the American physician. It was agreed that Beanes, Skinner and Key would be free to return to American soil but because they now knew of the British plan for an attack on Fort McHenry, they could not leave the harbor until the battle was finished. The bombing began just after dawn on September 13th and continued for 25 hours. As they waited 8 miles out from land (the British ships could not get closer because the harbor was filled with ships the U.S. had sunk), the Americans were convinced that the British would be successful as from their viewpoint the skies were filled with fire and smoke from rockets deployed by the ship which they could not have known were mostly too far out of range to hit their target. At dawn on September 14th as the firing ceased, Key used a telescope to look through the smoke expecting to see Fort McHenry in ruins. Instead he saw a huge American flag triumphantly blowing in the breeze! (It has been said that Key could not possibly have seen the 42 x 30 foot flag from that distance, a [livecam](#) now supports this fact.) Awestruck by the sight, the lawyer pulled one of the soldier's letters from his pocket and on the blank side began setting his emotions to verse. He polished his poem, originally titled "The Defence of Fort M'Henry" two days later when he and his American companions returned to land. It is not true that Francis Scott Key wrote a poem which someone else later connected to the English tune by John Stafford Smith. The first edition of the song printed and circulated as a broadside on Saturday, September 17th, included the intended tune's title. It was published by two Baltimore newspapers and soon after had appeared in other cities' papers along the East Coast.

One copy of Key's original handwritten lyrics is on display in Baltimore at the [Maryland Historical Society](#). The original flag which was the inspiration for Francis Scott Key's impassioned lyrics is on permanent display at the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington D.C. It has a fascinating history of its own which is not included in this plan. You can find student friendly information [here](#) and [here](#).

Although Francis Scott Key's lyrics originally "fit" the tune that he had in his head as he penned the words to his poem, "The Defence of Fort M'Henry," over the years, that tune has morphed into a song that musically supports the intent and integrity of Key's lyrics.

Analysis

FORM

The original song was a verse/refrain with the last strain repeated as the chorus. No longer performed this way, we now sing it with a form of AABC, each section eight measures in length with a one beat anacrusis. Each of these sections can be subdivided into two 4 measure question/answer type phrases.

RHYTHM

Today this piece is notated in 3/4 meter although in its first edition the meter was 6/4. The triple meter lends itself to telling a story because of its lyrical flow just as in a ballad. Each section consists of two 4 measure phrases, each beginning with a one beat anacrusis. It's interesting that each of these phrases can also be broken into two measure fragments which also universally begin with an anacrusis. This constant pursuit of the downbeat gives the piece the distinct impression of looking for an answer and may be the reason Key subconsciously used it as the rhythmic model for his lyrics which are constant questions. In the first edition of this piece, none of the anacrusis were dotted rhythms. Over time though, the even anacrusis were replaced at the beginning of the first two phrases of each A section with a more insistent dotted eighth/sixteenth note pattern. This dotted rhythm disappears after the first half of the melody as if the answer to the question is becoming clearer and the questioner grows more and more confident in the answer they had hoped for. In fact, the anacrusis becomes a very stable quarter note to initiate the final phrase. In current practice, a fermata is added in the middle of the final phrase on the word "free" likely because this word is so integral to our American beliefs, but it also gives the effect of prolonging the suspense before we get to the affirmation that our we'd longed for. The dotted eighth/sixteenth rhythm serves a second purpose in that it gives the illusion of a march because the landing on the downbeat feels more martial, like the left/right march of soldiers. This contributes to the patriotic feel of the piece. Although the original rhythm of "To Anacreon in Heaven" influenced the writing of the lyrics, the emotional impact of the lyrics has resulted in rhythmic modifications over time which has stripped the tune of its original identity so that the words and music are wedded as if they had never been independent of each other.

MELODY

The melody is Major with a distinctive outline of a major triad at the beginning. In current performance the triad begins at the first anacrusis but the original tune began the triad at the downbeat—the now familiar opening triad did not appear in arrangements of the song until the mid-1800's, perhaps descending to amplify the questioning nature of the lyrics. The original song, "To Anacreon in Heaven" also did not have the sharped 4th near the end of each of the first three phrases. This was added by Thomas Carr in his 1814 edition of "The Star Spangled Banner," probably to give the tune a more dramatic effect. The leading tone reinforces the anticipation and tension created by the rhythm, supporting the questioning of the lyrics. Due to its large range, one can argue that in general this melody is difficult to sing, but this is also because it moves more by skips than by steps. These intervals also persistently move up and down allowing us to aurally experience Mary Pickersgill's flag defiantly billowing in the breeze. The first question/answer phrase is repeated which helps the singer gain some confidence and then the melody becomes easier to sing (even though the tessitura moves higher) as it moves to mostly steps except for the leap of a 6th down near the end of the third phrase. The melody exudes confidence as the fourth and final phrase begins with repeated notes and then ends with one more flowing flag movement as the pitches move up and then down by steps ending on the tonal center. This melodic movement from the more-difficult-to-sing skips to steps and finally to repeated notes mirrors the initial angst about whether the Americans were losing the battle at Fort McHenry to the visual assurance that the Americans had not surrendered.

HARMONY

The harmony is simple with the first three melodic phrases accompanied by only I & V/V7 chords, aside from the late addition of the chromatic seventh leading to the V before the final phrase. In its original form, the last eight measure section was a repeated chorus, and this is where a IV chord breaks up the monotony harmonically. The accompaniment harmony of The Star-Spangled Banner is inconsequential which is probably why the song is so often performed a cappella.

TIMBRE

For this 4th -6th grade teaching plan the only timbre is the singing voice. During the delivery of lessons a variety of accompaniment versions may be used as well as performances by various ensembles but the focus will be on a cappella singing. It must be noted that because the repeated first melodic idea basically uses the lower vocal register, the third phrase forces the singer to use the higher register and the final phrase requires both registers, the opportunity to explore both the light and heavy vocal registers as well as to work on blending the two is a bonus!

TEXTURE

For this plan, the focus is on a monophonic melody. There are, of course, a multitude of arrangements for chorus, band, orchestra and as accompaniment for individual performers in a variety of styles.

DYNAMICS

The dynamics used in performing this piece are dependent upon the arrangement. The original 1814 publication had no dynamics indicated and the current "[Service Version](#)" available on NAFME's website includes a great number of crescendo and diminuendo markings which coincide with the upward and downward movement of the melody.



The HEART

The heart of "The Star-Spangled Banner" is its melodic progression from uneasy skips, to confident steps and finally to boldly repeated notes, which builds confidence and arouses a sense of pride and patriotism for our country.

Introducing the Piece

Without any preliminary conversation ask students to raise their hands as soon as they can name the tune you are playing. It's likely someone will know the title or that it is our national anthem within just a few seconds. Ask for volunteers to name where they have heard it before following this with asking how many students think they know it. Allow 5 minutes to complete the "Star-Mangled Banner" worksheet and collect. Provide an opportunity for students to listen to multiple versions by artists of their choice. This could be done on individual laptops, in small groups, or as a homework assignment. The goal is for students to be immersed in the song, hearing it four or more times prior to their next class. End the lesson with all students standing and singing the national anthem with words projected.

SKILL Outcome

Students will read and sing melodic patterns that repeat, step, and skip.

STRATEGIES

- ★ Do the Dots *(also useful as an informal assessment)*
 - Use magnetized dots on a projected staff or polyspots/students on a floor staff and later individual staves and bingo chips to reinforce the concept of repeats (staying the same), steps, and skips.
- ★ Take a Look
 - Project or use individual copies of the notation with examples of each interval circled asking students to label each. Reverse the process asking students to find and circle examples of each.
- ★ Anybody Perfect? *(also useful as an informal assessment)*
 - Teams get a set of 4 pitch pattern cards—one repeats, one steps, one skips and one leaps. As a team they sight read each and determine which they want to sing for a grade ☺ (Eliminate repeats and ask again!)
- ★ Give Me a Hand
 - Holding one hand still as the resting tone, lead students in physically indicating repeats, steps and skips.
- ★ Ladder Up
 - Use a visual “ladder”, such as a tone bell staircase or a vertical stacking of pitches to literally indicate repeats, steps and skips to lead students in singing various patterns
- ★ Poison Pattern
 - Choose a pattern or a group of patterns (for instance, any that move by skips) that students should sit down on when they hear played. Solicit student ideas for movement for the others or they can simply move to a new location each time a pattern is played—except for the “poison” pattern.
- ★ Over and Over
 - During each lesson of this unit provide an opportunity for students to sing the anthem with various support. For instance, with a rebus version, with a karaoke video, with the lyrics in Francis Scott Key’s handwriting, echoing each individual phrase, etc.
 - Listen to/view various artists performing the anthem through an online listing such as [Choose a Star](#). A recording of the original tune [“To Anacreon in Heaven”](#) might lead to an interesting discussion as well.
 - *The purpose of this strategy is to provide multiple listenings so that the tune can be accurately audiated and therefore more successfully sung aloud—the general familiarity of this melody will help students to more easily hear the difference in steps & skips*

ASSESSMENT

- ★ Paper/Pencil Test
 - Students are asked to label repeats, steps and skips on a melody on which various patterns are circled.
- ★ Be a Star Stations
 - In small groups students rotate through four stations (one for each section of the Star-Spangled Banner), rehearsing as a team and then performing for each other individually with peer assistance for improvement.
 - Perform the song, standing in groups, with each section randomly assigned using a rubric to assess accuracy. If time, re-assign each section to a different group and repeat. Consider video recording.
- ★ Do it with Data
 - Use Smart Music or Singing Coach to record to auto assess each student singing the song.
 - Use Voice Memo function on iPod or iPad or any handheld device for students to individually record themselves singing the anthem. Use a tone bell or other instrument to provide the first pitch. Allow notation and lyrics for these performance recordings.

KNOWLEDGE Outcome

Students will recognize that different songs can have their own history, vocabulary and performance practice.

STRATEGIES

- ★ The Star-Mangled Banner (*can be used as a pre-assessment*)
 - Give students a few minute to fill in the blanks for the words to the first verse of the Star-Spangled Banner.
- ★ Hooking the History
 - Use **one** of a number of 1-5 minute clips which briefly share the Who, What, When, Where and Why of the writing of the anthem's words.
 - Project a slideshow or **video** with "Take out the piece..." ideas accompanied by Star-Spangled arrangement.
- ★ Historically Speaking (*can be used as a pre-assessment*)
 - Use the "guess" column on this worksheet prior to the history of the banner lesson documenting number of correct answers without indicating right/wrong. Later, students self-correct their previous answers. *informal*
- ★ Sharing the Story
 - Share a slideshow of the history of the Star-Spangled Banner illustrated by former students providing the opportunity for volunteers to create new illustrations for the future. Review with new version before assessment.
- ★ Lucky 13 (*also useful as an informal assessment*)
 - Use sentence strips with small groups or individual worksheets for students to determine the chronological order of events leading to the Star-Spangled Banner becoming our national anthem
- ★ Oh Say...Do You Know These Words?
 - Using any written version of the 1st verse lyrics, as a selected artist performance is being played, have students circle any words of which they are not absolutely certain of the meaning. With a partner complete this sheet.
- ★ Line by Line
 - Sing each phrase of the anthem asking students to echo it back (this also reinforces the skill outcome) and after each phrase ask Who, What, When, Where, and Why.
 - Assign one phrase to each small group asking them to paraphrase and modernize the text.
- ★ What's Your Point? (*also useful as an informal assessment*)
 - Using replicas of stars the size of those on the original star-spangled banner have each individual in small groups of 5 write one fact or vocabulary definition on a point of their star to later be displayed as a review.
- ★ Silent Movie
 - View short clips of vocal performances in various musical styles with the sound turned off asking students to describe the performance practices they see and infer what their music style might be
- ★ Star-Spangled Sites
 - Provide links for students to access at home or if available, online at school, about the history of the Star-Spangled Banner, other patriotic songs, other national anthems, flag etiquette etc.
- ★ Take Me Out to the Ballgame
 - Use a Venn diagram to compare two songs traditionally sung at baseball games focusing on how their performance practices differ
- ★ What's the Difference?
 - Compare and contrast the performance practice differences between songs in different styles such as Ellington's "C Jam Blues" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

ASSESSMENT

- ★ Paper/Pencil Test
 - Students fill in the blanks with correct words to verse 1 and short answer with a word bank
- ★ Then and Now
 - Record each classroom initially performing the Star-Spangled Banner and again following these lessons.
 - Students will write a reflection on how their final performance differs from their first based on what they've learned about performance practice.

AFFECTIVE Outcome

Students will reflect on the purpose and value of anthems and recognize that music is used to help us share who we are and what we believe.

STRATEGIES

- ★ What's It All About, Anthem?
 - Give pairs or small groups of students (depending upon the number of anthems you want to use) a copy of another country's national anthem. If possible provide access to a recording as well. Allow 5 minutes for study and then ask each to share what they learned about that country's values or history through the song.
 - At a subsequent class consider looking at all four verses of the Star-Spangled Banner to answer the question, "*What American values are reflected in the words of the Star-Spangled Banner?*"
- ★ America the Beautiful—or Not
 - Sing this patriotic song and speculate that perhaps it should replace the Star-Spangled Banner as our national anthem. Insist on 2 minutes of silence as students read through/think through to determine if they are for or against this idea. Divide the class by their vote and facilitate a (hopefully heated) discussion about their choice or have each group draft a letter to Congress supporting their point of view.
- ★ And Now a Word from Our Sponsors...
 - Play a few commercial jingles asking students to name the product and then discuss what the jingle tells us about the product
 - Answer the question "*How is a commercial jingle like an anthem?*"
- ★ Father Knows Best...or Ask Mom
 - Invite (or assign) students to ask an adult the same initial question they answered, "*What does the Star-Spangled Banner mean to YOU?*" and allow class time for some sharing.
 - Encourage contact with a member of the U.S. military asking the same question. (Skype?)
 - Monitor Olympic coverage for any mention of the U.S. or another country's anthem
- ★ Turn and Talk
 - Possible questions to be offered during various lessons as student understanding progresses, discussing with partners, small groups or whole class
 - *What is a national anthem?*
 - *Why do we need a national anthem...or do we?*
 - *Are there other types of "anthems" besides those for countries?*
 - *Is the Star-Spangled Banner the best choice for the national anthem of the United States?*

ASSESSMENT

- ★ Short Answer using one of these questions
 - *Why does a country need a national anthem—or why not?*
 - *What does the Star-Spangled Banner say about who we are as Americans?*
- ★ Essay
 - Select a song, or write your own words to a tune you know, that could serve as your own personal anthem. Justify your choice with a description of how it reflects who you are.
- ★ Then and Now Take Two
 - Compare students' initial response to the question "*What does the Star-Spangled Banner mean to YOU?*" with their final response to the same question.

Music Selection

Like it or not, as Americans, our students need to know the Star-Spangled Banner. Why consider it just our duty to teach it when we can delight in sharing its story! The "impossible to sing" argument has supported petitions for other patriotic pieces to be considered as our national anthem even prior to the Star-Spangled Banner's adoption in 1931, but in analyzing how this melody supports the conflict/resolution we Americans have experienced throughout history, one must agree that the choice of this tune is perfect! Although we waver, we inevitably return to our democratic ideals.

Additional Resources

- ♪ [Music K-8 Magazine](#): Volume 10 Issue 5 and Volume 21 Issue 4 or downloadable kit
- ♪ [Barat Education Foundation](#)-Teaching with Primary Sources: historical pictures slideshow illustrating lyrics
- ♪ [American Flag Foundation](#): resources for educators
- ♪ [Colonial Music Institute](#): Music of the War of 1812 in America sheet music
- ♪ WE Publications Listening Guides: permanently out of print (*an older colleague may have a copy* ☺)
- ♪ YouTube links: [A visit to Fort McHenry](#); [Smithsonian Founding Fragments](#); [Battle of Baltimore](#); [Story Behind the Star-Spangled Banner](#)
- ♪ Teaser videos: [Battle of Fort McHenry](#) (1'34" Smithsonian Channel), [The War of 1812](#) (1'23" PBS)
- ♪ [A Star Spangled Story](#) (Smithsonian) and [Star Spangled 200](#) (Key Cam)
- ♪ [Hold the Fort Game](#): works best in Google Chrome browser
- ♪ Digital files from this presentation can be found on the [More Music](#) page of the website listed below.

Contact Info: Judy@MakeJoyfulSound.org

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**About the Star-Spangled Banner, John Philip Sousa said,
“besides its soul-stirring words, it is the spirit of the music that inspires.”**