

The War of 1812

Overview

Students will assume the role of President James Madison and brainstorm solutions on how to solve America's pending problems with Britain and France in the early 1800s. Students will then learn about Madison's actual choice to declare war, thus beginning the War of 1812. After learning about the war and important occurrences during its two year span, students will exhibit their understandings by imagining that a movie about the war is being made and designing a poster for advertisement purposes.

Grade

8

North Carolina Essential Standards

- 8.H.1.5 - Analyze the relationship between historical context and decision-making.
- 8.H.2.1 - Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts (e.g. war, slavery, states' rights and citizenship and immigration policies) on the development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.3 - Summarize the role of debate, compromise, and negotiation during significant periods in the history of North Carolina and the United States.

Essential Questions

- In what ways were France and Britain angering America during the early 1800s?
- What choices did President James Madison explore to solve the pending issues with France and Britain?
- Why did Madison make the choice to declare war with Britain?
- What were the important events of the War of 1812?
- Who was Francis Scott Key?

Materials

- War of 1812 Memo, attached
- Introduction to the War of 1812; reading, questions, and answer key attached
- Star-Spangled Banner, attached
- Movie Poster Example, attached

Duration

60 minutes

Procedure

President Madison, What Will You Do?

1. As a warm-up, tell students to imagine that they are James Madison, President of the United States in 1809. Hand out the attached memo and instruct students to read it and silently consider the decision before them, as Madison. Once students have formed some initial thoughts, place them into small groups to brainstorm at least 5 ideas for handling the situation with Britain and France and to highlight the option they feel would be most effective. (Example ideas might include declaring war on one or both countries, forming an alliance with one of the countries, etc.)
2. After approximately 10 minutes of small group discussion, have students present their ideas to the remainder of class for further debate and discussion. Note student ideas on the board and encourage the

class to challenge one another on the effectiveness of the ideas posed. Teachers may want to have the class vote on which idea overall they feel would be the best choice for Madison to make in 1809.

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3. Explain to students that while the memo they just reviewed is fictional, the situation with which they just grappled was actually faced by Madison and the United States in the early 1800s. Give students some background information on America's situation in the early 1800s, such as:
 - In 1809, President James Madison became the fourth president of the United States of America. Still a fairly new nation, he faced the dilemma of how to protect Americans at sea from attacks from French and British ships. Madison realized he could not continue Washington's policy of **isolationism**. Thus, he offered a deal to both France and Britain that if their country would stop attacking American ships, American would no longer trade with their enemy. Britain refused the offer, but Napoleon, Emperor of the French Empire, agreed. America thus stopped all trade with Britain. Yet, American ships continued to be attacked, and Madison came to the conclusion that to keep America's sailors safe, he would have to declare war. In June of 1812, he did just that, and the War of 1812 officially began.
4. Give students the attached handout and questions on the War of 1812 as an individual or partner assignment. Once students have finished, go over the answers as a class.

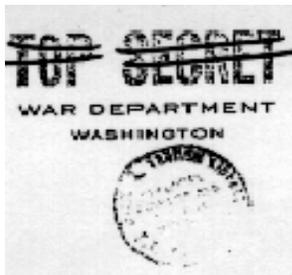
The Star-Spangled Banner

5. Focus students on the **Battle of Fort McHenry**, reminding students that there was a key eyewitness to this battle. Encourage students to imagine being **Francis Scott Key**, who was on a boat watching as his country was attacked by the British, by setting the stage with the following:
 - The date is September 13, 1814. You, Francis Scott Key, are a lawyer and a poet. Yesterday you received a very big job, handed down by President Madison. He sent you to Chesapeake Bay to go aboard a British warship and negotiate the release of an American prisoner. While on the boat, the British opened fire on Fort McHenry, which guards the city of Baltimore. Now that a battle is ensuing, the British will not let you leave the ship. You are helpless as you watch from the boat's deck, well into the night. All you can see for the most part is hazy fog and smoke, and every time you think you might get a glimpse of what is happening onshore it seems the air just gets thicker. You can hear loud firing and bombing, and you finally drift off to sleep not knowing what is to become of the nation you call home. When you finally startle awake early the next morning, you are finally able to see a little bit of the fort. Your stomach leaps as you search the sky, for you know if you see the flag, it means the Americans have won. Finally, in the midst of bursting shells, you see the large flag bearing 15 stars billowing in the morning air.
6. Discuss:
 - How would you feel as you listened to the battle wage on shore? What types of things would be at risk for the nation? For you personally?
 - What would you be wondering as you drifted off to sleep to the sounds of gunfire and bombs in the distance?
 - How would you feel as you searched the sky for the flag? How would you feel once you realized the flag was still there, and that America had not been defeated?
7. Hand out a copy of the Star-Spangled Banner (attached), explaining that Key's words were played when the British surrendered at the Battle of New Orleans, January 8, 1815. On March 3, 1931, "The Star Spangled Banner" was officially declared America's national anthem, 117 years after it had been written, at a time when there were forty-eight stars on the flag. Instruct students to partner up and focus on the first stanza of the poem/song. Tell students to brainstorm ideas of what they think the words and phrases represent. After approximately 5 minutes, have them report back to class.

8. Next, play a recording of the Star-Spangled Banner for students. Afterwards, discuss:
- What images come to your mind as you listen to the song?
 - What emotions do you feel as you listen?
 - Why do you think this song is performed before public events that take place across America (i.e. sports events)?
 - Why do you think this song was chosen to be our national anthem? Do you agree that this is an appropriate choice? Why or why not?

Create a Movie Poster for the War of 1812

9. As a culminating activity, tell students that they have been hired by a movie company who will be making a film about the War of 1812. They have been hired to create a movie poster for advertisement purposes. The poster must represent the War of 1812, containing text and images that will give potential moviegoers an understanding of what happened during the War of 1812. Project the attached example, asking students to clarify what the poster represents regarding the War of 1812.
10. Once students have completed their posters, display them around the classroom and give the class time to circulate in a gallery walk and view all of the finished products. Use the War of 1812 events illustrated in the posters as a means of reviewing the important events of the war.



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.

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's 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!

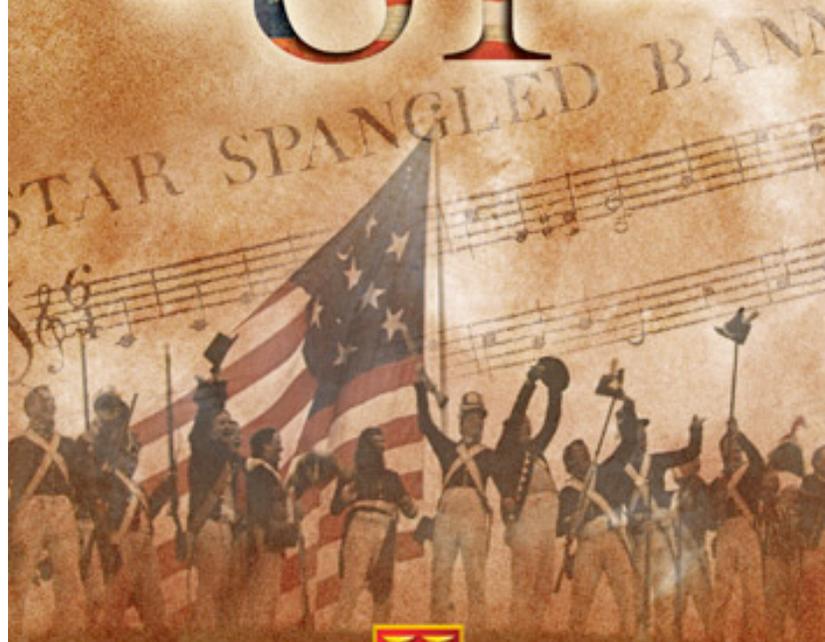
And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:
And 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

THE HISTORY CHANNEL PRESENTS

THE WAR OF 1812



THE HISTORY CHANNEL

DVD
VIDEO