



A Star-Spangled Story

The Birth of Our National Anthem

*Oh! say, can you see,
by the dawn's early light...*

How many times have you sung those words? Have you ever wondered what they mean and where they came from?

The person to thank is a man named Francis Scott Key. He was a lawyer and a poet in the years after the Revolutionary War.

Those were exciting times. America was newly independent from Great Britain. We were looking to expand west, and to spread our wings as a new nation. But in 1812, we hit a big snag. We went to war with Great Britain.

The War of 1812 was a mess, and by 1814, we were losing badly. In August, the British marched into Washington and stormed into the deserted White House, gobbled down a big dinner, and started setting fires. By the time they left, most of the city was in flames, including the White House, the Capitol building, and the Library of Congress.

Meanwhile, Mr. Key was worried about his good friend, Dr. William Beanes. He had been seized by British soldiers and taken prisoner on a British ship. Mr. Key didn't just sit around and wait for news. He went looking for the British fleet. He found them on the Potomac River. Dr. Beanes was there.

Mr. Key convinced the British that his friend had been imprisoned unfairly. They agreed to set him free. But not so fast. The British were about to launch an attack on Baltimore. The two Americans would have to wait on a ship and watch while the British bombed the city.

It was a terrible night. The British fired more than 1,500 bombs, and troops stormed the shore. The sky turned black with smoke. Mr. Key kept his stinging eyes on the enormous American flag hanging over Fort McHenry. As long as that flag was raised, the American troops were surviving.

In the morning, the bombing stopped and the smoke cleared. Our flag was still there! Mr. Key pulled an envelope out of his pocket and jotted down the words that would soon be famous: "Oh! say, can you see, by the dawn's early light . . ."

When he returned to Washington, the words were set to music. Everyone loved the song. And in 1931, "The Star-Spangled Banner" became our national anthem.

By Lauren Tarshis, Editor, *Storyworks*
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Dear Parents

I hope you and your child enjoy reading this interesting article about the writing of the "Star-Spangled Banner," our national anthem. Be on the lookout for a couple of idioms and some wonderfully descriptive adjectives. Thanks for having your child read this passage out loud.



TIP OF THE WEEK

An idiom is a common saying that doesn't make sense literally but that expresses an idea vividly. "It's raining cats and dogs" is a familiar idiom. Young students often read idioms literally and get confused about the meaning of the passage in which they occur. Please find the two idioms in this piece, listed below, and discuss them with your child.

The Questions

What do these two idioms mean?

1. "We . . . spread our wings as a new nation" _____

2. "in 1812 we hit a big snag" _____

List three examples of descriptive phrases that helped you understand this story better:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

We have completed this assignment together.

 Child's Signature

 Parent's Signature