

Broad Stripes, Bright Stars

Teacher Guide for the Classroom Video

Introduction to the Classroom Activity

In this activity, students will watch and discuss a 12-minute video of a theater presentation created by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Ideas for extension activities are also included in this guide.

This guide includes:

- **Historical Background Information**
- **Introduction to the Video**- Introduction to the Video includes a brief description of the theater performance.
- **Thematic Warm-Up Questions**
- **Focus and Discussion Questions**- Before each act, share focus questions that students should consider while they are watching that act. After each act, review answers to the focus questions. A Talk about the discussion questions, to follow-up on the content and help students connect to prior knowledge. Possible answers to questions are included in parenthesis and tips are included in italics.
- **Extension Activities**
- **Lyrics to The Star-Spangled Banner**



Leigh Jameson
performing as
Mary Pickersgill at the
National Museum of
American History

Historical Background Information

In the summer of 1813, Mary Pickersgill (1776–1857) was contracted to sew two flags for Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland. The one that became the Star-Spangled Banner was a 30 x 42-foot garrison flag; the other was a 17 x 25-foot storm flag for use in inclement weather. Pickersgill, a thirty-seven-year-old widow, was an experienced maker of ships' colors and signal flags. She filled orders for many of the military and merchant ships that sailed into Baltimore's busy port.

Helping Pickersgill make the flags were her thirteen-year-old daughter Caroline; nieces Eliza Young (thirteen) and Margaret Young (fifteen); and a thirteen-year-old African American indentured servant, Grace Wisher. Pickersgill's elderly mother, Rebecca Young, from whom she had learned flagmaking, may have helped as well.

Pickersgill and her assistants spent about seven weeks making the two flags. They assembled the blue canton and the red and white stripes of the flag by piecing together strips of loosely woven English wool bunting that were only 12 or 18 inches wide.



The Star-Spangled Banner, from the National Museum of American History

On September 14, 1814, U.S. soldiers at Baltimore's Fort McHenry raised the garrison flag to celebrate a crucial victory over British forces during the War of 1812. The sight of those "broad stripes and bright stars" inspired Francis Scott Key to write a song that eventually became the United States national anthem. Key's words gave new significance to a national symbol and started a tradition through which generations of Americans have invested the flag with their own meanings and memories.

The garrison flag, now known as the Star-Spangled Banner, was donated to the Smithsonian Institution in 1912. Today, it is on display as one of the landmark objects in the Museum. For more information, visit <http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/>.

Introduction to the Video

This theater presentation was performed at the National Museum of American History, where the flag that inspired the National Anthem is on display.

The year is 1813. Mary Young Pickersgill (a historical figure with a fictional monologue) is working on a garrison flag to fly over Baltimore's Fort McHenry. She speaks about the War of 1812, the process of creating a giant flag, and thoughts about the meaning of the flag.

Thematic Warm-Up Questions

- What do you know about the American flag? (physical description of the flag, places where you can find one, ideas about symbolism)
- Have you ever heard the song The Star Spangled Banner? How does it make you feel? What words or phrases do you remember from the song?

Act One (approximately 2 minutes)

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/Videos/Stars1.aspx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- What is the main character, Mary Pickersgill, making? Who else is helping her with her project?
- What hints does Mary Pickersgill give you about the setting for this play?

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- How large do you think the blue piece of fabric will be when it is unfolded?
- Where is Baltimore? Can you find it on a map? What other cities are nearby?

Act Two (approximately 4 minutes)

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/Videos/Stars2.aspx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- Why is Mary Pickersgill making this flag? How will it be used?
- If Mary Pickersgill's parents were involved in supporting the Revolutionary War, what year or time period do you think is the setting for this play?
- Listen for ways Mary Pickersgill thinks the war is affecting everyday life.

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- How did Mary Pickersgill's mother get commissions during the Revolutionary War? How did her mom's experience as a flagmaker help Mary?
Could lead to discussion on jobs that are performed by several generations of a family.
- What skills do you think would be helpful in making a flag?
- What is a privateer? Do you think it's right that Mary Pickersgill may have asked a privateer for help on a flag for the government?

Act Three (approximately 2 ½ minutes)

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/Videos/Stars3.asx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- How do you think you would feel after sewing a flag all day?
- How many stars does Mary say will be on her flag? Why does she say the number of stars should be changed?

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- How many stars are on the flag we use today? What do those stars stand for?
- Mary said, "George Washington once said that for him, the stars symbolize the heavens and man's divine aspiration to achieve." Can you think of any other signs, symbols, or flags that include stars?

Act Four (approximately 3 minutes)

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/Videos/Stars4.asx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- Listen to hear what the flag stands for to Mary, her mother, and her daughter.
- How large does Mary say the final flag will be? (42 feet by 30 feet)
 - Bonus Question: The flag will be 30 feet tall. If each stripe is 2 feet tall, and 7 stripes are underneath the canton, how tall is the canton? (16 feet)

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a flag so large?
- Do you have a special memory of seeing the American flag? To you, what does the American flag stand for?

Extension Activities

- Try one or more of the activities on the [Learning Resources page](http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/educational-resources.aspx) of the Star-Spangled Banner online exhibition (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/educational-resources.aspx>).
- Explore the [Share Your Story page](http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/pdf/SSB_PhotoShare_Educators_Guide.pdf) in the Star-Spangled Banner online exhibition and contribute your own image to the photograph mosaic (http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/pdf/SSB_PhotoShare_Educators_Guide.pdf).
- Listen to a 19th century version of the Star-Spangled Banner (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/mp3/song.ssb.dsl.mp3>) and compare it to a modern version (perhaps a school performance, a performance at a local baseball game, etc.).
- Read the *The Flag Maker* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti, an illustrated storybook that tells the story from the perspective of Mary's daughter Caroline Pickersgill, and explore related activities from the [Museum's OurStory Web site](http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/starspangled/) (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/starspangled/>).

Lyrics to “The Star-Spangled Banner”

By Francis Scott Key (1814)

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’ 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 morning’s 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 or 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 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, for 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!