

The star spangled banner



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

English 101 November 21, 2012 The Star Spangled Banner The Star

Spangled Banner is a very powerful and moving song that not only defines our country as a free and independent nation, but it also presents us with the struggles we went through to become who we are. The Star Spangled Banner originated as the poem “ Defense of Fort McHenry” in 1814 by Frances Scott Key. The national anthem was not written during the American Revolution, contrary to popular belief. It was, in fact, written in the War of 1812.

Although the poem has four unique stanzas, we normally only recognize the first one, and sometimes the second stanza as well.

Our anthem, regardless of its patriotic values, is a great example of rich English literature that symbolizes our people even after 200 years. But, in reality, the song has a wide variety of meanings and interpretations deeply embedded in the historical significance it represents. The first line of the song reads, “ O say can you see by the dawn’s early light? What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming? ” Translated in to today’s contemporary language, this means, “ hey there, can you see by morning what was there before the sun set yesterday evening? Frances Scott Key introduces the topic of this song by grabbing the reader’s attention. This first line of the song makes readers wonder what Key is referring to, making them want to read the poem on further. When Key mention’s the “ dawn’s early light” he is referring to an early morning; a new day and a new beginning. The “ twilight’s last gleaming” suggests a very special time of day; right before the sun is setting and there is a tiny streak of light that appears in the sky. These two verses show a lot of symbolism.

Once again, we must use the historical context of this poem to make meaning of the lyrics. The War of 1812 was a war fought by the British and Americans. Key was on a British ship when he wrote this poem, negotiating with the officers to release some of the American hostages. He was watching the battle of Fort McHenry in Baltimore. The battle took place in the late evening, when the American flag was still up and flying. In these lines, Key is asking himself, “ Will the flag still be up tomorrow morning? ” The twilight’s last gleaming could represent hope.

Key still has faith and trust in his country. Even in the midst of a bloodthirsty battle, Key hoped that he would see the American flag the next morning. He hoped he would see a sign of perseverance and strength instead of weak downfall. He wanted his country to reign through the peril it oversaw. If the American flag was still not up by “ the dawn’s early light”, it would signify defeat the British. The second two lines of the Star Spangled Banner places emphasis on the American flag. Today, our flag is commonly referred to as the stars and stripes.

Key noticed these two distinct features and decided to define the American flag by “ the stars and stripes”. History has it that there were two flags that were flown over Fort McHenry, one of them being a “ storm flag”. This was the flag that was flown during the rainy day and the “ perilous night” and the flag that was described in the first part of The Star Spangled Banner. This line reflects the determination of the American army. The flag is a key symbol of our nation. Key cleverly used this patriotic symbol to show how persistent our soldiers were; they kept fighting through the sanguine fighting of the night.

When Key woke up by morning, a new flag was hoisted up, apart from the storm flag that he saw the previous night. Fort McHenry was proudly flying its much larger “garrison flag”. This flag measured 30 ft. by 42 ft. , larger than a modern day school bus. Key believed this was the same flag that was flown the previous night, when the British had attacked. Regardless of whether it was the storm flag or not, the sight of the American flag flying over the fort after a gory battle gave hope and confidence to its citizens.

It once again stated the power of America as a powerful independent nation. The flag indirectly told the world to never underestimate the potential of America. The third line of the poem is very awkwardly phrased and positioned, once again reflecting the time period Key wrote the poem. “O’er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming” is referring to the previous line. Ramparts are protective walls. In this context, Key is referring to the walls of Fort McHenry. He very cleverly uses the word “ramparts” to describe the walls.

The ramparts were built in 1776 to protect the city of Baltimore in case the British tried to attack through the Chesapeake Bay. After the War of 1812 was brought to attention, a local committee raised over \$400, 000 to strengthen the walls to protect the citizens in case of an unexpected British attack. The word rampart suggests that the citizens were able to watch the battle with a sense of security as the soldiers risked their lives for their country. It solidifies the expression of sacrifice. Over the whole scene, Key once again mentions the American flag “gallantly streaming”.

This gives the notion that this concept of sacrifice is very much American. It is an American soldier’s duty to lay his life down for his country. The next

few lines start to intensely invoke emotions from the reader: “ And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there” During the battle of Fort McHenry, the British had more than 15 battle ships, each armed with heavy artillery and one armed with a rocket launcher. Through the night, as the rockets were fired in to the air, they illuminated the sky with a bloody red glow.

That red glow showed the British where the American flag was so they would know where to aim. But, here comes the notion of good that comes out of evil. While the British threw the bombs in the air to destroy the flag, they ended up illuminating the flag, giving hope to all the patriotic soldiers to keep fighting. The motive of the British was to destroy the American flag, according to the poem by Frances Scott Key. The American flag was the symbol of America. It was the identity of the United States of America, because it represented the journey of America.

The alternating 13 red and white stripes showed represented the moments of bloodshed and light in America. The fifty stars represent each of the strong independent states. By placing the stars in the same box, it shows unity among the various states. By destroying the flag, the British are stripping away the identity of the Americans. The final line of the first stanza summarizes the whole message of the song: “ Oh, say that Star - Spangled Banner yet wave? O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave! ” This line clearly states that the flag of the United States represents liberty and independence for all.

As long as the flag shall wave, it will mark America as “ the land of the free and the home of the brave”. Throughout the song, Key expresses a hero

journey; a journey through hell and back in to the light. This is the story of Fort McHenry. The Americans were plunged in to a world of blood and gore. But the outcome of the battle was very significant. The American flag became a physical representation of good over evil. It was the marking of the victory of America, once again. The battle was a memory of the importance of our “ Star- Spangled Banner”.