



Fort McHenry Skit

Gather your family together and perform this skit as you learn about the battle that inspired the U.S. National Anthem.

Characters:

Narrator

American Major George Armistead

British Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane

(Optional: some people can be American or British troops reacting to the directions of the Major and Admiral.)

Setting:

Fort McHenry and the Baltimore harbor. The skit switches back and forth between Armistead's perspective in the fort and Cochrane's in the harbor.

Narrator: Our skit takes place in September of 1814. The Americans and the British are engaged in the so-called War of 1812. The British have recently attacked nearby Washington, D.C. Their burning of the Capitol, the President's House, and the Treasury Building was devastating. Now they're on their way here, to Baltimore and Fort McHenry.

Armistead: I am American Major George Armistead. I've prepared as best as I can. I have a force of 1,000 men helping me hold down the fort. We have around 20 guns. We have a line of sunken ships in the shallow waters outside the fort. Their masts are sticking up out of the water to prevent the British ships from getting too close. We have cannons positioned behind those sunken ships to fire if they choose to come closer. We're going to find out what this fort is made of!



Cochrane: I am British Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. Our navy rules the seas and we want to keep it that way! These Americans need to learn that they can't just freely trade across the waters. Our navy conquered Napoleon! We've turned our attention here and burned Washington, and now we're going to take this fort. We are firing Congreve rockets at the fort. These rockets go up into the air, explode, and rain down deadly metal shards onto the fort's inhabitants. I don't see how we can lose. I'm sure the damage is heavy, let's move closer...

Armistead: They're coming closer now! They're in range of our guns, fire all! Fire all!

Cochrane: Pull back, men! Turn around to our original positions. We're in range of their guns now and they're firing too many.

Armistead: A new day is dawning, men. Lower the storm flag. Raise the garrison flag. The 42 x 30 foot flag will be visible to all of the ships in the river! I know it was a long night. But we only lost 4 men. Only 24 are wounded. And the fort is still standing!

Cochrane: After 25 hours and 330 men killed, wounded, or captured, we need a new strategy. Look at that billowing flag. They're not going away. Let's regroup away from here.

Narrator: You've just witnessed history! But you're not the only ones. Out at sea on a British ship, American Francis Scott Key was witnessing the battle through the night. He wrote some words to a British tune and called it *Defense of Fort McHenry*. But you might know it by another name. Here's the first verse:



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 rocket'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?

All: [bow]