Flag Through Fire

How a wartime poem expressed national feeling

8.C.7.1.B "Explain how the war fueled a spirit of nationalism, reflected in the lyrics of the national anthem."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show danger during the attack. Circle two phrases from the poem that could stir national pride, then number each circled phrase to match it with a danger detail.

The Night Behind the Anthem

1 In September 1814, during the War of 1812, British warships attacked Fort McHenry, which guarded Baltimore, Maryland. From a ship nearby, Francis Scott Key watched the bombardment. British forces had recently burned public buildings in Washington, D.C., so Baltimore's fate felt uncertain. During the night, exploding shells lit the sky, but smoke and darkness made it hard to see the fort's flag. At dawn, Key saw a large American flag flying above the fort. The British attack had failed, and Baltimore remained in American hands.

2 Key turned the scene into a poem, first titled "Defence of Fort M'Henry." He asked, "O say can you see, by the dawn's early light," and later described "the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air." The poem says these flashes "gave proof through the night that our flag was still there." Near the end of its first verse, Key asks whether the flag still waves over "the land of the free and the home of the brave." Across the verse, questions sit beside vivid details of the battle.

3 Nationalism means strong loyalty to one's country. The poem appeared in newspapers and was soon set to a familiar tune. Americans sang it at public gatherings long before Congress made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the national anthem in 1931. The War of 1812 had divided Americans: some had opposed it, and different groups experienced the war in different ways. Enslaved people were denied the freedom praised in the song, and Native nations faced threats to their land. The poem's account of one night reached readers and singers far beyond Baltimore.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the first verse begin with “O say can you see” instead of announcing what happened at the fort? Use the events in the passage to explain its effect.

2. Key places “the rockets’ red glare” near “our flag was still there.” How does that contrast turn a battle scene into a source of national pride?

3. How could “the land of the free” express national pride while failing to describe some people's lives? Use two details from the passage.

4. How could a poem about one night in Baltimore build national feeling elsewhere, even though Americans disagreed about the war? Use the lyrics and the poem's later history.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence diary entry from the viewpoint of someone in another American town who reads Key's poem after the battle. Quote one short phrase from the lyrics, show how it affects your character's sense of belonging to the nation, and acknowledge why another reader might feel differently.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.7.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show danger during the attack. Circle two phrases from the poem that could stir national pride, then number each circled phrase to match it with a danger detail. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the first verse begin with "O say can you see" instead of announcing what happened at the fort? Use the events in the passage to explain its effect.	**The question lets listeners share Key's uncertainty because darkness and smoke hid the flag during the attack. It makes the flag's appearance at dawn more moving.**
2	Key places "the rockets' red glare" near "our flag was still there." How does that contrast turn a battle scene into a source of national pride?	**The rockets show how fierce the attack was, while the surviving flag suggests that Americans held the fort despite the danger.**
3	How could "the land of the free" express national pride while failing to describe some people's lives? Use two details from the passage.	**The phrase praises the country whose flag remained above Fort McHenry. Yet enslaved people were denied freedom, so the words did not describe their lives.**
4	How could a poem about one night in Baltimore build national feeling elsewhere, even though Americans disagreed about the war? Use the lyrics and the poem's later history.	**Its words about "our flag" gave distant readers and singers a symbol they could share. Newspapers and public singing carried those words beyond Baltimore, even to people with different views of the war.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Today in Philadelphia, I read Key's poem about the attack on Baltimore. When I saw the words "our flag was still there," I pictured the fort standing through the shellfire. Though I was far away, that flag made me feel connected to the people who defended the country. An enslaved reader might hear the poem's praise of freedom differently, since slavery denies that freedom to many.

Accept supported explanations that connect danger, the surviving flag, and shared national feeling. For the diary entry, accept a historically plausible viewpoint that meets all four prompt requirements.