Historical Background

The War of 1812 often gets overshadowed by the Revolutionary War and is generally less understood among the American public. This war was really an offshoot of a larger global conflict between the British empire and the French empire of Napoleon Bonaparte. To North Americans, however, it was seen as a renewed struggle for independence. Canadian colonists and Native Americans fought against the U.S. invasion of their territories. Americans declared war on Britain because of interference in American trade with France, whom Britain was blockading, and also because of British impressment of sailors from American ships.

Students may be unclear about the motivations, operations, and consequences of the War of 1812. However, they have probably heard of Tecumseh and Andrew Jackson. They may already be familiar with the story of Dolly Madison rescuing the portrait of George Washington from the burning White House. Many sayings and symbols that have become part of our national identity were generated during the War of 1812, like Uncle Sam and the “Star Spangled Banner.” This war was also responsible for generating Tennessee’s state motto, “The Volunteer State.”

By war’s end, American forces had inflicted decisive defeats over Native American forces, but could not claim victory over the British. The Treaty of Ghent (1814) basically ended hostilities by restoring the status quo, after which Britain turned its attention once more to defeating Napoleon. Nevertheless, many Americans considered the war a second war for independence. Native American lands, however, were not restored to status quo, and were soon overrun with white settlers.

Suggestions for Teachers

Teachers can approach the War of 1812 by asking students if they know where the “Star Spangled Banner” came from, or if they know the origins of some of the other iconic moments from the war mentioned at left or in the March 2012 or September 2015 newsletters.

Study of the war can be divided into categories, like the primary sources on the following pages. Have students compare the war in the north with the war in the south, for instance. Who were the combatants on each front? How were the battles and outcomes different? Or have students examine some of the primary sources under “Remembering the War of 1812” and connect them to the events that inspired them. How was the war depicted a few decades after it ended? A century after? Today?

Have students examine a map such as the one on the next page. Zoom in to read the text and view the drawings. What does this map say about the British? Native Americans? White Americans?
Plan of Fort Meigs' and its environs : comprizing [sic] the operations of the American forces, under Genl. W.H. Harrison, and the British Army and their allies, under Genl. Proctor and Tecumseh / by an officer of the Kentucky Militia. [1813]
War in the North

Volunteers [1813-07-14] Courtesy of the Reuben T. Durrett Collection on Kentucky and the Ohio River Valley, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Battle of the Thames [18??] Courtesy of the Reuben T. Durrett Collection on Kentucky and the Ohio River Valley, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Letter from James Young Love to Eliza Tunstal [1813-05-10]Courtesy of the Filson Historical Society. Transcription

Perry's victory on Lake Erie, Sept. 10th 1813 / drawn by J.J. Barralet; engraved by B. Tanner. [c1814 October 14th]

Death of Tecumseh; Battle of the Thames Oct. 18; 1813/ lith. & pub. by N. Currier. [c1846]
Letter and petition from the citizens of Clark County, Indiana Territory to James Madison [1813]

War in the North (cont.)

The Yankey torpedo / E-s del & sc. [1813]

A correct map of the seat of war. [1812]

A scene on the frontiers as practiced by the "humane" British and their "worthy" allies / Wm. Charles, del et sculp. [1812; detail]

British valour and Yankee boasting or, Shannon versus Chesapeake / G. Cruikshank fect. [1813; detail]

A boxing match, or another bloody nose for John Bull / W. Charles, del et sculp. [1813; detail]
The Hartford Convention

The Hartford Convention or Leap no leap / Wm. Charles, Sc. [1814; detail]

The Capture of Washington

A view of the Presidents house in the city of Washington after the conflagration of the 24th August 1814. [1814; detail]

[Waterfront fire, probably burning of the Washington Navy Yard, 1814, Anacostia River, Washington, D.C.] [1815; detail]

Washington, [A] representation of the capture of the city of Washington, by the British forces under the command of Major Genl. Ross and Rear Adml. Sir I. Cockburn, August 24th 1814, wherein are shown, the fort and the flotilla [1815; detail]

Thomas Jefferson to Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, February 14, 1815, with Postscript Dated February 26 [1815; see transcription]. Also see, Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, October 13, 1815 [1815; see transcription]
The Capture of Washington (cont.)

Capture of Washington [Cut] On Wednesday, August 24, there was a severe action at Bladensburgh, six miles from the Capitol. "Baltimore has acquired immortal honor by the brave resistance of Commodore Barney, his sailors and the bold volunteers." [1814]


The taking of the city of Washington in America [1814 Oct. 14.; detail]

The fall of Washington--or Maddy in full flight [1814]

[U.S. Capitol and Pennsylvania Avenue before 1814] [1814; detail]

A view of the Capitol after the conflagration of the 24th August 1814 / G. Munger del. ; W. Strickland sculp. [1814; detail]
General orders ....
Andrew Jackson, Major-General 2d Division, Tennessee. November 24, 1812.

[Sketch map of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend of Tallapoosa River, 27th March 1814.]
[1814; detail]

Map 1814-15 New Orleans. [1815; detail]

Battle of New Orleans and death of Major General Packenham [sic] on the 8th of January 1815 / West del., J. Yeager sc. [1817; detail]

Hunter's of Kentucky. Or half horse and half alligator [1815]
A correct view of the battle near the city of New Orleans, on the eighth of January 1815, under the command of Genl. Andw. Jackson, over 10,000 British troops, in which 3 of their most distinguished generals were killed, & several wounded and upwards of 3,000 of their choicest soldiers were killed, wounded, and made prisoners, &c. / Francis Scacki. [between 1815 and 1820]

Glorious news from New Orleans! Splendid victory over the British forces Essex, Register Office. Feb. 9 [1815]. [1815]
The Treaty of Ghent

TREATY OF PEACE AND AMITY,
Between his Britannic Majesty and the United States of America. (a)

The present Treaty is concluded in Ghent, the 24th day of December, 1814, by the plenipotentiaries on the part of the Sayon, and of the United States, and ratified by the President and Senate of the United States, and the ratification is to be exchanged, and the said Treaty to be observed, on the part of the said parties, for the space of one year from the date thereof.

ARTICLE THE FIRST.

There shall be a firm and universal peace between his Britannic Majesty and the United States, and between their respective states, territories, cities, towns, and people, of every degree, without exception of persons or property. All hostilities, both by sea and land, shall cease
Remembering the War of 1812

Victory monument, Put-In-Bay, Ohio [between 1900 and 1910]

Monument commemorating the Battle of North Point, Calvert Street and Fayette Street, Baltimore, Maryland [ca. 1846]

Funeral of Hiram Cronk / American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. [1905]

Huzza! for General Jackson. [n. d.]

Banks of Brandywine, and James Bird. Sold by L. Deming, wholesale and retail, No. 62, Hanover Street, 2nd door from Friend Street, Boston, and Middlebury, Vt. [n. d.]

Audio
- James Bird [1939]
- Eighth of January [1941/08/30] (date of Battle of New Orleans)
Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is February 6, 2012.

U.S. President. By the President of the United States of America, a proclamation. Whereas the Congress of the United States, by virtue of the constituted authority vested in them, have declared by their act … that war exists between the United Kingdom … And. Proclamation. Washington, D.C.: 1812. From Library of Congress, An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpebib:@field(NUMBER+@band(rbpe+22800800)).


CITATIONS, cont.


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“A correct view of the battle near the city of New Orleans, on the eighth of January 1815, under the command of Genl. Andw. Jackson, over 10,000 British troops, in which 3 of their most distinguished generals were killed, & several wounded and upwards of 3,000 of their choisest soldiers were killed, wounded, and made prisoners, &c. / Francis Scacki.” Engraving. [Between 1815 and 1820]. From Library of Congress, Popular Graphic Arts. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006677463/.


CITATIONS, cont.


