

Title: : The Role of Citizens in the Defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812

Lesson Developed by: Jennifer Jones Frieman

Grade Level: 4 - 8

Duration: 60 minutes

MARYLAND VSC:

History: Grade 4

C. Conflict between Ideas and Institutions

2. Explain the political, cultural, economic and social changes in Maryland during the early 1800s
 - a. Describe Maryland's role in the War of 1812

History: Grade 8

C. Conflict between Ideas and Institutions

2. Analyze the emerging foreign policy of the United States
 - b. Explain how the continuing conflict between Great Britain and France influenced the domestic and foreign policy of the United States

Skills & Processes: Grade 3-5

D. Acquire Social Studies Information

1. Identify primary and secondary sources of information that relate to the topic/situation/problem being studied
 - c. Locate and gather data and information from appropriate non-print sources, such as music, artifacts, charts, maps, graphs, photographs, video clips, illustrations, paintings, political cartoons, interviews, and oral histories

Skills & Processes: Grade 6-8

D. Acquire Social Studies Information

1. Identify primary and secondary sources of information that relate to the topic/situation/problem being studied
 - a. Gather and read appropriate print sources, such as journals, periodicals, government documents, timelines, databases, reference works, and websites

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Use primary sources to describe the contributions of Baltimore citizens to the defense of Baltimore during the British attack in September 1814
- describe the impact of the attack on Baltimore businessmen.

Vocabulary:

militia – a group of private citizens who perform military service during emergencies

pile – a thick wooden pole driven into the ground

privateer – a privately owned ship given permission to attack enemy ships during time of war

ropewalk – a long narrow building where ropes are made

sundry – various

vessel – ship

vigilance – watchfulness, alertness

works – fortifications, barriers built to defend a position and block the enemy

Materials/Resources::

- Photocopy the primary sources:
 - “Civilian Defense in Baltimore, 1814-1815: Minutes of the Committee of Vigilance and Safety”, ed. by William D. Hoyt, Maryland Historical Magazine, Vol. 39, pp 205-206
 - 26th August 1814, paragraphs 5 and 6
 - 27th August 1814, paragraph 3 and 6
 - 27th August 1814, paragraph 4
 - "Report of the Committee of Claims on the petition of John Chalmers, Jun., ropemaker in Baltimore: November 7, 1814," PAM 2305, Maryland Historical Society
 - "Vessels sunk - Baltimore harbor: To accompany Bill H.R. No. 412, Feb. 4, 1829. Mr. Degraff, from the Committee on Commerce, to which the subject had been referred, made report," PAM 444, Maryland Historical Society
 - “Committee of Vigilance and Safety to _____. 1814 Sept. 17,” MS1846, Maryland Historical Society

Teacher Background:

The War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain began as a result of the Napoleonic Wars between Great Britain and France, which began in 1793. Both of those European powers were intent on crippling the other’s trade, while the young United States struggled to assert its neutrality and trade freely. With its stronger navy, Britain was especially bold in harassing American merchant vessels, regularly boarding them and impressing their sailors. Finally, in June 1812, the United States declared war on Great Britain.

Because the United States was militarily unprepared for war at the time, one strategy it employed was the use of privateers. Private merchant vessels were given letters-of-marque, which authorized them to stop and seize enemy ships and their contents. During both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, Baltimore, a major center for American shipbuilding, was the home port of a great many of these privateers. As a result of this privateering activity, the British nicknamed Baltimore “a nest of pirates” and made it a primary target for attack.

During the summer of 1814, the British focused their attentions on the Chesapeake region. In August, they attacked a poorly defended Washington, D.C., burning the White House and other public buildings in retaliation for the destruction of the Canadian city of York at the hands of the Americans. Their real aim was the destruction of Baltimore, however. On September 11, the British anchored at the mouth of the Patapsco River the largest invasion fleet ever to enter U.S. waters. But Baltimore was ready. Over the past several weeks and days, its Committee of Vigilance and Safety had been directing the construction of fortifications and other measures for the defense of the city, including sinking vessels in the channel leading to the inner harbor and stretching chains across their masts to block the advance of enemy ships.

On September 12, the British landed near Baltimore at North Point and marched toward the city. On their way toward Baltimore, they met and easily defeated a group of American troops. The Americans retreated to a line of earthworks (fortifications) that Baltimoreans had built just outside the city. The

British stopped their advance to wait until their warships could defeat Fort McHenry and sail into Baltimore Harbor to support their attack on the works. During the night of September 13-14, sixteen British warships bombarded Fort McHenry, remaining just out of range of Fort McHenry's guns. By the next morning, the Fort still had not fallen, and the British decided to abandon the attack. With support from the ships now impossible, the British also abandoned their plans to attack by land and retreated. Baltimore was safe. The Battle of Baltimore was a major turning point in the War of 1812, which ended just a few months later.

The Battle of Baltimore also produced our national anthem. Francis Scott Key watched the bombardment of Fort McHenry from an American truce ship anchored near the British fleet. He had recently negotiated the release of his friend, Dr. William Beanes, from the British, but the British insisted that Key and Beanes not be allowed to return to Baltimore until after the bombardment for fear that they would reveal the British plans to the Americans. Key was so inspired by the defense of the fort that he wrote a poem about it, which he called "The Defence of Fort McHenry." Key's wife's brother-in-law had the poem printed in the newspapers, and the poem, with its new name of "The Star-Spangled Banner," was soon set to the tune of an old English song "To Anacreon in Heaven." In 1931, Congress made the Star-Spangled Banner our national anthem.

For more information, consult Fort McHenry's Historical Handbook at http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/5/index.htm.

Lesson Development:

1. Ask students to consider how they might react if they knew an enemy force was approaching their city. Would they try to escape? Would they stay and try to defend the city? Who would be responsible for fighting the enemy? In what ways might the citizens help defend the city?
2. Explain that 200 years ago, the national army and navy were very small, not at all like those that exist today. If an enemy attacked Baltimore, it would be largely up to the people of Baltimore to defend the city.
3. Provide students with a basic understanding of the War of 1812, emphasizing the importance of the Port of Baltimore during this era, the role of Baltimore privateers, and the British desire to punish the Baltimore for its harassment of British vessels. You might read aloud "Why Baltimore?", a publication by Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine (<http://www.nps.gov/fomc/pdf-files/fort.pdf>).
4. Explain to students that in August 1814, the British attacked Washington, D.C., burning the Capitol and the White House. Washington was poorly defended by its militia and citizens, and the British met very little opposition. Following their attack on Washington, the British turned to Baltimore.
5. Tell students that they will be examining documents from almost 200 years ago to discover how Baltimoreans defended their city and how Baltimore businessmen were affected by these efforts.
6. Explain that, from the beginning of the war, Baltimoreans had formed a committee to help organize the defense of the city. This group was called the "Committee of Vigilance and Safety." When it became clear that the British were going to attack Baltimore, the Committee of Vigilance and Safety issued instructions to Baltimoreans about how to help defend the city. Tell students that they will be

reading some of these instructions.

7. Divide the class into 3 groups. Distribute one the following excerpts from the Committee of Vigilance and Safety's instructions both in its original form and in its translation to each group. If possible, first have students try to read the excerpt in its original form before turning to the translation. Also, it might be helpful to put boxes around the paragraphs you would like each group to read.
 - 26th August 1814, paragraphs 5 and 6
 - 27th August 1814, paragraph 3 and 6
 - 27th August 1814, paragraph 4
8. Direct the students to read in pairs their excerpt to answer the following FOCUS QUESTION: **IN ADDITION TO FIGHTING, HOW DID ORDINARY BALTIMOREANS HELP DEFEND THEIR CITY FROM THE BRITISH?**
 - They contributed money.
 - They helped build fortifications.
 - They provided tools.
9. Have a representative from each group share their findings with the class. Summarize.
10. Briefly explain the course of the Battle of Baltimore.
11. Explain to the class that some of the measures taken to defend Baltimore hurt the businesses of many Baltimoreans who made their livings through shipping and shipbuilding. Tell the class that they will now examine three more documents that describe some of the defensive measures that had lasting negative impacts on the Port of Baltimore.
12. Distribute one of the following sources and their translations to each of the three groups:
 - Report of the Committee of Claims on the Petition of John Chalmers
 - Vessels Sunk – Baltimore Harbor
 - Letter from the Committee of Vigilance and Safety, September 17, 1814
13. Direct the students to read in pairs their source to answer the following FOCUS QUESTION: **ACCORDING TO YOUR DOCUMENT, WHAT WAS DONE TO HELP DEFEND BALTIMORE, AND HOW DO YOU THINK THIS ACTION MIGHT HAVE HURT THE BUSINESS OF THE PORT OF BALTIMORE AFTER THE BATTLE?**
 - John Chalmers' ropewalk was burned. Not only did this destroy Chalmers' place of business, it also deprived Baltimore ships of one source of rope for their ships.
 - Twenty-four ships were seized by the military and sunk in Baltimore Harbor to prevent the passage of British ships into the harbor. The cargo on the ships was not removed prior to their sinking. The owners of these ships therefore lost huge sums of money. After the battle, these sunken ships also prevented Baltimore merchant ships from entering and exiting the harbor.
 - Piles were driven into the harbor to prevent the passage of British ships. Again, these obstructions would have also prevented the passage of Baltimore merchant vessels after the battle. Mere days after the battle, merchants were requesting the removal of the piles.

14. Have a representative from each group share their findings with the class. Summarize.

Assessment:

Students should assume the identity of a Baltimore merchant and write a letter dated September 15, 1814 to a friend living in Philadelphia. The letter should describe the contributions of Baltimore's citizens to the defense of the city and the long-term impact of the measures taken on the Port of Baltimore.

Closure:

Have students read their letters in a Living Theater scenario. This would summarize the content covered in this lesson.