

National Anthem Day

History of the Star-Spangled Banner

“The Star-Spangled Banner” is now the national anthem of the United States of America, however, it took over 100 years for the patriotic poem written on Sept. 14, 1814 to be acknowledged as our country’s official anthem.

The lyrics came from “Defence of Fort M’Henry,”* a poem written after Francis Scott Key witnessed the 25 hour bombardment of Fort McHenry by British ships during the Battle of Baltimore in the War of 1812. When the bombing stopped and the smoke cleared, Key saw the large American flag flying triumphantly over the fort signaling an American victory. Key gave his poem to his brother-in-law who brought it to a printer and a broadside printing of it was distributed on Sept. 17, 1814, setting his words to the tune of a popular English song.

Within weeks, newspapers reprinted the piece as “The Star-Spangled Banner” giving the flag it’s familiar nick-name and spreading it throughout the country. “The Star-Spangled Banner” was recognized for official use by the United States Navy in 1889, and President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed it the national anthem of all the armed forces in 1916 but it did not become the official national anthem until 1931.



Image: Cover of sheet music for “The Star-Spangled Banner”, transcribed for piano by Ch. Voss, Philadelphia: G. Andre & Co., 1862

Newspaper Activities:

“The Star-Spangled Banner” that most of us know is only the first verse of Francis Scott Key’s poem. Research the content of the other three verses, then write an article informing your readers about what you’ve discovered is missing.

Look through recent editions of the newspaper for listings of upcoming events. With those events in mind, determine which may include the playing of the national anthem as part of the event. Share your thoughts as a class and be prepared to defend your selections.

Following a lengthy lobbying effort by patriotic and veterans’ groups including the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Congress passed a resolution which was signed by President Herbert Hoover on March 3, 1931 acknowledging “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. National Anthem Day commemorates this event.

To learn more about the Star-Bangled Banner and Fort McHenry go to <https://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/default.aspx>

*Historical note: The spelling of “defence” in the original title of Key’s song is correct for the period.

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