



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Dawn's Early Light: The Story of Our National Anthem

### Characters:

**Narrator 1 & 2:** (Speak clearly to the audience)

**Francis Scott Key:** (A lawyer and poet, carries a pen and paper)

**Dr. William Beanes:** (An older friend, looks worried)

**Colonel John Skinner:** (A government agent, official and calm)

**British Admiral:** (Proud and stern)

**American Soldier on Fort McHenry:** (Young and hopeful)

**Star Spangled Banner Singer:** (Sings the final verse)

**The Flag:** (One or two students who hold a large American flag throughout the battle scene)

### Setting:

The play takes place in two locations:

**A Boat in Baltimore Harbor:** A row of chairs can represent the boat.

**Fort McHenry:** A desk or a fortress wall made from cardboard boxes

### Props:

A very large American flag (the main prop!)

A telescope or paper towel tube for Key to look through.

Flashlights or cell phone lights for the "rockets' red glare."

A drum for battle sound effects.

Pen and paper for Francis Scott Key.

# The Play

(Narrator 1 and Narrator 2 step to the front of the stage.)

**Narrator 1:** Welcome! Our play today takes us back to the year 1814. The United States is once again at war with Great Britain. It's called the War of 1812.

**Narrator 2:** The British army has attacked Washington D.C. and burned the White House! Now, their mighty warships are sailing toward Baltimore. Everyone is afraid.

(Narrators step to the side. Francis Scott Key, Dr. Beanes, and Colonel Skinner are on the "boat.")

**Francis Scott Key:** (Worried) Thank you for your help, Colonel Skinner. We must convince the British to release our dear friend, Dr. Beanes!

**Colonel Skinner:** I will do my best, Mr. Key. The British captured him, but we have come under a flag of truce to negotiate. They should respect that.

**Dr. Beanes:** (Looking grateful) I am so thankful you came for me.

(The British Admiral stands tall, facing them.)

**British Admiral:** We will release your doctor. However, you have seen our ships and our plans to attack Fort McHenry. You must stay on this ship until the battle is over.

**Francis Scott Key:** (Shocked) We have to stay here? In the middle of the battle?

**British Admiral:** Yes. You will be our... guests. The bombardment begins tonight.

(The British Admiral moves away. Key, Skinner, and Beanes look out anxiously. The lights dim slightly.)

**Narrator 1:** That night, from the deck of the British ship, Francis Scott Key watched the battle begin.

(Students off-stage use flashlights to create "rockets' red glare" by shining them on the walls. Another student makes a low drumming sound for "bombs bursting in air.")

**Francis Scott Key:** (Peering through his telescope) It's terrifying! The night is lit up by explosions. The fort is taking a terrible pounding!

**Dr. Beanes:** How can our flag possibly survive? The fort must be crumbling!

**Colonel Skinner:** (Putting a hand on Key's shoulder) We must have hope, Francis. We must have faith.

**Narrator 2:** The horrible battle lasted all night long. Francis Scott Key could not sleep. He paced the deck, staring into the darkness, waiting for the dawn.

(The drumming and flashlight effects slowly fade. The lights on stage come up to represent morning.)

**Francis Scott Key:** (Rubbing his eyes) The sun is rising! The smoke is clearing... I can barely see...

**Dr. Beanes:** What do you see? Is the flag still there?

(Key squints through his telescope. The student(s) playing "The Flag" slowly and proudly raise the large American flag high for everyone to see.)

**Francis Scott Key:** (With overwhelming joy and relief) Yes! Yes! I can see it! The flag is still flying! The fort held! "Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light, What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?"

(He frantically pulls out his pen and paper and starts writing on the back of an envelope.)

**Colonel Skinner:** What are you doing, man?

**Francis Scott Key:** I must write this down! The words are pouring into my head! "Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight, O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming!"

(The American Soldier at Fort McHenry cheers and salutes the flag.)

**Narrator 1:** Filled with pride and relief, Francis Scott Key wrote a poem called "The Defence of Fort M'Henry."

**Narrator 2:** Soon, his poem was printed in newspapers and set to a popular tune. Everyone loved it! It made them feel proud and hopeful.

**Narrator 1:** That poem became our country's national anthem: "The Star-Spangled Banner"!

(The Star Spangled Banner Singer steps forward.)

**Singer:** (To the audience) Please stand and join us in singing the first verse of our national anthem!

(The entire cast lines up at the front of the stage. The large flag is held proudly in the center. The singer leads the first verse. The audience is encouraged to sing along if they know the words.)

**Whole Cast:** (After the song) Thank you!

(All the delegates, including the narrators, come to the front of the stage.)

**Narrator 1:** The Framers of the Constitution showed us that by talking, listening, and compromising...

**Narrator 2:** People with different ideas can work together to build something amazing.

**Whole Cast:** (Facing the audience) Thank you for coming to our Constitutional Convention!

(All bow.)

Production Notes for the Teacher:

**The Flag:** The flag is the star of the show! A large one from the gym or a homemade one from a sheet and markers works perfectly.

**Sound Effects:** Assign a small group of students to be the "Boom Crew" for the battle sounds. Practice the drumming and flashlight cues.

**Singing the Anthem:** You can use a recorded instrumental version from YouTube for the class to sing along to if you prefer. Practice the first verse in class beforehand.

**Simplicity:** The play can be performed with just the narrators and Key, with other students forming a chorus that acts out the battle and holds the flag.

**Learning Objective:** This play helps students understand the historical context of the anthem (the War of 1812), the story of its creation, and the meaning behind its famous words, fostering patriotism and historical curiosity.