

The War of 1812: Create Your Own Textbook Entry

Compiled by the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Target Grade Level: 4–12 in United States history classes

Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- Identify and analyze key components of a portrait and relate visual elements to relevant historical context and significance
- Analyze information about the War of 1812 in order to identify which people, events, terms, and concepts are most important to understanding the era
- Create an outline of a textbook entry that reflects their understanding of the era.

Portraits

Please visit the “1812: A Nation Emerges” online exhibition at <http://npg.si.edu/exhibit/1812/>.

Background Information for Teachers: Overview of the War of 1812

In January 1815 the news radiated across the country: Andrew Jackson had decisively defeated the British in the Battle of New Orleans. Along with spectacular American naval victories—Oliver Hazard Perry on Lake Erie and Isaac Hull with the *Constitution* (“Old Ironsides”)—Jackson’s triumph helped establish one of the great myths in American history: that the United States won the War of 1812. In actuality the war was a draw. The British won most of the land battles; they successfully blockaded American ports and effectively stymied American attempts to invade Canada. The Treaty of Ghent, ending the war, did not even address American grievances, which included Britain’s interference with shipping and the impressment of sailors.

Myths, however, often express aspects of reality. Americans at the time believed the war had made them far more independent of Great Britain and European powers. There was a renewed sense of nationalism and the Northwest Territory was finally rid of British soldiers. Britain’s alliance with Native American tribes, a barrier to American expansion, was ended, with dire consequences to the Indians. Out of the war emerged two of the country’s most important national symbols—Uncle Sam and the Star-Spangled Banner—even if Americans today cannot place who caused the “rockets’ red glare.”

There was an outpouring of art devoted to the heroes of the war, much of which—from institutions and private homes throughout America, Great Britain, and Canada—is brought together in this exhibition for the first time.

Lesson Procedures

Textbook Activity

1. Have students research the War of 1812 era, using the information and images found in the “1812: A Nation Emerges” online exhibition as well as other available print and online resources.
2. Once students have a solid understanding of the causes, events, and effects of the war, have them create outlines for a textbook section on the War of 1812 era. They can work individually or in groups. Their outline should include:

- Topic headings for each section
- At least one portrait and two visual images or objects from the NPG website to illustrate each section, with captions explaining each image's significance
- A list of key terms and people who should be discussed in each section
- One paragraph per section explaining the significance of one person or term on the list for that section

Extension Activity:

Have students actually design and create their textbook pages, using online publishing resources such as <http://issuu.com/>

Follow-Up Discussion

Have students share, compare, and contrast their work. As a class, discuss the similarities and differences among the ways in which different students organized the material, chose their images, and identified which people and terms were important to understanding the era.

National Standards of Learning

Standards in History for Grades 5–12

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801–61)

- Understands United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861 and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans.
- Understands the extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800.