



LETTER WRITING WITH A POINT OF VIEW



Objective

Students will closely examine primary source material related to the Battle of St. Leonard Creek and create original writing inspired by this material.

Standards

Reading 4.A.2.a (grades 3 – 5)
Social Studies 5.C.2.a (grade 4)
Social Studies 5.A.2.a (grade 3)
Social Studies 6.A.3.b (grades 3 - 5)

Grade level

3 - 5

Length of lesson

45 – 60 minutes

Materials from the trunk

Primary Source Documents, Letters:

- Captain Joshua Barney, Flotilla Service, to Secretary of the Navy Jones (June 13, 1814)
- Captain Joshua Barney, Flotilla Service, to (brother) Louis Barney (June 27, 1814)
- Transcript of letter from Thos. E. King to Benjamin King (July 14, 1814)
- Rear Admiral George Cockburn, R.N. to Captain Robert Barrie, R.N. (July 16, 1814)
- Book: *Maryland's Largest Naval Engagement: The Battles of St. Leonard Creek, 1814, Calvert County, Maryland* by Ralph Eshelman
- *Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Map and Trail Guide*, National Park Service
- *Southern Maryland War of 1812 Travel Map and Guide*, Southern Maryland Partnership
- Wax letter sealing kit
- Quill Pens and Inkwell
- Parchment Paper “recipe”
- Homemade Ink “recipe”
- Trunk Images:
 - Portraits of Barney, Barrie and Cockburn
 - Barney’s Sketch of the Chesapeake Flotilla
 - Image of the Battle of St. Leonard Creek



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Materials from Classroom

- Homemade or Store Bought Parchment Paper
- Homemade Ink
- Lighter (for the wax letter sealing)

Overview

In this lesson, students will examine a letter written by Sir George Cockburn (pronounced CO-burn) and consider the letter in historical context. Then they will compose a fictional letter in response.

Teacher Background

In June of 1814, a **flotilla** led by Commodore Joshua Barney engaged in two battles with the British on St. Leonard Creek in Southern Maryland. The battles that took place that month are considered the largest naval engagement in the history of the state of Maryland. Fought on water and supported by American units on the nearby shore, the American and British engaged in fierce fighting. This lesson looks at a letter written by British Rear Admiral George Cockburn to Capt. Robert Barrie describing their plans to march upon the Nation's Capital during the time immediately following the Battles of St. Leonard Creek. Cockburn led the intense and prolonged raids on the Chesapeake region in 1813 and 1814. Under his leadership, the British maintained a naval **blockade** of American shipping on the bay, raided farms and towns, engaged in fierce combat and eventually marched on Washington. This period is referred to as the "Terror on the Chesapeake." While this lesson takes a close look at Cockburn's letter, you can use it as a way to explore the larger **narrative** of the War of 1812, specifically the story of the Chesapeake naval campaign and American resistance.

The following historical information comes from the Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum exhibit on the War of 1812, Farmers, Patriots and Traitors, on display through 2015.

By the summer of 1813, it was clear that the United States could not defend against the British occupation of the Chesapeake. In an effort to protect communities from raids, Joshua Barney, a native Marylander, came out of retirement (he was 53 when the war started and was a hero of the American Revolution) to organize and lead what became known as the Chesapeake Flotilla. The Flotilla was made up of small ships built in Baltimore, St. Michaels and the Washington Navy yard. A ship called the Scorpion was Barney's **flagship**.

Even though it was not fully manned, the Chesapeake Flotilla departed Baltimore in May 1814 and engaged with the British naval force commanded by Captain Robert Barrie. The Americans had to retreat first up the **Patuxent River** and then into St. Leonard Creek. There they fought in the First Battle of St. Leonard Creek (from June 8 - June 10, 1814). Commodore Barney's Flotilla successfully defended the position even though the British sent wave after wave of reinforcements. Unable to defeat Barney in the creek, Captain Barrie engaged in a "war of terror" on the communities along the Patuxent River, looting and destroying farms and carrying off livestock, goods and personal property (see letter written by Thomas King for a civilian account of the "war of terror"). When



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American reinforcements later arrived, Barney launched the Second Battle of St. Leonard Creek, a surprise land-sea attack on the British, and the Flotilla was able to escape up river. In retribution for these actions, the British went on to attack St. Leonard Town on July 2. After landing at **Benedict** (on the west side of the Patuxent River in Charles County), the British began their march towards Washington. Barney and his flotilla men scuttled (sank) the Flotilla above Pig Point. They then joined in the fighting to protect Washington D.C. After defeating the Americans at Bladensburg, the British marched into the Capital and set Washington aflame.

Biographical Sketches

British Rear Admiral George Cockburn

Admiral Sir George Cockburn was a British naval leader who held important commands in the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. Cockburn was second in command of the North American Station during the War of 1812 and engaged in fierce fighting, looting and attacks throughout the Chesapeake Bay region. He carried out the 1814 burning of Washington as an advisor to Major General Robert Ross. In addition, he implemented the British policy of encouraging the enslaved African American population to join the British forces. Later in life, he was elected to Parliament and served as First Sea Lord several times.

Captain Robert Barrie

Sir Robert Barrie was an officer in the British Royal Navy. He commanded ships during the French Revolutionary, Napoleonic Wars and in the War of 1812, when he carried out attacks on towns and shipping in New England and against the Chesapeake Bay Flotilla. He later became a senior naval officer in Canada, where his work has been commemorated via place names in Ontario and British Columbia.

Commodore Joshua Barney

Commodore Joshua Barney was a Revolutionary War hero and a Maryland native. As the British blockade of the Chesapeake grew, Barney submitted a plan for the defense of the bay to Secretary of the Navy William Jones in 1813. The plan called for the development of a flotilla, comprised of shallow-draft barges, gun boats and **sloops** with the intent of engaging and aggravating the British fleet. After the Battles of St. Leonard Creek, Barney moved the flotilla upriver and was ordered to scuttle the flotilla so it would not fall into British control. Barney and his men then joined the U.S. Army at the Battle of Bladensburg where they fought courageously against a superior British force.

Procedure

1. Discuss the Battles of St. Leonard Creek. What was the situation in the region during the spring of 1814? Who were the key players (Barney, Barrie)? What was the Flotilla? What is the timeline of events for the two battles and what were some of the geographical factors (i.e. the shallow depth of St. Leonard Creek) that may have contributed to the course of these battles?
2. Introduce students to Sir George Cockburn. Who was he and what was his relationship to Captain Barrie? You may choose to share some of the information outlined in the Teacher Background section for historical context. Explain that students will be examining a letter



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written by Cockburn to Barrie. (note: in the letter Cockburn refers to “jonathan”, slang for “American”)

3. Individually, students read the letter and consider the following. Why were these two men corresponding? What was happening at that moment elsewhere in the War of 1812? What was about to happen next? What is the tone of the letter? How does Cockburn refer to military actions? How does he characterize the Americans he has encountered? What is the general message here? In small groups, students share their thoughts, re-reading, restating and reviewing parts of the letter that were confusing or hard to understand (if any).
4. Then students imagine that they were somehow able to intercept this letter. Perhaps they were working as a **powder monkey** or letter carrier and gained access to the mail. They write a response to the letter from their point of view.
5. After students write their letters, have them seal their letters with the wax letter sealing kit provided in the traveling trunk. Teachers will supervise this activity. Teachers use the lighter to light the wax stick (with the wick). Slowly let the wax melt onto the area where the students’ letter will be “sealed”. Once enough wax accumulates on the paper, have the student use the stamp provided to seal.
6. After students have composed their writing, they trade letters with a partner and give each other feedback and suggestions on grammatical structure and content. Students incorporate edits into a final version of their letter to share with the class.
7. As a whole class, share the writing by reading aloud. Are the letters similar in tone – are some more dramatic than others? Can the letters be grouped by character, tone, voice or type? What kinds of characterizations can be made about the (fictional) authors from this writing? What information may be missing?

Extensions

- Consider the original Cockburn letter as reflective of just one moment in time. What will happen next? What just happened? Share thoughts via discussion or writing. Students might brainstorm ways to tell the story of the summer of 1814 (and the Battles of St. Leonard Creek) in new ways: as a graphic novel, as a lyrical poem, as a series of tweets.

Modifications

- Review the accounts of Joshua Barney (letters included in the trunk) and compare his writing to that of Sir George Cockburn. You could choose to split the class in two groups, giving one group Cockburn’s letter and the other group Barney’s account. What are their interpretations of the same “moment in time?”
- As opposed to composing a response to Cockburn’s original letter, students may choose to write a journal entry or additional letter from George Cockburn reflecting further on his plans, experiences and thoughts.



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Related Resources

Biographical sketches of British Rear Admiral George Cockburn, Captain Robert Barrie and Commodore Joshua Barney (Included in this lesson plan)

- Letter Written by Captain Joshua Barney to Secretary of the Navy Jones, June 13, 1814
Letter informs Secretary of the Navy about the flotilla, enemy ships, and issues with local residents
- Letter from:
Crawford, Michael, ed.
2003 *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History, Volume III, 1814-1815: Chesapeake Bay, Northern Lakes and Pacific Ocean*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy.
- Letter written from Captain Joshua Barney to Louis Barney, Brother, June 27, 1814
- Letter from Joshua Barney to his brother Louis depicting events from the Second Battle of St. Leonard's Creek from the previous day.
- Letter from: "Battle of St. Leonard's Creek, June 26, 1814." *Joshua Barney's Chesapeake Bay Flotilla*. Web10 April 2012. <http://mason.gmu.edu/~chughes3/creek21trans.html>
- Letter written by Thomas King to Benjamin King, July 14, 1814
Letter tells of "mischief" done by the British since Battles of St. Leonard Creek
- Letter from:
Transcript of letter from Thomas E. King to Benjamin King, Family Files/War of 1812, Calvert County Historical Society

To explore additional primary source materials that reflect broader discussion of people's perceptions of the War of 1812, you may want to visit the archives of the Maryland Historical Society. A link to War of 1812 resources found at the Maryland Historical Society on-line at:
<http://www.mdhs.org/findingaid/war-1812-collection-1794-1960-ms-1846>

For more background information on Commodore Joshua Barney and his Chesapeake Flotilla:
<http://mason.gmu.edu/~chughes2/projecthome.html>



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July 16, 1814

REAR ADMIRAL GEORGE COCKBURN, R.N., TO CAPTAIN ROBERT BARRIE, R.N.
Albion Saturday Morning 16 July 1814 off Drum Point

Dear Barrie

... (I have) positive Orders only to make Play with the advanced Force now sent to me & on no account to attempt any Thing of Importance before the Army arrives, which is to be Thirty Thousand Strong ... to be sure such an Army here will only have to choose where it will go & what it will occupy & take Possession of.

I shall strongly advocate their seizing in the first Instance the Capital as that is always a hard Blow to begin with and is in this instance so easy to be effected within 48 Hours after Landing such a Force at Benedict—to facilitate which I am now going to move from this River leaving in it only two Frigates & a Brig, that my Views respecting it may only appear to have reference to the Blockade of the Flotilla—and to further this Idea I have directed them to lay chiefly off Drum Point after having made one Haul up the River at a Place I have just received Information of as containing some extensive Stores.

I am myself with the rest of the Force going into the Potowmac & after making a Flourish or two there, sacking Leonard's Town etc. I shall again move elsewhere, so as to distract Jonathan, do him all the Mischief I can and yet not allow him to suspect that a serious & permanent Landing is intended any Where.

Everything is as quiet in this Neighborhood as when I last wrote, not a Militia Man or Soldier to be seen except we hunt for them in the Woods & then they only play at Hide & Seek with us, and in such good Order are the Inhabitants, that one of them on the left Bank of the River (about 40 Miles from Washington) sent to me to beg I would give him Permission to go from his Property for a few Days to Visit Relations ten Miles distant— and another sent to Ask leave to send a few of his young Geese to another of his Houses where part of his Family resided— in short it is quite ridiculous the perfect Dominion we have from the Entrance of this River to Benedict.

Mr. Madison must certainly be either in confident Expectation of immediate Peace, or preparing to abdicate the Chair.—

... I trust your People will soon get better when you are once fairly out of Chesapeake Air.

Yours

G: Cockburn



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June 13, 1814

CAPTAIN JOSHUA BARNEY, FLOTILLA SERVICE, TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY JONES
St. Leonard's Creek. June 13th. 1814

Sir,

I had the honor of addressing you on the 11th. Inst. giving you a short detail of our action with the enemy on the 10th, By information, they suffered much, the Large schooner was nearly destroyed, having several shot through her at the water's edge, her deck torn up, Gun dismantled, and main-mast nearly cut off about half way up, & rendered unserviceable; she was other ways much cut. They ran her onshore to prevent her sinking. The Commodore's boat was cut in two, a shot went through the Rocket boat, One of the small schooners carrying two 32 pounders had a shot which raked her from aft, forward; the boats generally suffered, but I have not ascertained what loss they sustained in men. Since that time they have remained in-active this way, Finding that the masts of my barges was a mark for them over the trees and points of land, I have had them all taken out, the boats are lighter & will row faster, with less danger from the Fire of the Rockets.

Major Stewarts men has arrived, he has placed them in different Positions along the creek to annoy, if they venture up. I have also erected a small battery, (1. 24 lb. Carronade), at the mouth of the branch where the Scorpion & Gunboats lay, and have also drove piles across the Creek, with a Boom, so that, should the force increase we have little to fear from an Attack by boats, no matter how numerous.

Yesterday a Gentleman of this County by the name of Parren (a Violent Fed) who lives at the mouth of the creek, came up, and said that himself & Brother had been taken and carried on bd.; That he had been landed from the Commodore, to inform the inhabitants that if they remained at home quietly, they should not be molested, but if on landing he found their houses deserted he would burn them all, as he had done the house of a Mr. Patterson and the Barn of Mr. Skinner, (our Purser). He also said he had, promised the Commodore after having given such information to return onboard in the evening, he had the Impudence to come where the flotilla lay, and then into the Camp of Major Stewart, where I found him, and on his declaring to me it was his intention to return onboard the Enemy in the Evening, I had him arrested and have him now under guard, where he must remain until I receive your orders, or the enemy goes down.

Several other persons are onboard the enemy, and some Voluntarily, (as I am informed). Saturday and yesterday, the enemy were employed on the Patuxent river in landing on the Banks to plunder stock etc. It was on Saturday evening they burnt the property of Mr. Patterson & Skinner.

This Mr. Parren informs me that Commodore Barrie of the Dragon always commanded and is much disappointed at his defeats, for that he had wrote to Admiral Cockburn that if the Admiral would send him a frigate & Brig, he would most assuredly destroy the flotilla. The frigate is the *Acasta*, the Brig the *Jasseur*.

They left only 200 men, and one small boat onboard the Dragon at the mouth of the Patuxent, so that there must have been in the affair on Friday upwards of 800 men, they came with a Band of Music playing. My force, after the bursting of my Gun, & the sinking of the Galley, was twelve Barges and 450 men.

The Militia have all been discharged, except one company, the fact is, their officers (mostly Feds) did not encourage their men to act, & such conduct only encouraged the enemy to commit depredations along the river.

I have the honor to be respectfully, Your Obt. Servt.
Joshua Barney



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June 27, 1814

Second Battle of St. Leonard's Creek
CAPTAIN JOSHUA BARNEY, FLOTILLA SERVICE, TO (BROTHER) LOUIS BARNEY
Flotilla off Benidick, June 27th. 1814

Dr. Louis,

Yesterday morning at the point of day we woke up our enemies, by 2 pieces. (18 pounders) under Capt Geoghegan his officers & 20 men of the flotilla, with red hot shot, 3 pr. under Capt Miller of the Marines, the Artillery posted on a Hill commanding the Enemy, the whole under Col. Wadsworth, the enemy were so alarmed that it was a quarter of an hour before they returned a shot — I moved down with the flotilla, and joined in “Chorus,” our shot was terrible, as we were not more than four hundred yards off, a distance which did not suit us, for we were within grape shot, but I was obliged to take that or none, as they lay direct in the mouth of the Creek, we pushed out and gave it to them, the moment we appeared they ceased their fire on the Batteries and poured it into us, seeming to have just waked, we returned it with Interest, at 6 they began to move and made sail down the river leaving us Masters of the field, thus we have again beat them & their Rockets, which they did not spare, you see we improve, first, we beat a few boats which they thought would make an easy prey of us, then they increased the number, then they added schooners, and now behold the [two] frigates, all, all, have shared the same fate, I next expect, ships of the line; no matter we will do our duty— My loss was 6 Killed & four wounded, young Asquith who had just joined us was killed — Captn. Sellers, Kiddall, & Worthington's boats were the sufferers, I had three men wounded at the fort, for it was my men alone that fought there, altho there was 600 men of Carbery & Littles Regmt. in the rear — I am now waiting orders from head quarters.

Give my love to Ann & Kiss Misses—Your Afft.

J Barney

Wm.(son) was not with us, as I had sent him with Skinner, in a flag to the Admiral with dispatches from Government —

The moment the enemy ran off, we moved up the River, so that, thanks to Hot & cold shot the Blockade has been raised—



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TRANSCRIPT OF LETTER FROM THOS. E. KING TO BENJAMIN KING, KING FAMILY FILES/WAR OF 1812

Calvert County Historical Society

Thursday July 14, 1814

Dear Sir:

I received your letter on Sunday last and was very glad to hear you are well but I am sorry to see you are so much influenced by Dr. Blake as to change your political sentiments and have such a mean opinion of the citizens of Calvert the place that gave you birth to think that the militia could not fight for looking at the mean marines that came down for the defense of old Barney who has been the means of running Calvert for if he had never of come in the Patuxent the British would never have thought nor had an idea that they could come as high as Lower Marlboro in the world but by his going down the Bay and giving them a challenge as it were he could not think they would let him return without following him up and he pitched on the Patuxent as a place of safety and as he knew Calvert St. Marys Charles and Prince George's County were all Federalist he thought it would be the means of making them all advocates of old Jim Madison but it has enraged them so that a great many that were in favor of him now are abusing him every day but I think when I tell the mischief the British have done it will be enough to make you and every man abuse Jim Madison and old Barney in Hell if you could now I will I will go on to tell you the damage that has been done since old Barney has been blocaded in (Leonard?) Creek in the first place they took R?Parran S Parran and Richard Parran Overseas as prisoners while they were getting their stock off the river in the second place they burned John Pattersons dwelling house Barn and destroyed much of his stock in the third place they burned John Broome's house in the fourth place they burned every house John Mackall had except the overseer house in the fifth place they came to lower Marlboro tore and broke everybodys house to pieces and burned the ware house and all the tobacco took nearly all the poultry in town away took seventy sheep from Mr. Graham took nearly all Mrs. Ballards negroes and two of Mr. T. Blakes Wat and Ned since Wat has made his escape and returned home took Reynolds as prisoner of war and took every book he had in his library but I made a mistake in telling you everybodys house was destroyed in Marlboro Old Boyds house nor nothing he had was touched but what he was paid for and on their return down they stopped at Cliffts and burned Mr. Morris' barns and some tobacco in it stopped at Benedict took nearly all of the tobacco out of the ware house and did not burn nothing but destroyed everybodys by tearing them to pieces stopped at Holland Point and burned Mrs. Mackalls barn burned a great many houses in St. Marys burned Dr. Sommersvilles' house and destroyed all his harvest fields by cutting his wheat things for the stock they have aboard since burned the ware house and two or three more houses I have never heard to who they belong. In St. Leonards Creek and now have — of this country up as far as Mrs. Rawling just below the Chapel and I must tell you that the marines you think so much of on their return up from the Creek encamped in our church and some of them came to my mothers and on their — return now after all this if you can yet think them right I must bid you adieu all the family send their love to you Mr. Reynolds and the Parrans got home again I am yours

Thomas B. King

P.S. I will send your things up by Miss Blake, excuse this I wrote it in a hurry.