A national ship

Our ship, USS Constitution, named for the country’s founding document, built with American materials, and manned with sailors from across the nation, represents the whole country as we go into battle against Great Britain.
An enemy ship has been spotted!

The drum beats, sending all hands to prepare for battle. In a flurry of activity we quickly ready the Ship for the fight. Breathlessly we hasten to our battle stations for the long painful wait. Hour after hour in tortured silence we contemplate our fate while we watch the enemy ship approach.
Anticipation

What do sailors feel as they wait for battle to begin?

**Fear** – Sailors worry that they or their friends might not survive the battle. What frightens you?

**Excitement** – The adrenaline pumps as the moment the sailors have been training for arrives. How do you feel when something you’ve waited for is about to happen?

**Anxiety** – Sailors are nervous because no one knows the outcome of the battle. What makes you anxious?

In My Own Words

“My pulse beat quick - all nature seemed wrapped in awful suspense - the dart of death hung as it were trembling by a single hair, and no one knew on whose head it would fall.”

- Seaman David C. Bunnell, 1813
As sailors waited for battle to begin, they were alone with their thoughts. They had time to dwell on the fear that they might never see their families again. Some gun crews strapped a Bible like this one to their cannon’s carriage for extra protection.
BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The roar of the cannon is deafening. We are surrounded by the destruction of the enemy’s fire. Every broadside fills the decks with smoke. We feel the eyes of our country upon us and fight like tigers.
What are the characteristics of a brave sailor?

**Courage** – Sailors push fear aside to do their job. What have you done that took courage?

**Responsibility** – Each sailor has to do his duty to his country, ship, and shipmates. What are your responsibilities to your community, school, or family?

**Team Player** – Working together is critical to succeed in battle. How do you work or play as part of a team?

*In My Own Words*

'We’re so close (to HMS Guerriere) we can see the whites of the eyes and count the teeth of the enemy.'

-Seaman Moses Smith, 1812
USS Constitution vs. HMS Guerriere

Follow Captain Isaac Hull’s diagram and read his descriptions of the battle that made Constitution famous.

3:45 pm
“All clear for action”
Constitution’s crew shortens sail and runs out the guns, ready for battle.

6:20 pm
“. . . in less than fifteen minutes from the time, we got alongside [firing broadside after broadside], his Mizen Mast went by the board . . .”

6:30 pm
As the two ships collide, marines prepare to board Guerriere “but the instant the Boarders were called . . . his Foremast, and Mainmast went by the board.”

7:00 pm
With the “Enemy totally disabled,” Guerriere surrenders by firing a gun to leeward.

Isaac Hull’s Battle Diagram, 1821; Private collection
Play Battle It Out

The object of the game
It is August 19, 1812 - USS Constitution and HMS Guerriere face off in battle 600 miles off the coast of Boston. Refight this historic battle to see which ship can outgun its opponent and sail to victory.

You will need:
Battle It Out game board 2 playing pieces (select two pieces from another game or use buttons, coins, etc) 2 dice
1 coin
Pencil and paper to keep score

Getting started:
Divide the players into two teams. One team will be playing for the United States Ship Constitution, and the other for the British Ship Guerriere.

Each team selects a playing piece and places it on their start space. The American team moves along the blue track, and the British team moves along the red track.

Playing the game:
To Move: When it’s your team’s turn, roll the dice and advance that number of spaces ahead.

To Fire: If you land on a space in a firing zone where your opponent is, your team can fire its ship’s guns. Firing is only permitted when both ships are in the same zone at the same time.

To get a hit in the...
Short-range firing zone: Flip a coin once. If you get heads, you’ve scored a hit.
Long-range firing zone: Flip a coin twice. If you get heads both times, you’ve scored a hit.

Keep track of how many hits each team earns.

Bonus hit: If you land on a white space and your opponent is on an adjacent square you get an automatic hit.

Winning the game: The ship that is first to hit its opponent six times is the winner.
Did women participate in battle?

On board the British ship Guerriere women helped carry the powder to the guns (cannon). Constitution sailor Moses Smith witnessed this and wrote, “The women they had with them were engaged in passing powder, and other munitions of war. Amid such activity on the decks of the enemy, courage and prudence demanded that we should be active on our own.”

Get History B U F F

Ready ... Aim ... Fire! Go online to lead your gun team to victory. Click on the “Hands-on Activities” link on www.asailorslifeforme.org.
How USS Constitution earned the nickname “Old Ironsides”

On August 19, 1812, USS Constitution engaged HMS Guerriere in an epic battle. Amidst the deafening roar and choking smoke of cannon fire, a sailor watched as cannonballs bounced off Constitution’s thick wooden sides. In amazement, he cried out, “Huzza, her sides are made of iron!” Ever since, the Ship has been affectionately known as “Old Ironsides.”
Draw the Missing Moment

For 200 years artists have depicted Constitution’s battle against HMS Guerriere, like the series of paintings below by George Ropes, Jr. None have illustrated the defining moment when the Ship earned her nickname, “Old Ironsides.” Help fill in the gap in the historic record by making your own drawing of that missing moment.

“Huzza! Her sides are made of iron!”

“Constitution and Guerriere” by George Ropes, Jr., 1813
Collection of the USS Constitution Museum, Boston
‘This being my first action I was ever in, you can imagine to yourself what were my feelings to hear the horrid groans of the wounded and dying.’

-Pardon Mawney Whipple, 1815
Who am I?

I am called Amos Evans, though the men know me instead as ‘Saw-Bones.’ I learned medicine from Ben Rush, one of our nation’s greatest physicians. My love of the sea led me to become a navy surgeon’s mate in 1808 (though I might have earned four times more ashore). After two years I was promoted to full surgeon, and I sailed with Constitution in June 1812.

In My Own Words

‘You are a hard set of butchers,’ was all I said to the surgeon, as my torn and bleeding limb was severed from my body.

- Seaman Richard Dunn, August 20, 1812
Bone Saw

This bone saw is a surgeon’s tool of last resort. He uses it to remove the mangled leg or arm of a wounded sailor. The sailor is awake during the operation so a good surgeon cuts with great speed. After battle, the surgeons from the two ships work together to ease the suffering of all the wounded.

Bone Saw from the Surgeon’s Medical Chest owned by William Swift, early 19th century
Swift was Surgeon on board USS Chesapeake during the War of 1812
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society
What do sailors feel after battle?

**Compassion** – Sailors show concern for those injured during the battle. How do you show compassion?

**Horror** – Sailors are shocked to see the destruction caused by their guns. How do you feel when your words or actions hurt someone?

**Pride** – Sailors feel a sense of accomplishment after winning the battle. How do you feel when you win something?

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**In My Own Words**

'I do not mind the day of battle, the excitement carries one through; but the day after is fearful, it is so dreadful to see my men wounded and suffering.'

- Captain Isaac Hull, 1812