



Song discussion questions and activities
Unit 2: A New Nation
1760-1820

- [Home](#)
- [Contents by Theme](#)
- [Unit Contents](#)
- [Historical Background](#)

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Free America

Words by Joseph Warren; to the tune of "The British Grenadiers," 1774

Song Background

The text of this song is attributed to Joseph Warren (1741–75), a soldier and leader in the war for independence. It was Warren who, on April 18, 1775, sent Paul Revere and William Dawes to Lexington and Concord on their famous ride to warn local patriots that British troops were being sent against them. This song appears in different versions and may have appeared in print as early as February of 1770, which was some time



Portrait of Joseph Warren (1741–75) by John Singleton Copley.

before the movement to free America was popular. It appeared in the *Massachusetts Spy* on May 26, 1774, and in the *Connecticut Courant* on May 8, 1775. It was originally known in some colonies as "A New Massachusetts Liberty Song."

This song essentially thumbs its nose at Great Britain, saying, "You may have been overrun by conquering nations, but we won't be!"

The adaptation of the tune of "The British Grenadiers" extends the proud military stance of the song's British predecessor with new, revolutionary lyrics.

Discussion Questions

- What does "the seat of science Athens and the earth's proud mistress Rome" refer to? *The ancient Greek and Roman empires.*
- What does "Proud Albion bowed to Caesar" refer to? *Roman conquest of England (Albion).*
- What did the Picts, Danes, and Normans all have in common? *They all have invaded or conquered Britain at some time.*
- What is the message of this song? If you could choose only one word to describe the mood of this song, what would it be?
- The song asserts the rights and liberties of Americans. Who do you think Warren considered to be an American deserving of these rights? Were all people living in the United States given the same rights?
- The writers of this song set it to the well-known tune "The British Grenadiers." What is a grenadier? What kind of music does the tune remind you of? *It is a marching tune.* What message were they sending by choosing this tune for these lyrics? If you were a British soldier, how would you feel listening to this tune?
- This song claims America will never be subject to an outside power. How realistic was this claim in the 1770s? What incident in the early 1800s almost threatened their claim? *War of 1812.*
- What incidents in our history since have stirred up the fear of invasion by foreign powers? *War of 1812, Mexican War, Pearl Harbor, Cold War, 9/11 terrorist attacks, computer hackings and infiltrations connected to the 2016 and 2020 elections.* How close have we come to actually being conquered? Do Americans still believe the US is immune from invasion? How likely is it that the US would ever be invaded or conquered?

Vocabulary

grenadier: A soldier who carries and throws grenades.

Albion: The earliest known name for the island of Britain, dating from ancient Greece.

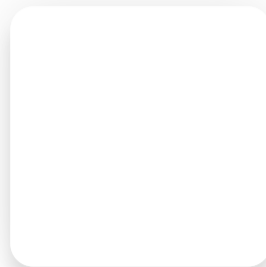
Picts: An ethnic group in ancient Scotland.

venal: Capable of being bought; corrupt with bribery.

sycophant: Swindler.

Recommended Recording

"Free Americay!" performed by The Boston Camerata on *Free America*, Harmonium Mundi, © 2019. Available on Spotify.



Free Americay!

PREVIEW Boston Camerata, Anne Azéma

Save on Spotify

In this recording, the fife and drum accompaniment offer the impression of a military performance as the colonists celebrate their victory.

Score

View [the broadside](#) (lyrics only) for "Free America."



[the music and lyrics](#) for "The British Grenadier" and "Free America."

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