



ACTIVITY

Communication Aboard USS *Constitution*

The speaking trumpet, boatswain's pipe and fife & drum were all objects used for communicating on USS *Constitution*. Many means of communication were necessary on a ship as large as *Constitution* to reach all of its 500 crewmembers. Think about the noise quality of each, and the intent. A boatswain's pipe signaled a change in watch for the sailors with a special call, like a pipe to dinner or to begin a chore. A speaking trumpet carried an officer's voice over longer distances and called orders to the men aloft. The beat of a Marine's fife and drum were heard far and wide when they signaled the crew to their battle stations. Have students compare these different modes of communication used on *Constitution* to those in your school, like loudspeakers, letters, a megaphone, the fire alarm, or cell phones.



Boatswain's Pipe

The boatswain's pipe (pronounced "bosun") was used for communication on a ship. Its loud and piercing sound woke up sailors and called them to duties throughout the day. It was the job of the ship's boatswain to play it, and he traditionally carried it on a lanyard around his neck.



Speaking Trumpet

There were no radios or loud speakers on board USS *Constitution* in the War of 1812. Instead, speaking trumpets like this one were used to amplify sailors' voices. Officers could use them to communicate orders during battle, and when two ships encountered each other, captains would use them to have a conversation that carried across the sea.



Fife

This instrument was used to communicate orders to the Ship's crew, such as calling them to battle. Fife music also gave rhythm to heavy work such as raising an anchor. The fife was played by the Marines musicians on board.