



ACTIVITY

## Creative Writing: HMS Guerriere Battle Skit

Using a list of primary source quotes, ask students to write an historical fiction short story or skit about the battle between USS *Constitution* and HMS *Guerriere*. The quotes are divided into the three main phases of a battle: the anticipation of impending warfare, the chaos of battle, and the aftermath. The quotes are taken from letters, journal entries, reports, and other primary source documents from the War of 1812, and illustrate points of view from both the American and British sides.

# Battle Quotes

## Before Battle

### **Americans:**

#### **Captain Isaac Hull:**

A frigate of the Royal Navy ...His Majesty's Ship Guerriere. We clear the decks for engagement and set off in pursuit. For the first time my brave crew will be put to the ultimate test ... battle.

No firing at random!...Let every man look well to his aim.

#### **Seaman Williams:**

We wait in impatience at our guns - not a word is spoken - not a sound heard, except now and then an order to trim a sail, and the bo'sun's shrill whistle. My pulse beats quick - all nature seems wrapped in awful suspense ... the dart of death hangs as if it is trembling by a single hair, and no one knows on whose head it will fall ...

#### **Seaman Moses Smith:**

We beat to quarters. Every man repairs to his battle station. Each gun crew mans their cannon. Powder monkeys carry charges up from the magazine. Marines stand ready on the fighting tops. The surgeon prepares the cockpit for the wounded.

#### **Midshipman Pardon Mawney Whipple:**

This is a moment I had most wished to experience ... a man must be happy who sacrifices everything for his country. My ambition leads me this way, and should I be so fortunate as to prove serviceable to my country, I shall be in the zenith of my glory.

### **British:**

#### **Captain James Dacres:**

She acts too bold to be an American ship, but the better she behaves the more honor we shall gain in taking her.

#### **Lieutenant Bartholomew Kent:**

As we closed within a mile on the Yankee frigate we hoisted our colors and released a broadside on *Constitution*.

# During Battle

## Americans:

### **Seaman Moses Smith:**

The British shot fall well short, sending up great fountains of water before the ship.

Huzza! Her sides are made of iron! [Note: Smith reports hearing this in his memoir during the battle against *Guerriere*, but does not identify the person or persons who said it.]

*Constitution* shakes from stem to stern with a single mighty blast.

### **Seaman Williams:**

We bear *Guerriere*'s fire, still silent, still steady, still waiting. Several shot enter our hull but the plank is so hard the shot falls out and sinks in the water.

Finally we come abreast of *Guerriere*. We're so close we can see the whites of the eyes and count the teeth of the enemy. Captain Hull is all animation. He sees that the decisive moment has come.

*Guerriere* returns our fire and cannonballs blast over the rail, sending splinters like daggers in all directions.

### **Captain Isaac Hull:**

Now boys, pour it into them!

## British:

### **Captain James Dacres:**

For a moment it feels as if heaven and earth have struck together; a more terrible shock cannot be imagined.

*Constitution* places herself on our larboard bow, raking us while riflemen sweep our deck with a deadly hail of musket fire.

### **Lieutenant Bartholomew Kent:**

*Constitution*'s shots pound away at our hull and masts. With a great cracking sound our mizzen mast collapses like a felled tree sending our topmen spiraling into the ocean.

The dead, wounded, and dying are handed down as rapidly as men can pass them, till the cock-pit is filled, with hardly room for the surgeon to work.

## After Battle

### Americans:

#### **Captain Isaac Hull:**

By heavens that ship is ours!

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.

*Guerriere* is so cut up, that all attempts to bring her to port will be useless. Once the wounded and survivors are removed, we'll set her ablaze.

#### **Midshipman Pardon Mawney Whipple:**

On board *Guerriere* ... pieces of skulls, brains, legs, arms & blood lay in every direction and the groans of the wounded are enough almost to make me curse the war.

#### **Seaman Moses Smith:**

In less than thirty minutes, *Guerriere* is left without a mast standing and her hull is cut to pieces. She's a mere rolling log at the mercy of the sea.

This being my first action, you can imagine what my feelings are to hear the horrid groans of the wounded and dying.

Upon our arrival in Boston a crowd cheers for us, ordinary sailors! Newspapers call it "a brilliant naval victory" and our ship has earned a new nickname, *Old Ironsides*. I am proud to call myself a *Constitution* sailor, proud of what we achieved together, and thankful for the ship that protected me from harm.

#### **Seaman Williams:**

The victory is complete. Our casualties are seven killed and seven wounded.

We search for our friends among the survivors. The surgeons from both ships work together to help the injured.

### British:

#### **Captain James Dacres:**

Strike the flag! Further resistance is a useless expense of lives. 15 of my men are killed and 63 are wounded.

The conduct of Captain Hull and his officers to our men is that of a brave enemy. The greatest attention being paid to our wounded.

#### **Lieutenant Bartholomew Kent:**

Our ship is in a sinking condition. Captain Dacres calls the remaining officers together.