

Speed Reading About Music— Stars and Stripes Forever

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APPENDIX A: Sample Speed Reading Text

1. “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” by John Philip Sousa

John Philip Sousa was the leader of the U.S. Marine Band in the late 1800s. Under his leadership, the band became more and more popular. People called him *The March King*, because he wrote 136 marches. (A *march* is a type of music with a strong beat—soldiers can easily keep in step and walk together, or *march*, when they hear this kind of song.) The most popular of the marches Sousa wrote is called “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” He wrote this march several years after he had retired from being leader of the band.

Sousa and his wife were on a long holiday in Europe when they read some sad news in the newspaper. Sousa’s band manager had died. The Sousas decided to travel back to the United States and, on the ship, John kept hearing the strong beat of a band playing in his head. It just wouldn’t stop, so he put pen to paper. While he was writing the song, Sousa was missing his home, but he was happily remembering his time as U.S. Marine Band leader and thinking about the flag flying over the White House. A nickname for the American flag is *The Stars and Stripes* because these are on the flag. Sousa said that when he was in a foreign country, the sight of *The Stars and Stripes* was the best thing in the world to him.

In 1897, John Philip Sousa first played this song at a concert in Philadelphia. It was so popular with the crowd that he had to play it again to satisfy them, and even a third time! In 1987, “The Stars and Stripes Forever” became the national march of the USA. This quick, spirited march is often heard on the Fourth of July. It is also often played after the U.S. president gives a speech.



People usually love hearing this cheerful song, but there is one place where you would never want to hear it—at a circus. In show business, especially the circus and theater, another name for this song is *The Disaster March*. If circus workers hear it being played, they know something bad is happening. This is a signal for them to get all the people out of the circus tents or away from danger. The book and movie *Water for Elephants* has such a scene where the band plays “The Stars and Stripes Forever.

(401 words)

Time _____

Score _____

APPENDIX B: *Sample Comprehension Questions*

1. “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” by John Philip Sousa

1. John Philip Sousa led the
 - a. U.S. Air Force Band
 - b. U.S. Marine Band
 - c. U.S. Army Band
2. He got his nickname for writing many
 - a. marches
 - b. waltzes
 - c. concerts
3. Music to which soldiers can easily walk is called
 - a. popular music
 - b. a march
 - c. progressive music
4. Sousa wrote “The Stars and Stripes Forever”
 - a. the year he retired as band leader
 - b. years after he retired
 - c. in 1987
5. When he sat down to write the song,
 - a. he already heard it in his head
 - b. he had no idea what it would sound like
 - c. he didn’t want to stop
6. *The Stars and Stripes* is a nickname for
 - a. John Philip Sousa
 - b. disasters
 - c. the American flag
7. This song is often played
 - a. after the U.S. president makes a speech
 - b. on New Year’s Day
 - c. on Christmas Day
8. The first time this song was performed in public, the band had to play it
 - a. one time
 - b. two times
 - c. three times
9. The song’s nickname among circus people is
 - a. *The President’s Song*
 - b. *The Disaster March*
 - c. *Water for Elephants March*
10. At the circus, this song is played when
 - a. the show begins
 - b. the elephants come in
 - c. there is a problem