Before the War:

The War of 1812 began as a conflict between the United States and Great Britain on the seas. Beginning in 1803, Great Britain began their policy of impressment or seizing American sailors from American ships. This angered many at home who saw this as a great insult from our bitter enemies. General negative feelings towards Great Britain were intensifying. An early example of the dangers of impressment was the Chesapeake Affair in 1807 where an American ship was fired upon and boarded by British sailors. Soon to be President James Madison gave a speech to Congress in 1806 citing the dangers of the British policy of impressment and warned against greater British insults as a cause of war. After his election, James Madison sent a request for war to Congress which was approved thus beginning the War of 1812. War Hawks in Congress who had been pushing for the war were thrilled. Although not everyone felt this way. Riots broke out in Baltimore protesting the war in August, two months after the declaration of war. Despite these protests, the war continued with victories and defeats for both sides.

American Victories:

Battle of Lake Erie

When war broke out, the British seized control of Lake Erie. Americans sought to gain control of it in September 1813. Nine vessels of the United States Navy defeated and captured six vessels of British Royal Navy. This ensured American control of the lake for the rest of the war, which in turn allowed the Americans to regain control of Detroit and break the Indian confederation established by Tecumseh. It was one of the biggest naval battles of the War of 1812.

Battle of New Orleans

This battle was a series of engagements fought between December 24, 1814 and January 8, 1815. It was the final major battle of the War of 1812. American soldiers, commanded by Major General Andrew Jackson, prevented an invading British Army and Royal Navy from seizing New Orleans as a strategic tool to end the war. Remember, whoever controlled New Orleans controlled supplies going up and down the Mississippi River. The Treaty of Ghent which ended the war was signed on December 24, 1814. Because news took months to travel across the Atlantic ocean, news of the War ending was unknown to those involved and hostilities would continue in New Orleans until January 18 when all of the British forces had retreated, finally putting an end to the Battle of New Orleans and thus the War of 1812. The success of Andrew Jackson makes him an instant celebrity and household name. The anniversary of this Battle was a celebrated holiday for generations.
**Battle of Tippecanoe**

Often considered the first battle of the War of 1812, the Battle of Tippecanoe took place between the American general William Henry Harrison and Tecumseh’s brother, Tenskwatawa in what is now the state of Indiana. The natives were unprepared for battle and on November 7, 1811, the Americans drove back Native forces and claimed a tactical victory. This also resulted in weakening the British-Native alliance and kept Native Americans from playing a major role in the War of 1812. Years later when Harrison would run for President alongside John Tyler, their campaign slogan became, “Tippecanoe and Tyler too.”

**The Battle of Baltimore**

American forces repulsed sea and land invasions off the busy port city of Baltimore, Maryland, and killed the commander of the invading British forces. In the beginning, Americans retreated, however, the Americans intentionally used delay tactic that caused heavy casualties on the British, stopped their advance and allowed the defenders of Baltimore time to properly prepare for an attack. The most well noted point in the battle came when the British began firing on an American fort in the harbor. The resistance of Baltimore’s Fort McHenry during bombardment on September 13 – 14, 1814, by the Royal Navy inspired Francis Scott Key to compose the poem "Defense of Fort McHenry" which later became the lyrics for "The Star-Spangled Banner," the national anthem of the United States of America. Key was overwhelmed with the sight of the American flag still waving atop the fort in the morning light after being bombed for hours. In the end the British retreated and left Maryland.

**Battle of Plattsburgh (Lake Champlain)**

Another major American victory took place on Lake Champlain near Plattsburgh, New York. The British army under Lieutenant General Sir George Prévost had ground troops and a naval squadron converge on the lakeside town of Plattsburgh, which was defended by New York and Vermont militia and regular troops of the United States Army, all under the command of Brigadier General Alexander Macomb. The United States also had ships on the lake and helped counteract Britain’s Naval presence there. Britain’s ships attacked shortly after dawn on September 11, 1814, but were defeated after a hard fight in which a British Commander was killed. The battle took place shortly before the signing of the Treaty of Ghent which ended the war. This American victory, and the successful defense of Fort McHenry, at the Battle of Baltimore, denied the British peace negotiators leverage to demand any territorial claims against the United States.
British Victories:

Invasion of Canada

American leaders assumed that Canada could be easily overrun. Former President Jefferson optimistically referred to the conquest of Canada as just "a matter of marching." Many Loyalist Americans had migrated to Upper Canada after the Revolutionary War.

In 1812–13, British military experience prevailed over inexperienced American commanders. An American army under the command of William Hull invaded Canada on July 12, with his forces primarily made up of untrained and ill-disciplined militiamen. Once on Canadian soil, Hull issued a proclamation ordering all British subjects to surrender. He also threatened to kill any British prisoner caught fighting alongside a native. The proclamation helped stiffen resistance to the American attacks. Hull’s army was too weak in artillery and badly supplied to achieve any of its objectives, and had to fight just to maintain its own lines of communication.

In contrast to the American militia, the Canadian militia performed well. French Canadians, and former Loyalists, who had fought for the British during the American Revolutionary War, strongly opposed the American invasion. While there were some who sympathized with the invaders, the American forces found strong opposition from men loyal to the British Empire. As the Americans were being driven out of Canada the humiliation of their defeat began to set in. In a last ditch effort to turn this invasion around the American burned the city of York (Toronto today) which was the region’s capital. This action propelled the Canadians to look for revenge.

Burning of Washington D.C.

In response to what the British considered the unwarranted destruction of property along Lake Erie as well as the United States army burning the city of York in Canada the British began to march toward the capital of the United States, Washington D.C. After several American defeats, a British force led by Major General Robert Ross began the march inland and even into the American capital. After hearing that the British were on their way to destroy Washington, President James Madison and his cabinet fled the city leaving behind his wife Dolley Madison at the White House. On August 24, 1814, the British marched into Washington D.C. and burnt it to the ground including the Capitol Building and the White House. It has often been thought that Dolley Madison personally saved the large portrait of George Washington herself. However, while the First Lady organized the saving of the painting and the silver but did not remove them herself. Instead it was a White House doorman John Pierre Sioussant, a Frenchman, who removed the painting and carried it out with the assistance of the White House Gardener. The citizens of the United States were shocked at the British actions with some calling it needless vandalism. Other countries and leaders also denounced Britain’s decision to burn the U.S. capital and the event brought shame to British citizens across the world.
After the War:

The peace treaty that ended the War of 1812 between the United States of America and Great Britain was the Treaty of Ghent signed on December 24, 1814. The treaty restored relations between the two nations to *status quo ante bellum* — that is, it restored the borders of the two countries to where they were before the war began. This means that legally nothing changed. The Treaty was ratified by Parliament on December 30, 1814 and signed into law by the Prince Regent (the future King George IV). Because of the era’s lack of communications, it took weeks for news of the peace treaty to reach the United States. American forces under Andrew Jackson won the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815. The Treaty of Ghent was not in effect until it was ratified by the U.S. Senate unanimously on February 18, 1815.