

**Document Based Question**  
**The Opening Shots of the Civil War/Attack on Fort Sumter**  
**8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Grade**  
**Michael T. Watson- Mulberry Middle School**

**Directions:**

The following documents center on the opening shots of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, situated in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. You are to read/analyze each of the following documents in the order that they appear. Following each document you are to answer the questions based upon your reading/analysis to the best of your ability. Then you will utilize the documents and your answers to the questions to respond to the following essay prompt.

Your essay should include an introductory paragraph followed by a body that includes specific details from the documents that have been provided for you. Your essay should be brought to an end with a strong conclusive paragraph.

**Essay Prompt:**

Utilizing both the literary and visual resources you are to write an essay describing the attack of Fort Sumter as seen and experienced from the perspective of the participants and witnesses.

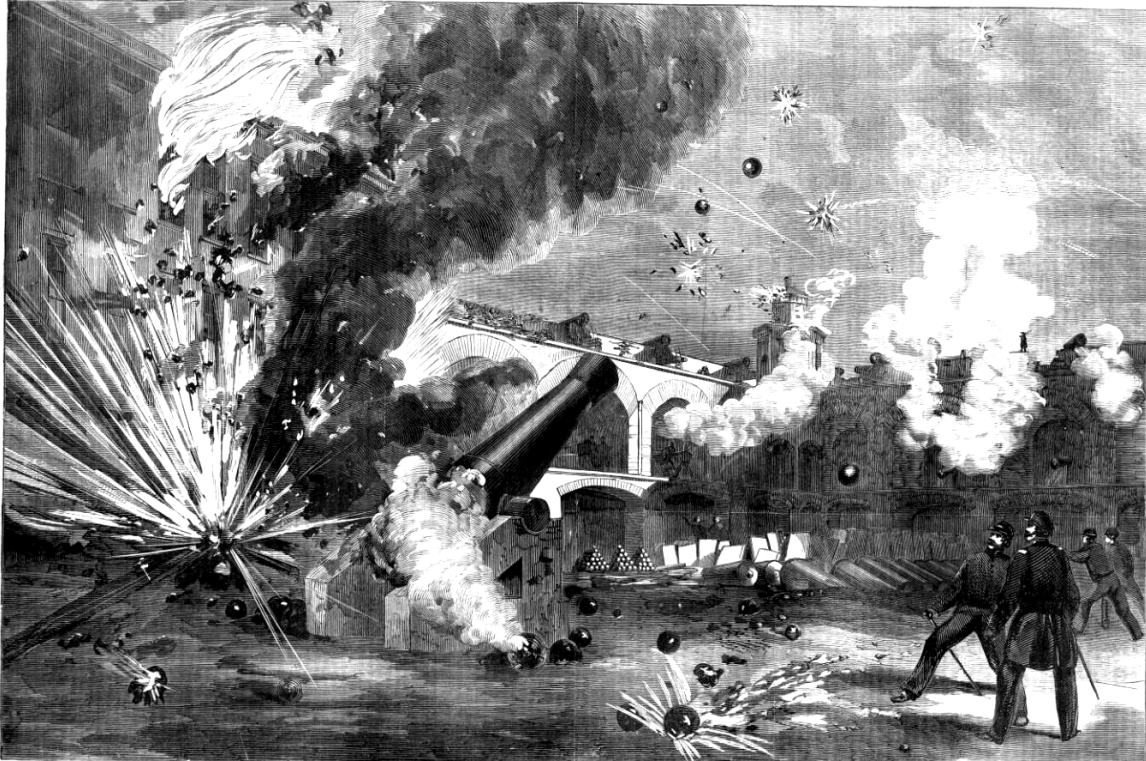
**Document A:** Captain Abner Doubleday was second in command at Fort Sumter, under the overall command of Major Robert Anderson, during the attack on Fort Sumter. The following excerpt is from a book that he authored in 1876 about his early war experiences.

“About 4 A.M. on the 12<sup>th</sup> (April) I was awakened by some one groping about my room in the dark and calling out my name. It proved to be Anderson, who came to announce to me that he had just received a dispatch from Beauregard, dated 3:20 A.M, to the effect that he should open fire upon us in an hour. Finding it was determined not to return the fire until after breakfast, I remained in bed. As we had no lights, we could in fact do nothing before that time except to wander around in the darkness and fire without an accurate view of the enemy’s works.

*The Blue and the Gray* by Henry Steele Commager

1. What information did Major Anderson bring to Captain Doubleday?
2. Why did Doubleday decide to remain in bed?
3. Explain why the soldiers within Fort Sumter would not return fire until after breakfast.

**Document B:** The following picture is taken from the April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1861 edition of Harper’s Weekly. Using this picture, which represents the interior of the fort during the bombardment of Fort Sumter, answer the following questions.



*Harper's Weekly*, April 27, 1861

4. Explain what dangers the men within Fort Sumter face.
5. Describe the destruction that is visible to Fort Sumter from inside the fort.
6. Based upon the illustration why do you think that no soldiers can be seen on the top level firing the cannon?

**Document C:** The following two excerpts are from the April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1861 edition of *Harper's Weekly*. *Harper's* was a well-recognized newspaper during the Civil War that had a national influence.

"The fire continued brisk all day. At 7 P.M. a heavy rain-storm caused a cessation of hostilities till 11 P.M. Major Anderson appears to have employed the interval in repairing damages. At or about 11 P.M. the fire recommenced, and a shell was thrown into Fort Sumter from each battery every twenty minutes during the night."

*Harper's Weekly*, April 27, 1861

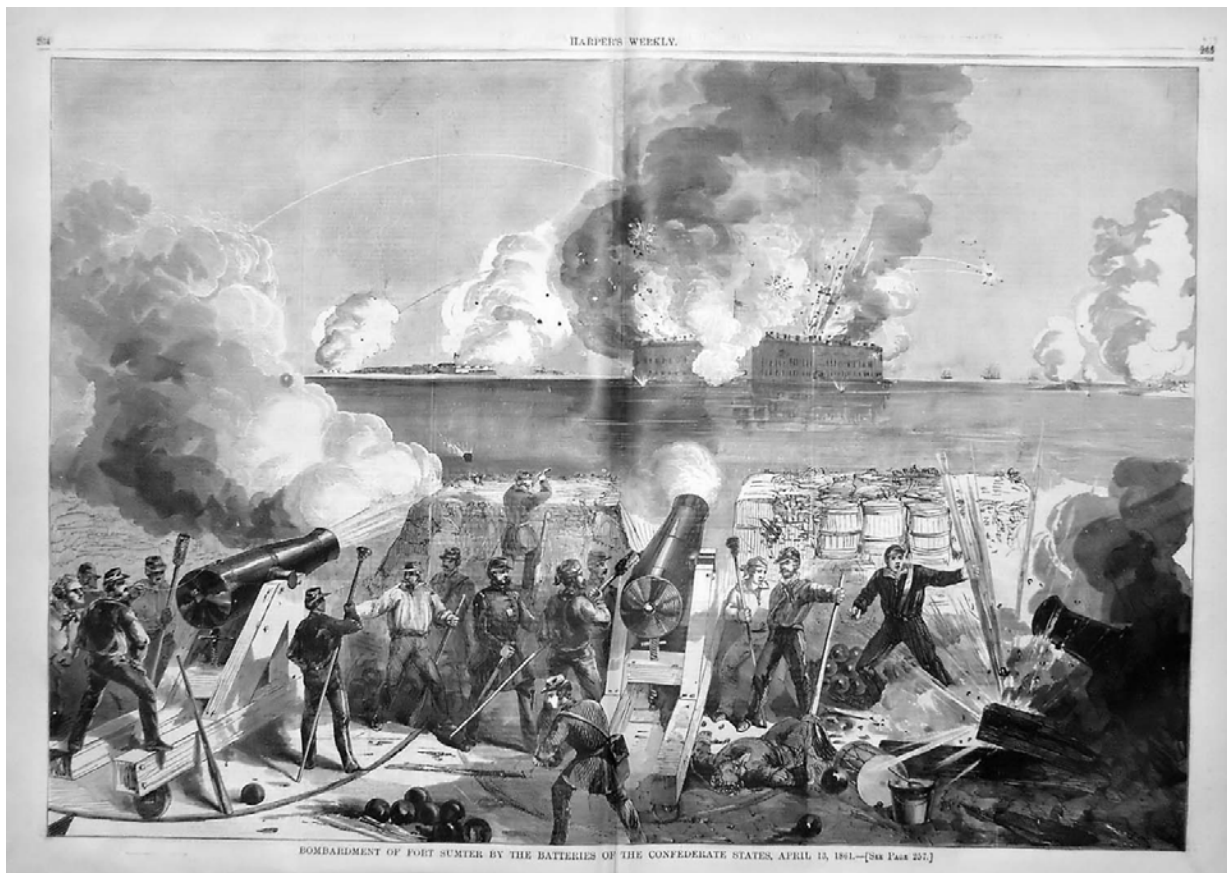
7. What happened at 7 P.M.?
8. How did Major Anderson take advantage of the rainstorm?

“With daybreak the heavy bombardment recommenced from all the batteries; the fire was returned from Fort Sumter with vigor until about 8 A.M., when Fort Sumter was perceived to be on fire. Major Anderson’s fighting then slackened, but the fire of the besiegers increased in intensity. At about 10 A.M. Major Anderson lowered his flag to half-mast in token of distress; perhaps as a signal to the United States vessels which were lying at anchor...”

*Harper’s Weekly*; April 27, 1861

9. What two things were perceived or noticed from Fort Sumter around 8 A.M.?
  
10. What does Major Anderson do at 10 A.M. on the second day of the bombardment? Why was this done?

**Document D:** The following picture is taken from the April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1861 edition of *Harper’s Weekly*. Using this picture, which represents the Bombardment of Fort Sumter by the Batteries of the Confederate States, answer the following questions.



*Harper’s Weekly*; April 27, 1861

11. What are the soldiers firing at?
  
12. Explain why the target should be easy to hit.

13. Explain why the soldiers firing the cannon might feel relatively safe and secure during the bombardment.

**Document E:** The following excerpts come to us once again from Captain Abner Doubleday. These excerpts are from April 13<sup>th</sup>, the second day of the bombardment of Fort Sumter.

“By 11 A.M. the conflagration was terrible and disastrous. One fifth of the fort was on fire, and the wind drove the smoke in dense masses into the angle where we had all taken refuge. It seemed impossible to escape suffocation. Some lay down close to the ground, with handkerchiefs over their mouths, and others posted themselves near the embrasures, where the smoke was somewhat lessened by the draught of air. Every one suffered severely....Had not a slight change of wind taken place, the result might have been fatal to most of us.”

*The Blue and the Gray* by Henry Steele Commager

14. Explain why so many of the men in Fort Sumter suffered so much by 11 A.M. on the second day of the bombardment.

15. What measures were taken by the soldiers inside Fort Sumter to lessen their suffering?

“Our firing having ceased and the enemy being very jubilant, I thought it would be as well to show them that we were not all dead yet, and ordered the gunners to fire a few rounds more. I heard afterward that the enemy loudly cheered Anderson for his persistency under such adverse circumstances.”

*The Blue and the Gray* by Henry Steele Commager

16. Why was it decided to “fire a few rounds more” from Fort Sumter?

17. How did the enemy react to this show of defiance?

“The scene at this time was really terrific. The roaring and crackling of the flames, the dense masses of whirling smoke, the bursting of the enemy’s shells and our own which were exploding in the burning rooms, the crashing of the shot, and the sound of masonry falling in every direction, made the fort a pandemonium. When at last nothing was left of the building but the blackened walls and smoldering embers, it became painfully evident that an immense amount of damage had been done.”

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18. Based on this description by Capt. Doubleday, why would the enemy, the Confederate forces, believe that the commanders and soldiers of Fort Sumter would be on the verge of surrendering?

**Document F:** The following picture is taken from the May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1861 edition of Harper’s Weekly. Using this picture, which represents a rooftop view of the bombardment of Fort Sumter answer the following questions.



*Harper's Weekly*: May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1861

19. Why are so many people on the rooftops of Charleston?
20. Describe the emotional reactions of many of the women in the illustration.
21. Based on the reactions of the women on the rooftops what fears or worries might they be expressing?

**Document G:** Union Major Robert Anderson was in command of the garrison stationed at Fort Sumter. Major Anderson knew that the fort could not hold out for long if and when Confederate forces launched a bombardment on Fort Sumter. His fears came true on the morning of April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1861. The following letter is a report that Major Anderson prepared in the aftermath of the bombardment. Answer the following questions from Major Anderson's report.

"Steamship Baltic, off Sandy Hook, April 18 (1861)-10:30 A.M.-via New York-Having defended Fort Sumter for thirty-four hours, until the quarters were entirely burned, the main gates destroyed by fire, the gorge walls seriously injured, the magazine surrounded by flames, and its door closed from the effects of the heat, four barrels and three cartridges of powder only being available, and

no provisions remaining but pork, I accepted terms of evacuation offered by General Beauregard, being the same offered by him on the 11<sup>th</sup> instant, prior to the commencement of hostilities, and marched out of the fort Sunday afternoon, the 14<sup>th</sup> instant, with colors flying and drums beating, bringing away company and private property, and saluting my flag with fifty guns.”

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22. When and where was this report written?
23. What reasons are given by Anderson to justify the surrender of Fort Sumter?
24. How long was Fort Sumter under fire?

Directions for the essay portion:

- Your essay should include an introductory paragraph, a body of several paragraphs with supporting evidence/facts, and a conclusive statement.
- You should use information from the documents, both written and visual, to include supporting details and examples to develop your essay.

Essay Prompt:

Utilizing both the literary and visual resources you are to write an essay describing the attack of Fort Sumter as seen and experienced from the perspective of the participants and witnesses.