



Walter Scott 1771-1832

The Battle of Bannockburn

Account 1: National Trust for Scotland, 2022.

The Battle of Bannockburn took place on 23 and 24 June. Despite being vastly outnumbered, Robert chose his ground well and masterminded a tremendous victory over the English army. Over the two days of battle, Edward's army was repeatedly thwarted by the Scots' stubborn resistance, before finally finding themselves trapped by the surrounding terrain, with no room to manoeuvre their huge force. The result was an unprecedented rout of Edward's army.

[National Trust for Scotland \(nts.org.uk\)](https://www.nts.org.uk)

Account 2: John Major, 1521; translated from Latin to English in 1892.

In blood the heroes fought, yea knee-deep. With marvellous skill did the English bowmen pick out the unarmed Scots; and when Bruce, whose eyes, as he were another Argus, were in every place, was ware of this, he sent against the bowmen some stout-hearted men, who forthwith drove them back with great slaughter. Meanwhile, when the issue of the day was doubtful still, the servants who had been left at the tents to guard the horses and baggage of their masters, moved with compassion for the case of their lords, left all and threw themselves against the foe.

1. Who was the battle between?
2. Who won?
3. Why did the losers lose, according to the National Trust?
4. Why did the losers lose, according to John Major?
5. Why do you think the accounts of the battle are different?
6. Which account is the most subjective? What words and phrases create an emotional response?
7. What purpose do you think each writer had in writing their account of the battle?
8. Who do you think each writer thought would read their account of the battle?

Answers:

1. The battle was between Scotland, led by Robert the Bruce, and England, led by Edward II.
2. Scotland won.
3. The National Trust says that Robert the Bruce chose a good place for the battle ('chose his ground well') and that the Scottish army refused to give up ('the Scots' stubborn resistance').
4. John Major says that the servants, who had been watching the battle, chose to join, and turned the tide in favour of Scotland.
5. The pupils can give different reasons. These include:
 - a. Major wanted to draw attention to the heroism of the Scottish people.
 - b. The National Trust wanted to appeal to people from all countries.
 - c. The National Trust gave an overview of the whole battle in just one paragraph whereas Major's account is taken from a larger text.
6. John Major's account is more subjective. He uses adjectives such as 'marvellous' and 'stout-hearted' to show that the battle was between two groups of people who were excellent at fighting. He emphasises the extent of the violence by saying that the blood was 'knee-deep,' and he used strong verbs, such as 'drove' to show the force of the battle. He compares Bruce to Argus, another great military hero, to show his expertise. These all create wonder in the reader who is likely to be left impressed.
7. The National Trust want to inform people of the battle and encourage people to visit the site. Major wants to give an account of Scottish history that is interesting for general readers.
8. The National Trust probably wrote with international visitors in mind. John Major probably wrote for British people who were interested in history.



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Accounts 3 and 4 Pre-Reading

You are going to read two accounts of the battle of Bannockburn written by Walter Scott. The first one is two stanzas from his poem, *The Lord of the Isles* (1815). The second is from his *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828-1830), which he wrote for his grandson.

Before you read, answer these questions:

1. What do you read for fun?
2. People in the nineteenth century read long poems for fun. Why do you think they liked them?
3. Who do you think Scott was writing for when he wrote his poem?
4. Do you think Scott wanted to write differently when he wrote the two pieces?
5. What effect do you think he wanted to achieve when he wrote each piece?

Now read the extracts and answer the questions below.

Account 3: Walter Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather*, (1828-1830).

The English King ordered his men to begin the battle. The archers bent their bows, and began to shoot so closely together, that the arrows fell like flakes of snow on a Christmas day. They killed many of the Scots, and might, as at Falkirk, and other places, have decided the victory; but Bruce, as I told you before, was prepared for them. He had in readiness a body of men-at-arms well mounted, who rode at full gallop among the archers, and as they had no weapons, save their bows and arrow, which they could not use when they were attacked hand to hand, they were cut down in great numbers by the Scottish horsemen, and thrown into total confusion.

[...]

On a sudden, while the battle was obstinately maintained on both sides, an event happened which decided the victory. The servants and attendants on the Scottish camp had, as I told you, been sent behind the army to a place afterwards called the Gillies' Hill. But when they saw that their masters were likely to gain the day, they rushed from their place of concealment with such weapons as they could get, that they might get their share in the victory and in the spoil. The English, seeing them come suddenly over the hill, mistook this disorderly rabble for a new army coming up to sustain the Scots, and, losing heart, began to shift every man for himself.

1. What two parts of the battle are described?
2. What simile does Scott use to describe the arrows?
3. What effect does this simile have?
4. Why could the archers not defend themselves?
5. Who joined the battle?
6. Who did the English think had joined the battle?
7. Was the Scottish victory expected or unexpected?

Answers:

Pre-reading questions: pupils' own choice

Post-reading questions:

1. Scott describes the Scottish horsemen killing the English archers, and servants joining the battle.
2. Simile: 'the arrows fell like flakes of snow on a Christmas day.'
3. This simile creates contrast between the pleasant connotations of Christmas and the destruction caused by the archers. Pupils may say that this makes the destruction more shocking or that it is an image that would be familiar to Scott's expected readers.
4. The archers could not defend themselves because they only had their bows and arrows. They had nothing to fight with when their enemy was too close to shoot.
5. The servants and attendants joined the battle.
6. The English thought that a new army of trained soldiers were coming to help the Scottish army.
7. The Scottish victory was unexpected.



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Account 4a, Walter Scott, *The Lord of the Isles*, the archers

And loud shouts Edward Bruce,—
“Forth, Marshal, on the present foe!
We’ll tame the terrors of their bow,
And cut the bow-string loose!”

XXIII

Then spurs were dash’d in chargers’ flanks, [chargers’ flanks = sides of the horses]

They rush’d among the archer ranks. [archer ranks = group of archers]

No spears were there the shock to let,

No stakes to turn the charge were set, [there were no stakes to stop the horses]

And how shall yeoman’s armour slight

Stand the long lance and mace of might?

Or what might their short swords avail,

’Gainst barbed horse and shirt of mail?

Amid their ranks the chargers sprung,

High o’er their heads the weapons sprung,

And shriek and groan and vengeful shout

Give note of triumph and of rout! [rout = soldiers running away]

Awhile, with stubborn hardihood, [awhile = at the same time]

Their English hearts the strife made good

Borne down at length on every side,

Compell’d to flight they scatter wide.—

Let stags of Sherwood leap for glee,

And bound the deer of Dallom-Lee!

The broken bows of Bannock’s shore

Shall in the greenwood ring no more!

Round Wakefield’s merry may-pole now,

The maids may twine the summer bough, [young women may prepare the may-pole]

May northward look with longing glance,

For those that wont to lead the dance, [wont = habitual action]

For the blithe archers look in vain! [blithe = happy]

Broken, dispersed, in flight o’erta’en,

Pierced through, trod down, by thousands slain,

They cumber Bannock’s bloody plain. [cumber = obstruct]

1. What rhetorical questions does Scott use?
2. Scott moves the perspective from the battle to two groups in England. What are they?
3. How will they feel when the archers do not come home?
4. Why do you think Scott changes perspective?
5. How else is this extract different from extract 3?

Answers:

1. The rhetorical questions are:
 - a. 'And how shall yeoman's armour slight / Stand the long lance and mace of might?'
 - b. 'Or what might their short swords avail, 'Gainst barbed horse and shirt of mail?'
2. He moves the perspective to the deer of England who will not be shot any more, and the young women who are waiting for their boyfriends to return.
3. The deer will feel happy and the young women will feel sad.
4. One possible answer is that it focuses on the human cost of battle and shows that the soldiers themselves were just ordinary people.
5. Pupils' own answers. Possibilities include: it has rhythm and rhyme; it makes the battle sound more heroic; it focuses more on sounds; it highlights the bravery and humanity of the archers.



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Account 4b, Walter Scott, *The Lord of the Isles*

XXX

The multitude that watch'd afar
Rejected from the ranks of war,
Had not unmoved beheld the fight,
When strove the Bruce for Scotland's right;
Each heart had caught the patriot spark,
Old man and stripling, priest and clerk,
Bondsman and serf; even female hand
Stretch'd to the hatchet or the brand;
But, when mute Amadine* they heard
Give to their zeal his signal-word,
A frenzy fired the throng;
"Portents** and miracles impeach
Our sloth—the dumb our duties teach—
And he that gives the mute his speech,
Can bid the weak be strong.
To us, as to our lords, are given
A native earth, a promised heaven;
To us, as to our lords, belongs
The vengeance for our nation's wrongs;
The choice, 'twixt death or freedom, warms
Our breasts as theirs—To arms, to arms!"
To arms they flew —axe, club, or spear,—
And mimic ensigns high they rear,
And, like a banner'd host afar,
Bear down on England's wearied war.

[stripling = young person]

[hatchet = axe] [brand = weapon]

[zeal = enthusiasm]

[frenzy = strong emotion] [throng = group]

[portents = signs]

[sloth = laziness] [dumb = unable to speak]

XXXI.

Already scatter'd o'er the plain,
Reproof, command, and counsel vain,
The rearward squadrons fled amain,
Or made but doubtful stay; —
But when they mark'd the seeming show
Of fresh and fierce and marshall'd foe,
The boldest broke array.

*Edith is disguised as a mute young man called Amadine.

** They thought Edith could not speak so when she gives her signal word, they think it is a miracle from God.



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1. What words does Scott use to describe the people watching the battle in the first four lines?
2. What effect does he create by using these words?
3. Why do you think Scott writes a list in lines 6 to 8?
4. Who do you think is speaking in the section that begins 'Portents...'?
5. How does the speaker in this section express his or her love for their country?
6. Find two examples of alliteration. Why do you think Scott uses alliteration?

Discussion Questions:

1. In groups, think of an event that you all witnessed (it could be as simple as this morning's assembly). Each one of you should jot down what happened. Then, compare what you have written with each other. How were your accounts different? Why were they different?
2. Why do you think each writer (The National Trust, John Major, and Walter Scott) wrote about the Battle of Bannockburn? Who did they think would read their writing? What points of view might have affected them?
3. If you were writing about the Battle of Bannockburn, what would you focus on?

Answers:

1. They are a 'multitude,' which shows that there are a lot of them; they have been 'rejected' from the fighting, which suggests that they are not well-valued in their society; they are 'not unmoved' by the battle, showing that they feel strongly.
2. He gives the impression that they are overlooked but valuable people.
3. The list emphasises the number and variety of people.
4. Although it is not clear exactly who is speaking, it must be one of the people watching.
5. They connect their country, that is their 'native earth' to the idea of salvation in 'a promised heaven' to suggest that patriotism, like salvation, is a gift from God.
6. Possibilities include:
 - a) 'wearied war' – the w sound is soft and, coupled with the long first syllable of 'wearied' reflects how tired the soldiers feel.
 - b) 'fresh and fierce' – uses hard sounds to reflect conflict
 - c) 'boldest broke' – use hard sounds to reflect conflict