To the Memory of the Brave Americans under General Greene, in South Carolina, who fell in the action of September 8, 1781.

Philip Freneau

At Eutaw Springs the valiant\(^1\) died;
   Their limbs with dust are covered o’er—
Weep on, ye springs, your tearful tide;
   How many heroes are no more!

If in this wreck of ruin, they
   Can yet be thought to claim a tear,
O smite\(^2\) your gentle breast, and say
   The friends of freedom slumber\(^3\) here!

Thou, who shalt trace this bloody plain,
   If goodness rules thy generous breast,
Sigh for the wasted\(^4\) rural reign;
   Sigh for the shepherds, sunk to rest!

Stranger, their humble graves adorn\(^5\);
   You too may fall, and ask a tear’;
‘Tis not the beauty of the morn
   That proves the evening shall be clear—

They saw their injured country’s woe;
   The flaming town, the wasted field;
Then rushed to meet the insulting foe;
   They took the spear—but left the shield.

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\(^1\) valiant: brave
\(^2\) smite: hit hard
\(^3\) slumber: sleep
\(^4\) wasted: not used
\(^5\) adorn: add to the glory of something
Led by thy conquering genius, Greene,
  The Britons they compelled to fly;
None distant viewed the fatal plain,
  None grieved, in such a cause to die—

But, like the Parthian\(^6\), famed of old,
  Who, flying, still their arrows threw,
These routed Britons, full as bold,
  Retreated, and retreating slew.

Now rest in peace, our patriot band;
  Though far from nature's limits thrown,
We trust they find a happier land,
  A brighter sunshine of their own.

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\(^6\) Parthian: cavalrymen of ancient Persia, who destroyed their enemies by pretending to flee and then suddenly turning around and shooting arrows
Response to
“To the Memory of the Brave Americans”

The main purpose of “To the Memory of the Brave Americans” is to convey the courage, nobility, and tragedy of the Americans who lost their lives in the Battle of Eutaw Springs during the Revolutionary War.

Part of this purpose is emphasized in the title which describes the Americans as being brave and is also supported in the opening line with the phrase “valiant died.” However, the soldiers’ bravery is soon contrasted with the survivors’ sorrow. In fact, the line “Weep on, ye springs, you tearful tide; How many heroes are no more!” conveys an ongoing sorrow that seems immense, like a gushing spring. This idea of continuous sorrow over the losses of war rings true today. Consider all the wars that have been fought and all the heroes that have fallen since the American Revolution up to the present day.

The third element of this poem is introduced in the second stanza. The line “The friends of freedom slumber here!” suggests that the cause for this brave but tragic loss was a noble one.

The tragedy of this battle is strengthened in stanza three, which clarifies who lost their lives. “Sigh for the wasted rural reign; Sigh for the shepherds, sunk to rest!” conveys that these were not professional soldiers who died but country people. This realization deepens the reader’s sense of sorrow.

The fifth stanza is especially interesting because it shows how the courage, zeal, and nobility of these country soldiers led to their deaths. Apparently they witnessed the destruction of their towns (“flaming town”) and countryside (“wasted field”). Outraged by this injustice, the Americans “rushed to meet the insulting foe.” However, in their haste, they made a tragic mistake. “They took the spear—but left the shield.” The spear represents military aggression and the shield stands for military defense. The attacking Americans were so aggressive that they forgot the need to be defensive.
The reason this oversight had tragic results is explained in the following two stanzas. Led by General Greene, the American forced the Britons to retreat. However, the author claims that the Britons were like “the Parthian, famed of old.” The Parthians were cavalrymen of ancient Persia who destroyed enemies by pretending to flee and then turning and shooting their arrows. Apparently, while retreating, the Britons counterattacked and surprised the advancing Americans.

The idea of a person’s or group’s zeal and overconfidence being used against them is still true in recent times. For example, in several political elections, such as Dewey vs. Truman in 1948, the favored, overconfident candidate was surprised by his opponent’s counterattack and lost the election.

The poem ends with a hopeful wish that the Americans who died in the battle of Eutaw Springs find “a happier land / A brighter sunshine of their own.”

“To the Memory of the Brave Americans” does an excellent job of combining the sentiments of sorrow and respect for those who have died for their country. Indeed, these mixed feelings have been felt by countless people, including many who live today and have lost loved ones in recent years. Such an audience would be moved by this Revolutionary War poem.
Response to “To the Memory of the Brave Americans”

Organization

Response essays are organized into three main sections. The essay begins with a thesis, or main idea. Then the argument that supports this thesis is presented. This section usually includes several paragraphs that are connected by transitions. The essay ends with a strong conclusion. Is your response essay organized in this way?

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Response to “To the Memory of the Brave Americans” (continued)

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Text References

Response essays to literature usually include many references to the original poem or novel that support the essay’s main thesis. Have you included references in your response essay?

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Response to “To the Memory of the Brave Americans” (continued)

**Making Inferences**

Response essays often make inferences about the effect of the poem on a larger audience and to place the meaning of the poem in a larger context. Does your response essay include inferences?

**Response to “To the Memory of the Brave Americans”**

- **This idea of continuous sorrow over the losses of war rings true today.** Consider all the wars that have been fought and all the heroes that have fallen since the American Revolution up to the present day.

- **The idea of a person’s or group’s zeal and overconfidence being used against them is still true in recent times.** For example, in several political elections, such as Dewey vs. Truman in 1948, the favored, overconfident candidate was surprised by his opponent’s counterattack and lost the election.

- **Indeed, these mixed feelings have been felt by countless people, including many who live today and have lost loved ones in recent years.** Such an audience would be moved by this Revolutionary War poem.