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Barbara Frietchie

John Greenleaf Whittier · *1863 · English original*

A flag in an attic window interrupts a military procession, and a protective order changes the encounter.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How can steadfast courage draw an honorable response from an opponent?

"Up from the meadows rich with corn,"
Opening couplets

Barbara's appeal awakens restraint in the commander, so the poem remembers her loyalty together with his protective decision.

KEY CHARACTERS

Barbara Frietchie
Elderly woman whose steadfast action governs the scene.

Stonewall Jackson
Orders the troops and then protects the woman.

The marching soldiers
Pass through Frederick beneath the surviving flag.

Grades 6–8

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A town under marching feet

OPENING COUPLETS

The harvest landscape gives way to troops entering Frederick, where the Union flags have disappeared.

- The poem opens in Frederick, up from the meadows rich with corn.
- Lee's army is in the town, and the flags come down.
- Whittier's headnote is part of the hosted text; the poem itself begins at the meadows.

> *"Up from the meadows rich with corn,"*
> Opening couplets

02

One window answers

BARBARA RAISES THE BANNER

Barbara raises the flag from her attic, making one household's loyalty visible to the approaching soldiers.

- Barbara Frietchie is bowed with fourscore years and ten.
- She sets the staff in her attic window when the rebel tread comes up the street.
- Stonewall Jackson rides at the head of the column.

> *"To show that one heart was loyal yet."*
> Barbara raises the banner

03

The banner survives

THE CONFRONTATION

Gunfire breaks the staff, but Barbara catches the cloth and addresses the commander from the window.

- The famous plea is to spare the country's flag, even if the gray head is shot.
- The banner is torn, then taken up again from the broken staff.
- Keep Whittier's wording, including the quotation marks around her speech.

> *"'Shoot, if you must, this old gray head, / But spare your country's flag," she said."*
> The confrontation

04

Restraint and remembrance

CLOSING TRIBUTE

Jackson orders protection for Barbara, and the ending gives honor to her courage and a tear to his memory.

- Jackson's order protects the gray head, and the flag hangs through the day.
- The close turns to her grave and the flag of Freedom and Union.
- The date 1863 stands at the end of the hosted poem.

> *"Honor to her! and let a tear / Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall's bier."*
> Closing tribute

Public courage

Military restraint

Memory and evidence

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. Read the prose headnote before treating the scene as a report.
2. Notice the shift from landscape to a single attic window.
3. Follow the change from rifle commands to protective orders.

Quotations are verbatim from the English original, Project Gutenberg #9578: John Greenleaf Whittier, Poems in Wartime, from The Works of John Greenleaf Whittier, Volume III, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/whittier-barbara-frietchie/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.