

THEME: The Revolutionary War – the Lead Up to the War

TOPIC: The Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party

PREPARATION / PROPS: A bag of sugar (or sugar cubes as a treat), a coffee can, a newspaper, a Nintendo DS, tea to drink, poster of the Boston Massacre, poster of the Boston Tea Party

LESSON: The Sugar Act. In 1764, the Sugar Act put a three-cent tax on foreign refined sugar and increased taxes on coffee, indigo, and certain kinds of wine. It banned importation of rum and French wines. These taxes affected only a certain part of the population, but the affected merchants were very vocal. Besides, the taxes were enacted (or raised) without the consent of the colonists. This was one of the first instances in which colonists wanted a say in how much they were taxed.

The Stamp Act. In 1765, The Stamp Act was the first direct British tax on American colonists. Every newspaper, pamphlet, and other public and legal document had to have a Stamp, or British seal, on it. The Stamp, of course, cost money. The colonists didn't think they should have to pay for something they had been doing for free for many years, and they responded in force, with demonstrations and even with a diplomatic body called the Stamp Act Congress, which delivered its answer to the Crown. Seeing the hostile reaction in the colonies, the British government repealed the Stamp Act in March 1766 but at the same time passed the Declaratory Act, which said that Great Britain was superior (and boss of) the American colonies "in all cases whatsoever." The Stamp Act gave the colonists a target for their rage. Indeed, the Sons of Liberty was formed in response to this Act. The Stamp Act Congress also gave the colonists a model for the Continental Congress.



The Boston Massacre. The Boston Massacre was a shooting of five American colonists by British troops on March 5, 1770. One person, an African-American man named Crispus Attacks, was killed. Nearly every part of the story is disputed by both sides. Did the colonists have weapons? The British say rocks and other such weapons were hurled at them. But the British had guns, and they did open fire. The Boston Massacre deepened American distrust of the British military presence in the colonies.

The Boston Tea Party. Angry and frustrated at a new tax on tea, American colonists calling themselves the Sons of Liberty and disguised as Mohawk Native Americans boarded three British ships (the Dartmouth, the Eleanor, and the Beaver) and dumped 342 whole crates of British tea into Boston harbor on December 16, 1773. Similar incidents occurred in Maryland, New York, and New Jersey in the next few months, and tea was eventually boycotted throughout the colonies.

It was another cold December night in Boston. The three British ships the Dartmouth, the

Eleanor, and the Beaver were sitting in Boston harbor, their holds full of tea that wasn't being unloaded because the angry residents of Boston were threatened not to buy or use the tea.

The anger was directed at the government of Great Britain, which at that time had passed the Tea Act, a law that almost guaranteed that the American colonists would buy tea from the East India Company. Why? Because the law lowered the price on tea that the East India Company sold so much that it was the cheapest tea around. In fact, it was way below the price charged by other tea companies. Most American colonists, looking for ways to cut costs and save money, would choose a cheaper tea over a more expensive tea any day.

Why did this law come about? The East India Company wasn't doing so well and the British government wanted to help the company get back on its feet. Other tea companies weren't happy about the Tea Act, of course, but the American colonists viewed it as another example of "taxation without representation": In effect, the Tea Act was putting a tax on tea sold by companies other than the East India Company. As with the Stamp Act and other unpopular taxes, they were all voted in by Parliament, which was thousands of miles away, and the American colonists had no way to influence the law or speak out against it while it was being debated in government.

So the colonists were angry. They wanted to do something else to let the British know about the unhappiness that the Tea Act was causing. Some people wanted to keep things nonviolent; others wanted bloodshed. The result was somewhere in the middle.

A group of colonists determined to make things change was the Sons of Liberty. Led by such impassioned patriots as Samuel Adams and John Hancock, the Sons of Liberty had secret meetings at which they discussed how best to get their message across to Great Britain, that the American people wanted more of a role in governing themselves.

Christmas was approaching in the year 1773, and the colonists faced another year of unopposed and unrepresentative taxes. The Sons of Liberty decided to take action.

Donning disguises that made them look like they were Native Americans, a large group of the Sons of Liberty on December 16 stormed aboard those three unsuspecting British ships and dumped 342 crates full of tea overboard. By any standards, that's a lot of tea. These crates happened to be jammed full of tea, and so the companies that made that tea lost a lot of money that night.

Because the Sons of Liberty were disguised as Native Americans, they could claim that they were not guilty of dumping the tea. The British government knew better, of course, and grew angrier than ever at what it saw as Americans' ingratitude. The very next year saw the passage of what came to be called the Intolerable Acts, one of which closed the port of Boston entirely.

The Boston Tea Party was a symbolic act, an example of how far Americans were willing to speak out for their freedom. Two short years later, in 1775, Americans were willing to give their lives for their freedom, as shots rang out on Lexington Green.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How would you feel if you suddenly had to pay an extra tax on things. Examples might be – every time you watch a TV show, or play a video game, or send an email?
- Point out how long it took from when the British enacted the Sugar Act to when we declared independence – 12 years. Do you think that was a short time or a long time? Why did it take 12 years?
- Did the Sons of Liberty do the right thing, throwing tea into the harbor? Why do you think they did that? What do you do when you think something is wrong or unjust?

ACTIVITY: Recreation of the Boston Tea Party

Materials: Face paint, painted boxes, picnic table or stage

Method: Kids put on Indian war paint and take turns boarding the “ship” and hurling “crates of tea” overboard. Teach them to say “No taxation without representation!”

REFERENCES: <http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/>