Boston Tea Party

Tea Act/Boston Harbor

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**The Tea Act: What the heck was it?**

Patriots in Boston were outraged over the Tea Act, enacted in May 1773. But why? It didn’t increase a tax, it merely was intended to help the British East India Company (BEIC), which was in heaps of debt because of their expeditions in India. It gave theBEIC a government loan and canceled the import duty on its tea.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**So why did everybody get so mad?**

For nearly 5 years, most colonists were buying tea which was smuggled in by Dutch traders to avoid a 3 pence tax. When the Tea Act occurred, it actually made the tea from the BEIC cheaper. Cheaper? Then why did everybody flip out? Was it really about the money? Heck no techno! It was the coercion and trickery. The Tea Act was supposed to encourage Americans to drink the East India tea and in effect, pay the Townshend duty. Radical Patriots felt the ministry was bribing Americans to fall back from their stance of avoiding British taxation at all costs. The point is, the Patriots wanted to snub the British and the British wanted American compliance.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**What was this enraged reaction?**

Resistance, resistance, resistance! Americans Patriots were nothing if not stubborn. They organized bonfires in which they persuaded others to throw the British tea into the fire. Gradually they became bolder. The Sons of Liberty did their best to prevent BEIC ships from bringing in new supplies. The Royal Governor of Massachusetts, Governor Hutchinson, was not a big fan of this idea. He passed the *Dartmouth* through customs easily so it could enter the **Boston Harbor**. If the Sons of Liberty planned on blocking the tea from coming to shore, Hutchinson was going to use British troops to supervise the unloading and selling. The Sons of Liberty quickly worked up a plot to dispose of the tea before that could happen.

The PLAN: **The Boston Tea Party**: Sounds fun, who’s invited?

 **Rally, Mohawks - bring out your axes! And tell King George we'll pay no taxes![[3]](#footnote-3)**

 Who: A group of artisans and laborers disguised as Mohawk Indians.

 What: Boarding the *Dartmouth*, breaking open 342 chests of tea and throwing them into the harbor.

 (P.S. This cost was about $800,000 in today’s money! Yikes!)

 Where: Boston Harbor

 When: December 16, 1773

 DO NOT RSVP.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**The Big Bad Reaction: Coercive Acts**

The British were not about to take the actions of December 16th so lightly. In fact, the King was pretty ticked. He said, “Concessions have made matters worse. The time has come for compulsion.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Uh-oh. Bad news for the colonists. He put into place four Coercive Acts until the Bostonians paid for their tea.

1. The Port Bill—Closed Boston Harbor.
	1. Now, this was a pretty big deal because many Bostonians made their money this way. No money = no food. No food = Death. DEATH![[6]](#footnote-6)
2. Government Act—Annulled the Massachusetts charter and prohibited local town meetings.
	1. This is completely Professor Umbridge[[7]](#footnote-7) of them. In my opinion, when you tell people they can’t do something, it makes it all the more alluring.
3. Quartering Act—The colony must build barracks for British troops.
	1. Build a nice cozy home for enemies, are you KIDDING me?
4. Justice Act—Allowed trials for capital crimes to be transferred to Britain.[[8]](#footnote-8)
	1. If I ever go on trial (and I hope THAT never happens!) I’d rather be in a room full of friendly faces than a governmental group that sees me as a potential traitor.

**The Long Run: Revolutionary War**

That pretty much sums it up.

**So how do we TEACH this thing?**

**The Boston Tea Party Crime Scene:**

* Tell the students they are to act as investigators into the Boston Tea Party. Don’t give them any background information at first. I know, I know. That’s blasphemy. But just give it a try. Tell them they are solving the mystery behind the crime: What happened that night? They have to figure out the motive behind the crime.
* Review the concepts of Sourcing, Contextualization, and Collaboration with your students. Tell them it is VITAL to the case that they have the details. They are going to be the investigators building a case against the criminals, after all. Without enough evidence, the criminals may never be punished for the crime. They must reach a consensus in class about what happened.
	+ Use the Jigsaw Strategy, Sourcing, Contextualization, and Collaboration to solve the crime.
* Begin by putting students into small groups and giving each group a different Eyewitness account of the Boston Tea Party.[[9]](#footnote-9) Some of these accounts are longer than others. Use your data analysis to make sure students within the groups are reading at their level.
	+ Eyewitnesses include:
		- George Hewes (Participant)
		- Joshua Wyeth (Participant)
		- David Kinnison (Participant)
		- Anonymous (Impartial Observer)
		- Samuel Cooper (Participant)
		- John Andrews (Participant)
		- Boston Gazette (Newspaper Account)
		- Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Weekly Newspaper (Newspaper Accounts)
* Within the groups, students must analyze the account using the National Archive worksheet.[[10]](#footnote-10) This will ask students to look for sourcing, audience, and generate questions. Students will also have to give a summary of what happened that night.
* Next, separate students into different groups using the Jigsaw technique so that there is at least one person from each account in the new groups. They will discuss with their new groups what happened that night and come to a consensus on what really happened and why it happened. During their discussion, they should be filling out a graphic organizer comparing the similarities and differences between their accounts and the accounts of others.
* Have a leader from each group present the information they have agreed on.
* After each group presents, discuss what the students think really happened. Allow a debate/discussion to happen. Ask the students why they didn’t all agree to the exact same thing. It should lead to a discussion on skepticism and collaboration and how historians piece together information to find out the most likely scenario.[[11]](#footnote-11) Make sure to include the effect in the discussion. (Coercive Acts) Possible: Follow-Up discussion on the effects.
1. Henretta, James A., David Brody, and Lynn Dumenil. *America's History 6th Edition*. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. Pg.

153. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Henretta, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.boston-tea-party.org/mystery.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Henretta, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Henretta, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Dramatic exaggeration. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rowling, J. K., and J.K. Rowling. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Scholastic Paperbacks, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Henretta, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.boston-tea-party.org/accounts.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jeffery Nokes, *Building Students' Historical Literacies: Learning to Read and Reason with Historical Texts and Evidence* (New York: Routledge, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)