

What Was the Boston Tea Party?

Put the date “December 16, 1773” on the board and ask students if they can guess or remember what happened on this date. The answer, of course, is the Boston Tea Party. Ask students to tell the class what they know about this event in the American Revolution.

Next, have a tea party with your class using herb tea or lemonade. Ask parents to send cookies to go with the tea. While your students are drinking their tea, read them Kathleen Krull’s book *What Was the Boston Tea Party?* (An alternative book is Peter Cook’s *You Wouldn’t Want to Be at the Boston Tea Party!* See also *Colonial Voices: Hear Them Speak* by Kay Winter.) Explain that the British king and Parliament were so angry about the tea party that they shut down Boston’s government and closed Boston Harbor till the colonists paid for the tea. (In today’s money, the tea would be worth more than \$1 million.) Closing the harbor made it difficult for the people in the area to make a living, so this was a serious punishment.

Put the following on the board and read it with your students. Underline and explain difficult words as you go. This quote is part of what the leader in Britain who was in charge of the colonies, Lord Dartmouth, wrote in his instructions to the new governor of Massachusetts, General Thomas Gage:

...the sovereignty of the King, in his Parliament, over the colonies requires a full and absolute submission; and His Majesty’s dignity demands that, until that submission be made, the town of Boston, where so much anarchy and confusion have prevailed, should cease to be the place of the residence of his governor. . . .

Discuss what Lord Dartmouth means by “His Majesty’s dignity” and what it “demands.” (*The actions of the colonists mocked the power and leadership of the king. He needed to put them in their place.*) What is anarchy? (*A situation in which a society has no law and order, which makes it wild and dangerous.*) Explain that other instructions from Lord Dartmouth told General Gage how to use his

soldiers to make sure the Massachusetts colonists settled down and obeyed the British. Ask your students whether the British government was right in passing what the colonists called “The Intolerable Acts.” Were colonists right to have the Boston Tea Party? Discuss whether the tea party was an act of protest, as the colonists said, or an act of theft and vandalism, as the British said. Use this question to talk about point of view. Tell your class that at the time, the British point of view made sense to British leaders and the colonial point of view made sense to colonists who were angry with the British government. How did the Boston Tea Party and other protests lead to the American Revolution? Why didn’t the British listen to the colonists’ protests, avoiding a war? Was it possible to avoid the war? Of course, today we cheer for the colonists’ point of view because we are Americans and won the war! You may also want to note that a few years ago a group of Republicans in our country started calling themselves the “Tea Party Movement” because they were unhappy with some of the laws and leaders in today’s US government.

