

# Literature, Primary Source and Writing Activity

## The American Revolution – Boston Tea Party

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### Common Core Standards

**Reading: Literature**—Key Ideas and Details, RL.3.1, 4.1, and 6.1; RL.3.3–5.3; Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity, RL.3.10–12.10

**Reading: Informational Text**—Key Ideas and Details, RI.4.1 and 6.1; RI.3.3–5.3; Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity, RI.3.10–12.10

**Reading: Foundational Skills**—Fluency, RF.3.4–5.4

**Writing**—Text Types and Purposes, W.3.1–W.5.1; Production and Distribution of Writing, W.3.4–W.6.4; W.3.5–W.6.5; W.3.6–W.6.6

**Speaking & Listening**—Comprehension and Collaboration, SL.3.1–12.1

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**NOTE:** This activity is divided into four parts and should be completed over the course of a week.

#### PART I

Ask your students what they think the colonists in Boston were saying and doing in the days leading up to the Boston Tea Party of December 1773. After they've shared some of their ideas, read Kay Winters' book *Colonial Voices: Hear Them Speak* as a class. Assign different students to read the different parts (pages or poems). When they finish reading, ask students to respond to the poems. Which ones stood out the most for them, and why? If they had to choose, which of the colonists would they like to be? What are their thoughts about the colonists and their protests against the British now that they've heard the voices in the book? What event does the book describe and what is the answer to the question on the last page? Have students write their own poems presenting a dialogue between two of the characters from different pages. Why did the Loyalists have such a different perspective from the Patriots?

#### PART II

Have a tea party with your class. Bring herb tea or lemonade since some parents won't want their children to drink caffeinated beverages. Ask parents to send cookies to go with the tea. While your students are drinking their tea, begin reading them Kathleen Krull's book *What Was the Boston Tea Party?* Krull's book will fill in the details not covered in *Colonial Voices: Hear Them Speak*, which focuses on the lead-up to the Boston Tea Party. An alternate book is Peter Cook's *You Wouldn't Want to Be at the Boston Tea Party!* Explain that the king and Parliament were so angry about the tea party that they shut down Boston's government and closed Boston Harbor. Closing the harbor made it difficult for the people in the area to make a living, so this was a

serious punishment. British leaders also sent a new royal governor.

After reading these books with your students, print out copies of first-person accounts from Boston Tea Party participants using the following link to the Boston Tea Party Historical Society site: <http://www.boston-tea-party.org/accounts.html>. George Hewes' account is particularly detailed. Have students read and discuss at least three of the accounts in pairs.

Then make a Venn diagram on the board and ask students to help you compare and contrast the information about the Boston Tea Party in the first-person (primary source) accounts to the second-person (secondary source) accounts. What is the link between the two sets of accounts? (*The people who wrote the secondary source accounts probably read the primary source accounts first.*) If primary sources are so important, why do we need secondary sources? (*Secondary sources bring the information from multiple primary sources together in one place. They present useful summaries and add information to any single primary source. They can also give more than one point of view.*) Note that this activity corresponds to a fourth grade Common Core reading standard, RI.4.6.

Another type of comparison you can make is among the different first-person accounts from the link provided above. Assign students to compare at least three of the accounts in pairs or small groups. Then meet as a class to discuss how the accounts are similar and different. How does reading more than one account of the same event help us as students of history? Note that this activity corresponds to a fifth grade Common Core reading standard, RI.5.6.

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### PART III

Next, distribute “The Boston Tea Party” student page and read the four primary source quotes with your students. Underline and explain difficult words as you go. The first quote is what one participant, Joshua Wyeth, said about the Boston Tea Party. The second quote is what Patriot leader John Adams wrote in his diary about the Boston Tea Party the next day. The third quote is what one of Lord North’s supporters in Parliament said about Boston. (Lord North led the group of Parliament members who wanted to punish Boston severely.) The fourth 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.

Discuss what each person said and why he said it. Why were the men who participated in the Boston Tea Party “merry, in an undertone”? (*They joked, but softly. They were not noisy when they threw the tea overboard. They probably did not want to attract the attention of British soldiers.*) What 10 adjectives and 4 special nouns did John Adams use to describe the Boston Tea Party and its probable effects, along with the Patriot Movement in general? What does each word mean, and why did he use them? (*Magnificent, notable, striking, bold, daring, firm, intrepid, inflexible, important, lasting; Dignity, Majesty, Sublimity, Epocha. He saw the act as a grand and glorious expression of the colonists’ political rebellion.*) What did Adams mean by “An Epocha in History”? (“*Epocha*” is an old word for “epoch.” *An epoch is usually a period in time, but it can be an event that begins a particular period in time. Here Adams meant a turning point or the beginning of a new era.*)

What made the member of Parliament so angry? (*He probably thought the Bostonians were destructive rebels.*) What did Lord Dartmouth mean 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!*) 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 students why they think the British send a general to be the new governor. Was the British government right in passing what the British called “The Coercive Acts” and the colonists called “The Intolerable Acts”? Were colonists right to have the Boston Tea Party?

Your students probably aren’t aware of how much the tea that was dumped was worth. Put the following figures on the board:

*342 chests of tea = 9,000 pounds of tea = \$15,000  
then = \$1,600,000 in today’s money*

Discuss with your class 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*, which you have probably covered previously in Language Arts. 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 Revolutionary 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. Why did they choose that name? (*They felt it was patriotic because it reflects the beginning of our country’s history. It is also a way of saying our government is wrong now in the same way that the Patriots held the Boston Tea Party to say the British government was wrong in 1773. If you discuss today’s Tea Party group—which students may have heard of at home or on the news—be careful not to take sides.*)

### PART IV

Finally, have students work in pairs to write persuasive (or opinion) letters to each other—one as a Patriot and the other as King George or another British government leader. They can draw straws to see who writes first, being sure to make specific points about the problems in the colonies. The second student will write a response to the specific ideas in the first letter.

Give students time to get feedback from a partner or small group before revising. Make sure students focus on content development, adding details and clarification rather than simply proofreading (correcting a few spelling and grammatical errors). After students have revised and you have checked their work, they should type up their writing on the computer. Then have students share the most interesting ideas from the two letters with the class.

Name:

Date:

# The Boston Tea Party

*We were merry, in an undertone, at the idea of making so large a cup of tea for the fishes but we used not more words than absolutely necessary.*

—Joshua Wyeth, Boston Tea Party participant

*Last Night 3 Cargoes of Bohea Tea were emptied into the Sea. This Morning a Man of War sails.*

*This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity, in this last Effort of the Patriots, that I greatly admire. The People should never rise, without doing something to be remembered—something notable And striking. This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences, and so lasting, that I can't but consider it as an Epoque in History.*

—John Adams, Patriot leader

*They [the people of Boston] ought to have their town knocked about their ears, and ought to be destroyed.*

—A member of Parliament, one of Lord North's supporters

*. . . [T]he 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. . . .*

—Lord Dartmouth