Teaching with Primary Sources — MTSU

PRIMARY SOURCE SET
THE COMING OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Historical Background

Prior to the Seven Years War (also known as the French and Indian War), colonists had an easy relationship with the British government. Following the end of the war, that relationship quickly began to change.

Great Britain had amassed a large debt from the war effort. Feeling that the colonists should shoulder much of the cost of their defense, Parliament passed a series of laws to increase revenue that would be used to pay for the war debt. These acts included the Sugar Act (1764), Stamp Act (1765), Mutiny Act (1765), and Townshend Duties (1767). These acts taxed the sale of items such as molasses, paper, paint, glass, and tea. The Mutiny Act required that the colonial assemblies furnish British troops with housing and supplies. The British also increased efforts to stop smuggling and enforce these new taxes.

Colonists organized boycotts of taxed goods and staged protests to voice their complaints. They complained that they were being taxed without having representation in the British Parliament. The constant presence of British troops in the colonies only escalated the tensions, leading to events such as the Boston Massacre in 1770. Just a few years later, the colonists would begin their fight for independence.

Additional Links:
- National Park Service: Explore The Revolutionary Period
- Signers of the Declaration: Historic Background
- Colonial Williamsburg: Teachers Page
- PBS: Liberty! The American Revolution
- National Archives—DocsTeach: Revolution and the New Nation (1754–1820s)

Suggestions for Teachers

The Library of Congress has a wide variety of sources available to explore this critical time period prior to the American Revolution. When working with textual sources, students may struggle with vocabulary. To help your students, incorporate vocabulary lessons into their primary source analysis either by pre-selecting words they might have trouble with, or allowing students to select words they do not understand.

Also, keep in mind that some students may struggle with the symbolism in visual sources. For example, when looking at the image above, how are the ladies portrayed? Is this a positive or negative portrayal? Why are the ladies depicted in such a way (who created the image)? Discussing the sources together will help your students better understand their historical significance.
Cantonment of the forces in North America, 11th. Octr. 1765. [1765]

This is the place to affix the stamp. [1765]

No stamped paper to be had. [1765]

The repeal or the funeral of Miss Ame=Stamp [1766]

The Pennsylvania journal and weekly advertiser - expiring: in hopes of a resurrection to life again / William Bradford, [1765 October 31.]
1767-70

The colonies reduced—its companion [1767]

A view of Charles Town the capital of South Carolina in North America Vue de Charles Town capitale de la Carolina du Sud dans l'Amérique Septentrionale / / engraved by C. Canot from an original painting of T. Mellish, in the collection of Mr. John Bowles. [1768]

The town of Boston in New England and British ships of war landing their troops [1768]

Four coffins of the men killed in the Boston Massacre [1770]

The coffin of Patrick Carr [1770]
Advertisement. The members of the Association of the Sons of Liberty, are requested to meet at the City-Hall, at one o’clock, to-morrow (being Friday) on business of the utmost importance. [1773]

The association of the sons of liberty, of New-York. It is essential to the freedom and security of a free people, that no taxes be imposed upon them but by their own consent, or their representatives. [1773]

To the agents of their high mightinesses the Dutch East-India company, at St. Eustatia.

New-York, November 5, 1773. To the friends of liberty, and commerce, Gentlemen... [1773]
Boston, December 1, 1773.

Boston, December 2, 1773.

Boston, December 20, 1773, on Tuesday last the body of the people of this and all the adjacent towns, an others from the distance of twenty miles, assembled at the old south meeting house.

Boston, December 20, on Tuesday last the body of the people of this and all the adjacent towns, an others from the distance of twenty miles, assembled at the old south meeting house.

GENERAL VIEW, LOOKING SOUTH ON WASHINGTON STREET - Old South Meeting-house, Washington & Milk Streets, Boston, Suffolk County, MA [1968]

“Tea destroyed by Indians.” [1773]
1774-5

Advertisement… [1774]

America in Flames [1775]

A political lesson [1774]

Virtual representation [1775]

The alternative of Williamsburg [1775]
CITATIONS

Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is 2/19/19.


Bradford, William. *This is the place to affix the stamp*. Illustration. [October 24, 1765]. From Library of Congress, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand. [https://www.loc.gov/item/2004672606/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2004672606/).


[The repeal or the funeral of Miss Ame=Stamp. ] Cartoon. [March 18, 1766 or later]. From Library of Congress, Cartoon Prints, British. [https://www.loc.gov/item/93504548/](https://www.loc.gov/item/93504548/).


Revere, Paul. *[The coffin of Patrick Carr.]* Illustration. [March 19, 1770]. From Library of Congress, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand. [https://www.loc.gov/item/2004672648/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2004672648/).

Advertisement. The members of the Association of the Sons of Liberty, are requested to meet at the City-Hall, at one o’clock, to-morrow (being Friday) on business of the utmost importance:--and every other friend to the liberties, and trade of A. Broadside. New York: 1773. From Library of Congress, *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera*. [https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.10501400/](https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.10501400/).

To the agents of their high mightinesses the Dutch East-India company, at St. Eustatia, Beloved partners in iniquity. We, the deputies of their high mightinesses, for the city of New York, dispatch the Cowbay frigate, Captain Thistle, to acquain. Broadside. New York: 1773. From Library of Congress, *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera*. [https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.10500800/](https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.10500800/).


Boston, December 2, 1773. Whereas it has been reported that a permit will be given by the custom-house for landing the tea now on board a vessel laying in this harbour, commanded by Capt. Hall: this is to remind the publick, that it was solemnly. Broadside. Boston: 1773. From Library of Congress, An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera. https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.03702400.


Boston, December 20, on Tuesday last the body of the people of this and all the adjacent towns, an others from the distance of twenty miles, assembled at the old south meeting house to inquire the reason of the delay in sending the ship Dartmout. Photostat. Boston: 1773. From Library of Congress, An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera. https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.0370250a.


