



BOSTON TEA PARTY 250 DBQ LESSON PLAN

Grade Level – 9-12th Grades

Lesson Purpose - This Boston Tea Party Document Based Question Lesson is designed to assist students in learning about the events of the Boston Tea Party and its aftermath. Each Document and accompanying questions will help students to understand a “piece of the history” during these historic times 250 years ago. After the lesson, students will be able to give their opinion on whether they feel the colonists were justified in their actions or not. This lesson will also let students know that we are beginning to go through and remember the events of the birth of the United States 250 years ago, leading up to the Semiquincentennial celebration on July 4, 2026!

Alabama Standards Met –

10th Grade US History I – Standard 3 – Trace the chronology of events leading to the American Revolution, including the French and Indian War, passage of the Stamp Act, the Boston Tea Party, the Boston Massacre, passage of the Intolerable Acts, the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the publication of *Common Sense*, and the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Historical Context - On December 16, 2023, America will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. In 1773, the East India Company's warehouses in London were filled with millions of pounds of tea they could not sell because the Colonists discovered that they could buy tea from smugglers at a lower price! To help the East India Company, King George III and the British Parliament passed the Tea Act.

The Tax Act was enacted in three parts:

1. Added a tax of three pence per pound (about \$3.00 today) on tea.
2. Required the tax be paid when it was unloaded in the Colonies.
3. Named the East India Company as the only company allowed to sell tea in the Colonies.

All 13 colonies had been fighting for survival due to economic strains brought on by the massive inflation that had taken place following the French and Indian War. Great Britain was heavily in debt following the war and felt the colonies would be a good place to regain some of the lost money.

All 13 colonies were outraged by the tax and, once again, protested “No Taxation Without Representation!” They felt the Tea Act was another way King George was trying to control the Colonies. Why, they thought, should the British be able to tell them what tea they could buy and who they could buy it from? Colonists in Boston promised that East India Company tea would never be allowed into their city!

Near the end of 1773, three ships - the Eleanor, the Dartmouth, and the Beaver - carrying tea from England, arrived in Boston Harbor. Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty decided the tea would not be taken off the ships and into Boston. There was also a legal issue at play. Once ships landed in a harbor, they had 20 days to unload their cargo and pay the duties on it or the ship and cargo would be taken by the government. Nor could the ships legally return to England before unloading their cargo. The Sons of Liberty were on the docks in Boston, not allowing that. The ships and their captains were stuck.

On December 16, 1773, approaching the 20th day since the Dartmouth arrived, 7,000 colonists gathered in Boston's Old South Meeting House to protest the Tea Act. Some had used soot and red clay to paint their faces to disguise themselves as members of the Mohawk tribe. In the 1770s, the Mohawks were a symbol of freedom and liberty in the colonies and the Sons of Liberty felt this “disguise” would represent their cause.

As the meeting ended, hundreds marched down to Griffin's Wharf, where the British ships were docked. The mob's leaders led 60 colonists into groups to board the three ships and destroy the tea. The men

dumped 342 chests (45 tons) of tea into Boston harbor. The tea destroyed that night would be worth over \$1 million dollars in today's currency!

Until the 1800s, when it was renamed the Boston Tea Party, the events of that December night were known as "the destruction of the tea." Soon after the destruction of the tea, Paul Revere was sent on two trips - to Philadelphia and New York City - to tell the story of the tea party to colonists outside of Boston. When King George III found out about these events he became determined to make the colonists pay for what they had done, leading to the passage of the Intolerable Acts in 1774.

Directions – The Key question at the end of the lesson will be able to be answered by reading the accompanying documents (1-5). Read and analyze them and also make sure to:

1. Read the questions after each of the 5 documents carefully and consider what you may already know about the topic.
2. Underline key phrases and words in the Document Based Questions. Take notes as you read. If you do not know the meaning of a word, look it up.
3. Formulate a thesis to directly answer the key question at the end of the lesson.
4. Organize your answers from the documents into an outline (with prior knowledge and knowledge gained by these documents) to help you answer the key question at the end.

KEY QUESTION – WERE THE COLONISTS JUSTIFIED IN THE ACTIONS OF THE BOSTON TEA PARTY?

DOCUMENT 1 – John Adams was not in Boston on the night of the Boston Tea Party, but was a strong voice against British taxation policies. Here is how he thought the Boston Tea Party would be remembered in history.

"This is the most magnificent movement of all...There is a dignity, a majesty, a sublimity in this last effort of the Patriots (the Tea Party) 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 cannot but consider it as an epocha [sic] in history."

- According to Adams, what should people do when rising up against something?

- How did John Adams think the Boston Tea Party would be remembered? Was he right? Explain.

DOCUMENT 2 – Thomas Whatley was an advisor to George Grenville, the British author of the Stamp Act. Here he explains why the British should be able to collect taxes on the American colonies.

“We (Britain) are not yet recovered from a War (French-Indian War) undertaken solely for their (the Colonies) protection... a War undertaken for their defense only..they should contribute to the preservation of the advantages they have received...”

- Why did Whatley think the American colonists should be willing to pay taxes to Parliament?
- Do you think he was right or wrong? Explain.

DOCUMENT 3 – March 5, 1770 – Boston boys and men threw snowballs and ice and screamed at British soldiers, taunting them. Fighting erupted and the frightened soldiers ended up firing into the crowd of Bostonians. 5 were killed and several wounded. Paul Revere, a silversmith from Boston created this engraving of the “Boston Massacre” to create anti-British sentiment in the colonies in the following weeks.



- How is the engraving by Revere different from the description of the events above?
- Why do you think this event was called a “massacre?”

DOCUMENT 4 – Here are some excerpts from *Letters From A Farmer in Pennsylvania* by John Dickinson. Dickinson was from Pennsylvania and a colonial leader. He was in the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention. Here he reacts to new taxes being placed on the Colonists by the King and Parliament.

“There is another late act of Parliament, which appears to me to be unconstitutional, and....destructive to the liberty of these colonies...The Parliament unquestionably possesses a legal authority to regulate the trade of Great Britain, and all her colonies. I have looked over every statute (law) relating to these colonies, from their first settlement to this time; and I find every one of them founded on this principle, till the Stamp Act administration.....All before, are calculated to regulate trade....The raising of revenue...was never intended...Never did the British parliament, (until the passage of the Stamp Act) think of imposing duties (taxes) in America for the purpose of raising a revenue. (The Townshend Acts claim the authority) to impose duties on these colonies, not for the regulation of trade...but for the single purpose of levying money upon us.

- What kind of taxes did Dickinson think were ok to collect from the colonies?
- Why does Dickinson object to the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts?

DOCUMENT 5 – This is an account of the Boston Tea Party from the *Massachusetts Gazette* in 1773.

“Just before the dissolution of the meeting (Tea Act meeting)....brave and resolute men, dressed in the Indian manner, approached near the door of the assembly, gave the war-whoop, which rang through the house (church) and was answered by some... silence was commanded...the Indians, as they were then called, repaired to the wharf, where the ships lay that had the tea on board, and were followed by hundreds of people, to see the event they hoisted out the chests of tea...and emptied the tea overboard...In the space of three hours they broke up 342 chests, which was the whole number in these vessels and discharged the contents into the dock.

- Why do you think the rebels dressed as Indians?

- Restate the events of the Boston Tea Party that the author here tells us.

PART B (Key question) – Were the colonists justified in the actions of the Boston Tea Party?

ANSWER KEY

DOCUMENT 1 QUESTIONS

- According to Adams, what should people do when rising up against something?

Do something to be remembered, something notable or striking

- How did John Adams think the Boston Tea Party would be remembered? Was he right? Explain.

Important, lasting, as an epocha (important era in history).

Answers on if he was right or not will vary.

DOCUMENT 2 QUESTIONS

- Why did Whatley think the American colonists should be willing to pay taxes to Parliament?

Britain had protected them (the colonies) and defended them

- Do you think he was right or wrong? Explain.

Answers will vary

DOCUMENT 3 QUESTIONS

- How is the engraving by Revere different from the description of the events above?

This does not show the colonists screaming and throwing snowballs at the officers. They are being attacked here. There could be some various answers here as well. The Revere engraving makes the British the aggressors.

- Why do you think this event was called a “massacre?”

Answers will vary but the way this shows the colonists being shot down and has the look of a “massacre.”

DOCUMENT 4 QUESTIONS

- What kind of taxes did Dickinson think were ok to collect from the colonies?

To regulate trade

- Why does Dickinson object to the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts?

Because they are to collect money (revenue) from the colonies and are not regulating trade. This is unfair to Dickinson

DOCUMENT 5 QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the rebels dressed as Indians?

Varies. To disguise themselves maybe or to pay tribute to Indians as a symbol of freedom

- Restate the events of the Boston Tea Party that the author here tells us

Varies. Should list a few events from the author such as how the men dressed, yelling in the church, walking to the wharf and destroying the tea.

PART B KEY QUESTION ANSWER

Answers will vary but this should be an answer that states why colonists were or were not justified based on these documents or prior knowledge. This is opinion based.