The origins of the American Revolution

Lesson 4 “Steeping Tea in Boston Harbor”

U.S. History I: Grades 9-12 (Advanced Placement)

By Sean Lawler, Education Program Coordinator of the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum
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Introduction to the Topic

After the conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1763, Parliament needed a source of income to pay for the costly fighting. During the war, not only did the Great Britain support the American colonies, but also supplied the armies of Frederick the Great of Prussia in the European theatre. The fighting lasted seven years, and while the British emerged victorious they also accrued a staggering national debt. At the end of the war, Great Britain was in debt to the tune of £122 million. Their system of tax collection could not keep up with the national debt, and revenue had to be raised outside of England.

In 1764, the Grenville ministry, appointed by King George III, proposed the Sugar Act. It was designed specifically to raise revenue in the North American colonies, but more importantly, the Act improved upon the Molasses Act of 1733 which placed six pence per gallon tax on all molasses imported into the colonies. The main issue with the Molasses Act was that it was being avoided by enterprising colonial merchants. Rather than pay the tax, they would instead smuggle molasses in from other countries. So in 1764, Parliament lowered the tax by half, making it cheaper to pay the tax on British molasses.

While this news should have been well received, many colonists were upset about the Sugar Act. The colonists were not represented in Parliament and they had not given their consent to the tax. Then in 1765, the Grenville ministry went one step further and placed a direct tax on paper goods. In 1765, the Stamp Act taxed newspapers, letters, legal documents, death certificates and marriage licenses. For many colonists, they depended on these goods to conduct business, and suddenly, their businesses were not as profitable. Colonists in Boston, New York and Philadelphia objected to the Stamp Act. In Boston on August 14, 1765, angry colonists went so far as to destroy the house of the appointed Stamp Master Andrew Oliver (see Lesson 1: “Resistance is Brewing”). Due to the unpopularity of the Stamp Act, Parliament repealed all duties in 1766, only to follow with the Declaratory Act, which restated Parliament’s authority to tax the colonies without their consent.

In 1767, more taxes followed. The Townshend Acts were not as invasive as the Stamp Act, but continued to tax the colonists without their consent. This time, patriots were more organized, and had a plan to resist taxation without representation. Patriot merchants signed the nonimportation agreement. By signing their name to this document they publicly agreed to never import taxable goods so long as the Townshend Acts were in effect. By doing this, the colonists hoped to starve English merchants of trade and income, and force Parliament to repeal the Townshend duties. Again their plan was successful, and on March 5, 1770, Parliament officially repealed all duties save for one—the tax on tea.
Overview of Lesson 4: “Steeping Tea in Boston Harbor”

**Brief Overview:** Students will understand how the Boston Tea Party contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution.

**Prior Knowledge:** Students should understand how the French and Indian War caused Great Britain to sink into debt, and how Parliament’s policies to alleviate that national debt created friction between the North American colonies and the mother country. In addition, students should know about the methods colonists employed to resist taxation without representation, and how King George III and Parliament responded to their protests.

**Estimated Time:** 45 minutes (1 class period)

**Content Area/Course:** U.S. History I

**Unit:** The American Revolution

**Lesson:** Introduction to the causes of the American Revolution.

**Overview:** Students will understand the causal factors of the American Revolution by examining the Boston Tea Party as a method to peacefully protest the Crown’s colonial policies.

*By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:*

Describe the rights and responsibilities of English subjects in eighteenth century colonial America.

Explain the role of Massachusetts in the origins of the American Revolution, and how the Boston Tea Party caused the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and the North American colonies.

*Essential Question Addressed in this Lesson:*

Why did the Sons of Liberty destroy the East India Company tea and how did this event push the colonies closer to war?
**Standard(s) and Unit Goal(s) to be addressed in this lesson:**

**MA History and Social Studies Curriculum Framework Standards**

**USI.4:** Analyze how Americans resisted British policies before 1775 and analyze the reasons for American victory and the British defeat during the Revolutionary war. (H)

**USI.5:** Explain the role of Massachusetts in the Revolution, including important events that took place in Massachusetts and important leaders from Massachusetts. (H)
   A. The Boston Massacre
   B. The Boston Tea Party
   C. The Battles of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill
   D. Samuel Adams, John Adams, and John Hancock.

**MA English Language Arts Curriculum Framework Standards**

**ELA 9-10.RH.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

**ELA 6-8.RH.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

**ELA 9-10.SL.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

**ELA9-10.SL.2:** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

**ELA9-10.SL.3:** Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

**ELA9-10.SL.4:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
"Steeping Tea in Boston Harbor"

Instructions: Please have your students read the following article on the Boston Tea Party. Once finished, have your students assess the famous rendering of the Boston Tea Party using the Common Core Chart of I See/ It Means. Finally, have your students read the primary source materials, and answer the questions that follow.

The East India Company and the Tea Act

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the East India Company represented a huge part of the British economy. The empire depended on the East India Company for the production and trade of silks, cotton, indigo, rice, tea, and other staples. At this time, the East India Company was heavily involved in India, and conducted most of their trade out of Bengal (northeast of India). They quickly assumed control of all production and trade going in and coming out of that region. By the late 1760’s the East India Company had even assumed the role of government—appointing governors called nabobs to rule over the local populace.

The East India Company made a fortune while in India, but gave little back to the native inhabitants. Instead of growing crops to support the local economy, the East India Company forced the locals to only grow crops that would be profitable in international trade—profitable, that is to the East India Company. In other words, essential foodstuffs like rice were not grown, and cash crops like cotton were exported to other countries at an exhaustive pace. By this arrangement, the East India Company made a lot of money, and had no desire to change their practices.

The East India Company continued to profit in this fashion. But by the late 1760’s, the East India Company had overused the soil. Instead of allowing the farmland to fallow, or sit uncultivated, they used the soil every year in order to maximize their yield of cash crops—and maximize their profits. As a result, the local inhabitants of Bengal could not grow the crops that were necessary for their diet, and many of them starved in a massive famine which killed an estimated ten million people over the course of the 1760’s.

In addition to their mismanagement of Bengal, the East India Company also ordered too much tea from China. After being grown in mainland China, the East India Company transported their tea to London, where it was sold at auction to the highest bidding merchant. Anticipating business, the East India Company ordered too much tea, and even had tea sitting in London warehouses that had been expired for four years. Indeed, the East India Company was facing serious problems. The famine in Bengal, and the overproduction of tea drove the East India Company to the brink of bankruptcy. Since the East India Company was a major part of the British economy, Parliament was also facing a serious problem.

To compound the issue, several Members of Parliament were shareholders of the East India Company. If the enterprise went bankrupt, they too would lose their private fortunes. It was clear to all that the British government could not stand by as the East India Company faltered. To solve the crisis, Parliament passed the Tea Act in 1773 which granted the East India Company a monopoly over the production and
trade of tea. According to this Act, the East India tea would be the only tea colonists would be permitted to drink. However, under the Tea Act, even with the tax, East India Company tea would be cheaper than the more popular and smuggled Dutch tea that colonists had previously consumed.

To Members of Parliament, the Tea Act seemed like a silver bullet. It would bring in badly needed revenue for the East India Company, reduce the smuggling of Dutch teas by patriot merchants, and raise revenue for the British government by placing a miniscule threepenny per pound tax on tea. Parliament thought the Americans would appreciate the more affordable East India tea. The British government did not foresee the uproar the Tea Act would cause in the North American colonies.

**Enemies to their Country**

It took weeks before news of the Tea Act finally reached the colonies. By September of 1773, the East India Company was loading its tea chests onto ships in London that would be bound for ports in colonial America. The *Polly* left for Philadelphia with her cargo of 697 chests; the *Nancy* sailed for New York with 698; and 257 chests headed for Charleston aboard the *London*. Boston on the other hand was expecting four tea ships; the *William, Eleanor, Dartmouth* and *Beaver*. Of the four ships bound for Boston, only three made it to their destination; the *Eleanor, Dartmouth* and *Beaver*.

The *Dartmouth* and *Beaver* were owned by the Rotch’s. These vessels were predominantly used in whaling expeditions, but on this occasion, they were dropping off their cargo of whale oil and receiving other finished goods from London for export to the Americas. While in London, the *Beaver* picked up 112 crates of tea, and the *Dartmouth* carried 114 chests back to Boston. While Rotch’s ships were being loaded, John Hancock’s ship, the *Haley*, was readying to leave the port of London for Boston. The Captain of the *Haley* refused the demands of the East India Company to take their tea back to Boston; instead, the *Haley* carried with it news of the impending arrival of the dreaded tea, and the new tax to be levied on it.

To make matters worse, the East India Company negotiated with only a handful of loyal merchants in the colonies. These loyalists would assume the role of middlemen, and would make a handsome profit once the tea was sold in the colonies. The East India Company selected merchants in New York, Charleston, Philadelphia and Boston to sell the tea on their behalf. These loyal merchants would be called the consignees, and they would find themselves caught between the Sons of Liberty and the British government.

The Sons of Liberty were a force to be reckoned with. Their leaders led the Stamp Act Riots in 1765 and the boycott on British goods that forced the repeal of the Stamp and Townshend duties. Government officials in Boston and New York quaked at the thought of being summoned to the Liberty Tree for a public resignation. They were notorious for tarring and feathering anyone that stood in their way—a torture most inhumane to the victim. For those who escaped this medieval punishment, they were still equally terrified at the thought that a mob of violent men might turn up at their doorstep. When the *Haley* arrived in Boston Harbor bearing news of the impending arrival of the four tea ships, the Sons of Liberty used many of these tactics in an attempt to intimidate those who would benefit from the Tea Act.
Their first targets were the seven consignees who had been selected by the Crown to sell the tea in Boston. Richard Clarke and his sons were the first of the consignees to receive a threatening letter from the Sons of Liberty in the early morning hours of November 2, 1773. At one o’clock in the morning, Richard Clarke received a loud knock on his door from a man who claimed to carry a letter from the country. It was a strange time to receive mail, and Clarke had his suspicions. Taking the letter, Clarke realized it was not from the country, it was from the leaders of the Sons of Liberty:

Boston, 1st Nov. 1773

Richard Clarke & Son:

The Freemen of this Province understand, from good authority, that there is a quantity of tea consigned to your house by the East India Company, which is destructive to the happiness of every well-wisher to his country. It is therefore expected that you personally appear at [the] Liberty Tree, on Wednesday next, at twelve o’clock at noon day, to make a public resignation of your commission...

Fail not upon your peril.

O.C.

The letter demanded the Clarke’s appear under the Liberty Tree to resign their appointment as consignees of the East India tea. To remind the Clarke’s of the violent nature of the Sons of Liberty, they sprinkled threatening overtures throughout the letter. Fearing tarring and feathering or worse, the Clarkes predictably did not make an appearance under the Liberty Tree.

On the day of reckoning, the Sons of Liberty waited for several hours under the Liberty Tree for the Clarkes to arrive, and grew increasingly outraged with each passing minute. Later that day, the hundreds of spectators who gathered beneath the Liberty Tree were led to the Clarke’s warehouse by William Molinieux and Dr. Joseph Warren. On their way, they were intercepted by Richard Clarke who asked “Who does this committee represent?” Molinieux replied that he and the 500 onlookers represented the “whole people.” At this time, Molinieux handed Clarke a document which asked for the resignation of the consignees, and asked Clarke to sign it. Clarke refused and pushed the paper away. Molinieux, by now visibly irritated leaned in, and exclaimed to Clarke that the consignees “must expect to feel the utmost weight of the people’s resentment [as] enemies to their country.”

By now, tensions had reached a boiling point. Molinieux could no longer control the crowd he was leading, and many of them sprinted for the Clarke’s warehouse. One of Clarke’s servants frantically tried to shut the door before the mob could enter, but to no avail. The crowd ripped the door off its hinges, and entered the Clarke’s warehouse. Prior to their arrival, a group of about twenty men who were all friends of the Clarke’s had holed themselves up in a room on the second floor of the house. The Sons of Liberty ordered them to come out, but did not succeed. The Clarke’s friends waited them out for an hour and a half. Eventually, the crowd lost interest in their object of aggression, and one by one they peeled off from the mob, and made their way home.
It was for the uncontrollable violence and rage that the British Army was sent to Boston to keep the peace. Even though there were close to four thousand redcoats in Boston, none of them were able to stop the determined mob that managed to tear apart the Clarke’s residence. Even though they had the protection of the King’s Army, the Clarkes and the other consignees feared for their lives. If they conceded to the Sons of Liberty, resigned their appointment, and sent the tea back to London, they would lose their fortunes and be ruined; if they landed the East India Company tea in Boston, they could expect the full wrath of the Sons of Liberty to come down on them. To the consignees, it seemed as though there was no solution to the tea crisis.

In the days that followed, the Sons of Liberty continued to harass the consignees. On Thursday, November 4, 1773, the Sons of Liberty delivered a similar letter to Benjamin Faneuil. Much like the letter addressed to the Clarke’s, the one that arrived on Faneuil’s doorstep begged him to resign his appointment. Much like the Clarke’s, Faneuil ignored the threatening overtures of the Sons of Liberty to the best of his abilities.

On November 17, the Sons of Liberty appeared outside Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s house. His sons, Tom and Elisha Hutchinson, were two of the seven consignees. Realizing that they weren’t home, the Sons of Liberty made their way to the Clarke residence yet again. Richard Clarke’s son, Jonathan Clarke was one of the consignees, and he had just arrived from London. While in London, he was one of the merchants who negotiated a deal with the East India Company. He would receive a six percent commission for the sale of the Crown’s tea. As he was settling in that evening, a crowd of two or three hundred approached his doorstep at eight o’clock in the evening. The crowd jeered at the Clarke’s with whistling, shouts, and catcalls as they attempted to remove the door from its hinges. The women in the house fled for the second floor along with Richard Clarke. At this time, one of the Clarke sons opened a window and called out “You Rascalls, be gone or I’ll blow you[‘re] brains out!” Unperturbed, the crowd continued its assault, and Clarke fired his pistol out of the window which sent the mob into a fury.

Now, the mob unleashed all of their rage that had been festering since the passage of the Stamp Act. They pulled paving stones from the road and launched them through the windows of the Clarke residence. Thankfully, nobody was hurt, but the Clarkes were left to clean up their shattered windows. Feeling an early winter chill, the Clarke’s were unable to spend the night in their house, and instead stayed over with friends.

In the weeks that followed, Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty kept the movement alive. They held public meetings in which they agreed to neither land, sell, nor harbor the tea. While they had yet to decide the best course of action to take with the tea, all agreed that the tea should not be landed in Boston. It was during this moment that many historians believe the leaders of the Sons of Liberty met in secret and planned what would later become known as the Boston Tea Party. If all other tactics failed the Sons of Liberty would make their way down to Griffin’s Wharf, and throw the Crown’s tea into Boston Harbor, rendering it undrinkable.
The Pernicious Tea Arrives in Boston Harbor

On November 28, 1773, the first of the four tea ships bound for Boston was sighted off the coast. It was the Dartmouth, a vessel owned by Francis Rotch and family. Francis Rotch was only twenty three at the time, and was the only member of his family in Boston when the Dartmouth arrived. Now the Sons of Liberty directed their ire towards him. According to Parliament's Navigation Acts, a ship once arriving in harbor had but twenty days for its cargo to be unloaded, and the taxes assessed. With the arrival of the Dartmouth, the clock started ticking.

Immediately, Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty called a meeting to decide what should be done with the tea. Since a town meeting could only be called by the town’s selectmen, this meeting was unofficial, if not outright illegal. Instead of being reserved to the property holding elites, the entire town was invited to participate in this meeting of the “Body of the People.” On November 29, they called on Francis Rotch whose ship had just arrived the day before. The Body of the People ordered Rotch to unload his other cargo, and send his ship back to England with the tea onboard. Rotch pointed out that it was illegal to do so, and if he did, the three British warships Kingfisher, Captain and Active would get the order to destroy his ship with a combined battery of 150 guns.

Suddenly, the Sons of Liberty changed their approach. Instead of intimidating Rotch they realized it would be wiser to exhaust all legal avenues possible to send the tea back to London. This would make it appear to King George and Parliament as though the Sons of Liberty were trying to abide by the law. Since the Sons of Liberty believed the tax on tea was illegal, they believed that by trying to send the tea back under a veil of legality would look best to observers. With this in mind, Samuel Adams and the Boston Committee of Correspondence called on Francis Rotch to help resolve the crisis. On December 11, Rotch appeared before the Boston Committee of Correspondence where he was asked why the Dartmouth had not left for London. Samuel Adams, standing to address Rotch stated, “The ship must go. The people of Boston and the neighboring towns absolutely require and expect it.”

Again on December 14, Samuel Adams accompanied Rotch to the customs office where they spoke with the Chief Customs Collector of Boston, Richard Harrison. Rotch begged Harrison for a pass so he could send his ships back to London with the cargo of tea onboard. Harrison replied that he did not have the authority to grant such a request, and that the Dartmouth could not raise anchor and leave Boston Harbor until every last crate of tea was unloaded.

Richard Harrison had his history with the Sons of Liberty. Just five years earlier, in May of 1768, Harrison was put in charge of seizing none other than John Hancock’s ship as penalty for attempting to smuggle goods into Boston. As Harrison ordered marines from a British warship to haul Hancock’s ship the Liberty away, thousands of spectators gathered at Hancock’s Wharf to harass Harrison as he attempted to escape. On his way home, he was pelted with rocks by the crowd. At the end of the day, the same crowd pulled Harrison’s pleasure boat out of the water, dragged it overland to Boston Common, and lit it on fire.

This was the same Richard Harrison the Sons of Liberty were asking to bend the rules to allow Francis Rotch’s ship to sail back to London with the cargo of tea onboard. Understandably, Harrison dragged his
feet at every opportunity, effectively blocking the Sons of Liberty in their attempt to send the tea back without paying the taxes. As the days passed, tensions in the town of Boston grew to a fever pitch. The tea was still on the ships, and no decision had been made on whether or not the ships would be allowed to leave Boston Harbor.

As December 16 dawned, there was only one day remaining to settle the crisis. A freezing rain fell over the city as people from all corners of Massachusetts trudged through the mud to Old South Meeting House. By 10 AM, nearly five thousand people had crammed into Old South to discuss all possible solutions to the crisis. Samuel Savage opened the meeting as moderator, and invited the speakers to instruct the townspeople on the laws which demanded the unloading of the tea, and Rotch's failed attempts to secure a pass from Richard Harrison. It was resolved that Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson was the only man who could override customs laws, and allow Rotch's ships to leave Boston unscathed with the tea onboard.

But Hutchinson was nearly seven miles south of Boston in his summer estate in Milton. The Body of the People assembled that day resolved to send Francis Rotch to Milton in one final attempt to acquire a pass to sail back to London. Samuel Savage dissolved the meeting with the understanding that the Body of the People would reconvene at 3 PM. As the icy rain continued to fall, Rotch mounted his horse, and prepared for a long ride to Milton.

When the Body of the People reconvened, there was still no sight of Rotch. As the hours passed, the tension inside Old South Meeting House continued to grow. Finally, at 5 PM, Rotch returned from Milton with the Governor's decision. Predictably the Governor refused Rotch's request, but Rotch had one last trick up his sleeve. He proposed staging a theatrical display for the Sons of Liberty by sending the Dartmouth back into the harbor. At this point, the soldiers on Castle William would fire a warning shot across the bow of the ship and then the Dartmouth would return to Griffin's Wharf under the protection of the Royal Navy where the tea would be unloaded. But there were serious flaws in his plan. For one, Rotch would be hard pressed to find a crew willing to risk their lives for such a foolhardy maneuver. Even if he did, there was no telling how the Sons of Liberty would react to this superficial attempt to send the tea back to London.

In all likelihood, the Sons of Liberty would have destroyed the tea anyway. To be sure, the Royal Navy had been a presence in Boston Harbor since 1768 when the Romney arrived in time to seize John Hancock's ship the Liberty for smuggling. While there is scant evidence to affirm the Sons of Liberty planned the Boston Tea Party, there is no doubt that a plan had been in motion for some time. When Rotch returned from Milton with the Governor's word it was nearly 5 PM, and the crowd had grown anxious. Once Rotch delivered Hutchinson's statement, Samuel Adams arose from his pew to say "There is nothing more a meeting can do to save this country." At this point, the crowd that had been anxiously waiting for this moment all day erupted into a chorus of war-whoops and huzzahs. Many historians believe that this statement by Samuel Adams was the signal to destroy the Crown's tea.

People cried out "Boston Harbor a tea pot tonight!" John Rowe, the owner of the Eleanor claimed in his journal he was too ill to attend, but others at Old South Meeting House recall him exclaiming "who
knows how salt water and tea might mingle tonight!” With the meeting thrown into disorder, the Sons of Liberty made their way toward the exits. Prior to the meeting, many of them had planned where they would meet to don their disguises. Some of them met at the print shop of Benjamin Edes where his son recalled repeatedly filled the rum punch bowl for the Sons of Liberty in the other room. Others met at John Crane’s carpenter shop where they smeared their faces with lamp black and soot from the inside of the fireplace. Almost all of them wore feathers in their caps to symbolize that they were a part of Samuel Adams’ Mohawks.

But none of them dressed up as Indians as would be recorded by popular legend. All of the tea destroyers wore their casual civilian clothing. The most important element of their disguise was the cloaks and blankets the Sons of Liberty wore. This did much to keep the December chill at bay, but more importantly, the blankets and cloaks concealed their coats. Most men in Boston could only afford one or two coats, and in a town of only 15,000 inhabitants, they would be very recognizable by their coats to observers standing along the wharf.

When the Sons of Liberty arrived at the wharf, every man knew his duty. About thirty to fifty men boarded each of the three ships, and nearly one thousand spectators had amassed on Griffin’s Wharf to watch the scene unfold. The Sons of Liberty rigged up block and tackle to hoist the heavy tea chests out of the hold—some of them weighed as much as three hundred and sixty pounds. Once on deck, the Sons of Liberty used hatchets to crack open the wooden chests. Then, they dumped the contents of the chests into the water. They were quiet, as all that could be heard was the cracking and splintering of wooden chests and the hiss of tea hitting the salt water below.
The Boston Tea Party and Popular Legend

Using the Common Core Chart of *I See/ It Means* (see below), have your students analyze this popular rendering of the Boston Tea Party. Take notes of the scene and make sure your students are prepared to compare its historical inaccuracies to the article above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I See</th>
<th>It Means*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Record as many details as possible that provide clues to the illustration, cartoon, photo or artifact. The details must be observable and can include text.</td>
<td>For each detail, describe the action taking place. Generate inferences or predictions. Consider the following: What roles does this detail play? Why is it important? What is its purpose? What does this detail mean or represent? What is it a symbol of? Explain how the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary/Analysis**
Write a brief response to the questions: What do all the details add up to? What is the meaning of this illustration, photo, or cartoon? Explain the message of the cartoon using key terms and key people. Background knowledge can be brought in here. Use key terms/key people whenever possible.

**Analysis**
What is the POV of the artist, cartoonist, etc. What special interest groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon’s message? Why?

**Primary Source Material from the Boston Tea Party**

*Description:* On November 28, 1773, the Dartmouth entered Boston Harbor with a cargo hold full of East India Company tea. This was the first of the four ships bound for Boston with a cargo of the Crown's tea onboard, and the arrival of the ship threw the town into a panic. Samuel Adams, and the Boston Committee of Correspondence he helped organized, wasted no time in calling a public meeting to decide what should be done about the situation.

Clearly their objective was to oppose the landing of the tea, for if it was to be entered into customs as was required by law, the tax would be paid, with the cost passed onto the consumer. In the document that follows, the people assembled at this most important meeting discussed the options they were faced with, and even brought the ship owners into the quarrel by asking them to seek clearance for their vessels to return to England with the cargo of tea onboard and intact.

In addition, the minutes of this meeting even record proclamations addressed to them by the Royal Governor of Massachusetts to cease and desist in their meeting, for as he put it, the meeting was not a lawful assembly. Please read the following document, and answer the questions that follow.
Document 1:  Boston December 1, 1773. At a Meeting of the People

By Benjamin Edes and John Gill, Printers of the Boston Gazette

At a meeting of the People of Boston, and the neighboring Towns, at Faneuil Hall, in said Boston, on Monday the 29th of November 1773, Nine o’clock AM and continued by adjournment to the next Day; for the Purpose of consulting, advising and determining upon the most proper and effectual Method to prevent the unloading, receiving or vending the detestable TEA sent out by the East India Company, Part of which being just arrived in this Harbor:

IN Order to proceed with Due Regularity, it was moved that a Moderator be chosen and Jonathan Williams, Esq; Was then chosen Moderator of the Meeting.

A MOTION was made that as the Town of Boston had determined at a late Meeting legally assembled, that they would to the utmost of their Power prevent the landing of the Tea, the Question be put, Whether this Body are absolutely determined that the Tea now arrived in Captain Hall’s [ship, the Dartmouth] shall be returned to the Place from whence it came [London, England]. And the Question being accordingly put, it passed in the Affirmative.

It appearing that that [Faneuil Hall] could not contain the [numbers of] People assembled, it was Voted, that the meeting be immediately Adjourned to the Old South Meeting House, Leave having been obtained for this Purpose.

The People met at the Old South [Meeting House] according to Adjournment.

A Motion was made, and the question put, viz. Whether it is the firm Resolution of this Body that the Tea shall not be sent back, but that no Duty shall be paid theron; & pass’d in the Affirmative.

Mr. [Francis] Rotch the Owner of the Vessel being present informed the Body [of the People] that he should enter his Protest against their Proceedings.

It was then moved and voted [that] Mr. Rotch be directed not to enter this Tea; and that the Doing of it would be at his Peril.

Also Voted, That Captain Hall, the Master of the Ship [the Dartmouth], be informed that at his Peril he is not to suffer any of the Tea brought by him to be landed.

A Motion was made, That in Order for the Security of Captain Hall’s ship and Cargo, a Watch may be appointed—and it was Voted that a Watch be accordingly appointed to consist of 25 Men.

Captain Edward Proctor was appointed by the Body [of the People] to be the Captain of the Watch for this Night, and the Names were given in to the Moderator, of the Townsmen who were Volunteers on the Occasion.

It having been observed to the Body, that Governor [Thomas] Hutchinson had required the Justices of the Peace in this Town to meet and use their Endeavors to suppress any Routs or Riots [etc] of the
People that might happen—It was Moved and the Question put—Whether it be not the Sense of this Meeting, that the Governor’s conduct herein carries a design’d Reflection upon the People here met; and is solely calculated to serve the Views of Administration—Passed in the Affirmative.

The People being informed by Col. [John] Hancock, that [John Singleton] Copley, Son-In-Law to Mr. [Richard] Clarke, Sen. Had acquainted him that the Tea Consignees did not receive their Letters from London till last Evening, and were so dispersed, that they could not have a joint meeting early enough to make their Proposals at the Time intended; and therefore were desirous of a further Space for that Purpose.

The Meeting out of great Tenderness to these Persons, and from a strong Desire to bring this Matter to a Conclusion, notwithstanding the Time they had hitherto expended upon them to no Purpose, were prevailed upon to adjourn to the next Morning Nine o’Clock.

Tuesday Morning Nine o’Clock, Met according to adjournment.

The long expected Proposals were at length brought into the Meeting, not directed to the Moderator, but to John Scollay, Esq; one of the Selectmen—It was however voted that the same should be read, and they are as follow, viz.

Monday, November 29th, 1773

SIR,

WE are sorry that we could not return to the Town satisfactory Answers to their two late Messages to us respecting the Teas; we beg Leave to acquaint the Gentlemen Selectmen that we have since received our Orders from the Honorable East India Company.

We still retain a Disposition to do all in our Power to give Satisfaction to the Town, but as we understood from you and the other Gentlemen Selectmen at [Richard] Clarke’s Interview with you last Saturday, that this can be effected by nothing less than our sending back the Teas [to England], we beg Leave to say, that this is utterly out of our Power to do, but we do now declare to you our Readiness to store the Teas until we shall have Opportunity of writing to our Constituents and shall receive their further Orders respecting them; and we do most sincerely wish that the Town considering the unexpected difficulties devolved upon us will be satisfied with what we now offer.

We are, SIR,
Your most humble Servants,

Thom & Elisha Hutchinson
Benjamin Faneuil
Joshua Winslow, Esq.
Richard Clarke & Sons
John Scollay, Esq.
Mr. Sheriff Greenleaf came into the Meeting, and being [begged] Leave of the Moderator that a Letter he had received from the Governor, requiring him to read a Proclamation from the Governor, requiring him to read a Proclamation to the People here assembled might be read, and it was accordingly read.

Whereupon it was moved, and the Question put, Whether the Sheriff should be permitted to read the Proclamation—which passed in the Affirmative.

The Proclamation is as follows, viz.

To Jonathan Williams, Esq; acting as Moderator of People in the Town of Boston, and to the People so assembled:

Whereas printed notifications were on Monday the 29th Instant posted in divers Places in the Town of Boston and published in the News-Papers of that Day calling upon the People to assemble together for certain unlawful Purposes in such Notifications mentioned: And whereas great Numbers of People belonging to the Town of Boston, and divers others belonging to several other Towns in the Province, did assemble in the said Town of Boston, on the said Day, and did then and there proceed to choose a Moderator, and to consult, debate and resolve upon Ways and Means for carrying such unlawful Purposes into Execution; openly violating, defying and settling at naught the good and wholesome Laws of the Province and the Constitution of Government under which they live: And whereas the People thus assembled did vote or agree to adjourn or continue their Meeting to this the 30th Instant, and great Numbers of them are again met or assembled together for the like Purposes in the said Town of Boston.

IN Faithfulness to my Trust and as His Majesty’s Representative within the Province I am bound to bear Testimony against this Violation of the Laws and I warn exhort and require you and each of you thus unlawfully assembled forthwith to disperse and to surcease all further unlawful Proceedings at your utmost Peril.

Given under my Hand at Milton in the Province aforesaid the 30th Day of November 1773 and in the fourteenth year of His Majesty’s Reign.

By His Excellency’s Command,

Thomas Hutchinson

[This] being read by Sheriff [Greenleaf], there was immediately after, a loud and very general Hiss.

A Motion was made, and the Question put, Whether the Assembly would disperse and [cease] all further proceedings, according to the Governor’s Requirement—it passed in the negative.
A proposal of [John Singleton] Copley was made, that in Case he could prevail with the Clarkes to come into this Meeting, the question might now be put, whether they should be treated with Civility while in the Meeting, though they might be of different Sentiments with this Body; and their Persons be safe until their Return to the Place from whence they should come—And Question being accordingly put, passed in the Affirmative.

Another Motion of [John Singleton] Copley’s was put, Whether two Hours shall be given him, which also passed in the Affirmative.

Adjourned to Two o’clock PM.

A motion was made and passed, that Mr. Rotch cand Captain Hall be desired to give their attendance.

Mr. Rotch appeared, and upon a Motion made the Question was put, Whether it is the firm Resolution of this Body, that the Tea brought by Captain Hall shall be returned by Mr. Rotch to England in the Bottom in which it came; and whether they accordingly now require the same, which passed in the Affirmative.

Mr. Rotch then informed the Meeting that he should protest against the whole proceedings as he had done against the Proceedings as he had done against the Proceedings [of] Yesterday, but [even though] returning the Tea is an involuntary Act in him, he yet considers himself as under a Necessity to do it, and shall therefore comply with the Requirement of this Body.

Captain Hall being present was forbidden to aid or assist in unloading the Tea at his Peril, and ordered that if he continues Master of the Vessel, he carry the same back to London; who replied he should comply with these requirements.

Upon a Motion, Resolved, That John Rowe, Esq; Owner of Part of Captain Bruce’s Ship [the Eleanor] expected with Tea, as also Mr. Timmins, Factor for Captain Coffin’s Brig, be desired to attend.

Mr. Ezekiel Cheever was appointed Captain of the Watch for this Night, and a sufficient Number of Volunteers gave in their names for that service.

Voted, that the Captain of this Watch be desired to make out a List of the Watch for the next Night, and so each Captain of the Watch for the next Night, and so each Captain of the Watch for the following Nights until the Vessels leave the Harbour.

Upon a Motion Made, Voted, that in case it should happen that the Watch should be any Ways molested in the Night, while on Duty, they give the Alarm to the Inhabitants by the tolling of the Bells—and that if anything happens in the Day Time, the Alarm be by ringing of the Bells.
Voted, That the Captain of this Watch be desired to make out a List of the Watch for the next Night, and so each Captain of the Watch for the following Nights until the Vessels leave the Harbour.

Upon a Motion made, Voted that in Case it should happen that the Watch should be any Ways molested in the Night, while on Duty, they give the Alarm to the Inhabitants by the tolling of the Bells—and that if anything happens in the daytime, the Alarm [will be sounded] by the ringing of the Bells.

Voted, That six Persons be appointed to be in Readiness to give due Notice to the Country Towns when they shall be required so to do, upon any important Occasion. And six Persons were accordingly chosen for that Purpose.

John Rowe, Esq; attended, and was informed that Mr. Rotch had engaged that his Vessel should carry back the Tea [in the same ship it arrived on], and that it was the Expectation of this Body that he does the same by the Tea expected in Captain Bruce’s [ship the Eleanor]. [When hearing this] he replied that the ship was under the care of the said Master, but that he would use his utmost Endeavor, that it should go back as required by this Body, and that he would give immediate Advice of the Arrival of said ship.

Voted, That it is the Sense of this Body that Captain Bruce shall on his arrival strictly conform to the Votes passed respecting Captain Hall’s Vessel [the Dartmouth] as though they had been all passed in Reference to Captain Bruce’s ship [the Eleanor].

[Next] Mr. Timmins appeared and informed that Captain Coffin’s brig [the Beaver] expected in [Boston Harbor] with Tea was owned in Nantucket, he gave his Word of Honor that no Tea should be landed while she was under his care, nor touched by anyone until the Owner’s arrival.

It was then voted that what Mr. Rotch and Mr. Timmins had offered was satisfactory to the Body.

Mr. Copley returned and acquainted the Body, that as he had been obliged to go to Castle William [a fortified island in Boston Harbor where the tea consignees were hiding], he hoped that if he had exceeded the Time allowed him they would consider the Difficulty of a Passage by Water at this Season as his Apology: He then further acquainted the Body, that he had seen all the consignees, and though he had convinced them that they might attend this Meeting with safety, and had used his utmost Endeavors to prevail upon them to give Satisfaction to the Body; they acquainted him, that believing nothing would be satisfactory short of re-shipping the Tea, which was out of their Power, they thought it best not to appear, but would renew their proposal of storing the Tea, and submitting the same to the Inspection of a Committee, and that they could go no further, without incurring their own Ruin; but as they had not been active in introducing the Tea, they should do nothing to obstruct the People in their Procedure with the same.
It was then moved, and the Question put, Whether the return made by Mr. Copley from the consignees [at Castle William] be in the least Degree satisfactory to this Body, and [that motion] passed in the negative.

[The Body of the People then stated]:

Whereas a Number of Merchants in this Province [of Massachusetts] have inadvertently imported Tea from Great Britain, while it is subject to the Payment of a Duty imposed upon it by an Act of the British Parliament for the Purpose of raising a revenue in America, and appropriating the same without the Consent of those who are required to pay it:

RESOLVED, That in thus importing said Tea, they have justly incurred the Displeasure of our Brethren in the other [British North American] Colonies.

And Resolved further, That if any Person or Persons shall hereafter import Tea from Great Britain, or if any Master or Masters of any Vessel or Vessels in Great Britain shall take the same on Board to be imported to this Place, until the said unrighteous Act [the Tea Act] shall be repealed, he or they shall be deemed by this Body, an Enemy to his Country; and we will prevent the landing and sale of the same, and the Payment of and Duty thereon. And we will affect the Return thereof to the Place from whence it shall come.

RESOLVED, That the foregoing Vote be printed and sent to England, and all the seaports in this Province [of Massachusetts].

Upon a Motion made, Voted, That fair Copies be taken of the whole Proceedings of this Meeting and transmitted to New York & Philadelphia, And that Mr. Samuel Adams, John Hancock, William Phillips, John Rowe and Jonathan Williams be committee to transmit the same.

Voted, that the Committee of Correspondence for this Town, be desired to take Care and every other Vessel with Tea that arrives in this Harbour, have a proper Watch appointed for her—Also Voted, That those Persons who are desirous of making a Part of these Nightly Watches, be desired to give in their Names at Messieurs Edes and Gill’s Printing Office [of the Boston Gazette].

Voted, That our Brethren in the Country be desired to afford their Assistance upon the first Notice given; especially if such Notice be given upon the Arrival of Captain Loring, in Messieurs Clarke’s Brigantine.

Voted, That those of this Bosy who belong to the Town of Boston do return their Thanks to their Brethren who have come from the neighboring Towns, for their Countenance and Union with this Body in this Exigence of our Affairs.
VOTED, That the Thanks of this Meeting be given to JONATHAN WILLIAMS, Esq; for his good services as Moderator.

VOTED, That this Meeting be Dissolved—and it was accordingly Dissolved.


Review Questions

1. Based on the reading, who were the consignees? How were they to benefit from the taxes placed on the East India Company tea? Use specific examples from the primary source and the article to strengthen your answer.

2. Based on the primary source, how did the Royal Governor respond to the meeting held by the Boston Committee of Correspondence? Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.

Critical Questions

1. Why was Royal Governor Thomas Hutchinson concerned about the meeting held by the Boston Committee of Correspondence? Give at least two reasons citing quotations from the primary source and the article you just read.

2. In your opinion, why do you think the Boston Committee of Correspondence would hold a public meeting in which all members of society could attend?

Primary Source Material from the Boston Tea Party

Description: In the early morning hours of December 17, 1773, John Adams rode into Boston to tend to his law office. When he saw the morning sun hit Boston Harbor, he could hardly believe his eyes. Hundreds of tea chests were floating in Boston Harbor with lids cracked open, and tea floating in every direction. John Adams was not a member of the Sons of Liberty, but he sympathized with the patriot cause. But more importantly, he prided himself on following the law. In 1770, he defended the British regulars accused of perpetrating the Boston Massacre because he believed in their right to a fair trial. Again in 1773, he counseled Francis Rotch on the best legal course of action to take with the East India Company tea on board his ship.

But English law frowned upon the destruction of another’s property, and the Boston Tea Party accomplished just that. Nevertheless, John Adams, not being privy to the Sons of Liberty’s secret plan,
was pleased with their actions. He was not in the town the night the tea was destroyed, but he arrived the morning after, and recorded his thoughts in his diary. In this particular entry, Adams was strikingly prescient of the events to follow.

Document 2: An Entry from the Diary of John Adams, December 17, 1773

By John Adams

December 17, 1773

Last night [three] cargos of Bohea [East India Company tea] were emptied into the Sea. This Morning a Man of War [from the British Navy] sails.

This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity, in this the 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 Epocha in History.

This however is but an Attack upon Property. Another similar Exertion of popular Power, may produce the destruction of Lives. Many persons wish, that as many dead carcasses were floating in the Harbour, as there are Chests of Tea: --a much less Number of Lives however would remove the Causes of all our Calamities. The malicious Pleasure with witch Hutchinson the Governor, the Consignees of the Tea, and the officers of the Customs, have stood and looked upon the distresses of the People, and their Struggles to get the Tea back to London, and at last the destruction of it, is amazing. Tis hard to imagine People so hardened and abandoned.


The Question is whether the Destruction of this Tea was necessary? I apprehend it was absolutely and indispensably so.—They could not send it back, the Governor, Admiral and Collector and Comptroller would not suffer it. It was in their Power to have saved it—but in no
other. It could not get by the Castle [William, a fortified island in Boston Harbor], the Men of War [meaning British warships]. Then there was no Alternative but to destroy it or let it be landed. To let it be landed, would be giving up the Principle of Taxation by Parliamentary Authority, against which the Continent have struggled for [ten] years, it was losing all our Labor for [ten] years, and subjecting ourselves and our Posterity forever to Egyptian Taskmakers—to [burdens], Indignities, to Ignominy, Reproach and Contempt, to Desolation and Oppression, to Poverty and Servitude.

But it will be said it might have been left in the Care of a Committee of the Town, or in Castle William. To this many Objections may be made.

Review Questions

2. Did John Adams believe the destruction of the Crown’s tea was necessary? If so, why?

Critical Questions

1. Based on the readings, do you believe the Sons of Liberty accomplished their goals by destroying the tea? Or did they simply make matters worse for the colonists?
2. If you were Samuel Adams, would you have encouraged the destruction of the tea, or would you have chosen another course of action? Please cite realistic alternatives to solving the matter without destroying the tea.