

The Intolerable Acts – What was Unfair?

In this two-day lesson, students explore pre-revolutionary Boston and conflicts that led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence. On Day one, students work in small groups and read and present short plays illustrating historical conflicts between colonists and British authorities. On Day Two, students work in groups to analyze and represent each conflict by creating protest posters to share with the rest of the class.

Day One Procedure

Activity # 1 Review – Time Line Story

Using your textbook (*Reflections* Unit 4, Chapter 8), help students review events that led to conflict between the British government and American colonists. Cover the following:

- British and French fought the French and Indian War to decide who rules America.
- The war cost the British a lot of money.
- The British wanted Americans to help pay for the war.
- The British imposed new tax laws on Americans.
- The British Parliament passed tax laws without American representation.
- The Americans began to fight British authority by boycotting and smuggling goods and refusing to pay taxes.

Tell students that today they are going to visit Boston when the British ruled the American colonies. Here, they will explore some of the conflicts that arose between the British government and the American colonies.

Activity # 2 Small Group Activity – Reading and Writing Boston Stories

Tell students that they are going to read a short play about life in Boston more than 200 years ago. In each play, something unfair happens to a young person.

Divide the class into five groups. Explain that students are going to:

- Read the play among yourselves and decide who will play each part.
- Answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.
- Rehearse your play.
- Present your play to the class as a reader's theater.
- Ask the class to identify what Americans thought was unfair.

Note: Each play has five parts. If you have more than five students in a group, assign extra roles of Director and Expert. The Expert can do the last task above.

While students read and rehearse their plays, write this question on the board:

What did the Americans think was unfair? Why?

Ask each group to present its Boston Play. After each performance, have the Narrator or Expert lead a discussion based on the question on the board. Answers should include the following:

- **Handout A:** British rulers had made taxes without asking the Americans (taxation without representation).

- **Handout B:** British soldiers searched homes and took things that did not belong to them (search and seizure).
- **Handout C:** Americans were told to give food and lodging to British soldiers (quartering act).
- **Handout D:** British rulers did not allow Americans to meet together (illegal assembly).
- **Handout E:** American citizens wanted the right to a trial by jury.

Collect student handouts. You will need them for Day Two of this lesson. Tell students that in the next class they are going to make posters that protest the unfair things done to people of Boston by King George, the British Parliament, and British soldiers.

Day Two Procedure

Activity # 1 Group Activity – Planning and Drawing Protest Posters

Explain that as the colonists became angry with British authority, they began to protest. One way they protested was by making posters showing how the British were unfair. These posters were hung in towns and villages so that colonists would learn about the injustices and unite to protest.

Tell students that today they are going to return to Boston where the colonists are becoming more and more angry with British authorities. Explain that now they will have a chance to make their own posters to protest the injustices they experienced in the Boston plays.

(You may want to explain that many people in the 13 American colonies suffered unfair treatment at the hands of the British. But British authorities were particularly hard on Boston because they wanted to make it an example to scare all American colonists into obeying British law.)

Divide the class into the same groups as in Day One of this lesson. Redistribute Boston Plays to the appropriate groups.

Distribute paper and drawing supplies and ask students to work together to write a single sentence objecting to an unfair thing that happened in their play.

Examples might include:

- Don't tax unless you ask.
- Our homes belong to us, not you.
- No soldiers in our homes. No soldiers at our tables.
- We want the right to meet together.
- We want the right to have a trial by jury.

Tell students that they will need to use their sentence as a caption somewhere in the poster they draw. Remind students how much time they have to complete the activity.

Activity # 2 Group Activity – Museum Tour

Arrange for groups to hang their posters in different areas of the room with group members standing next to their poster.

Explain that each group is going to present its poster to the other groups in a "museum tour." Have each group split into A's and B's. Explain that the A's are first going to be tour guides. The tour guides tell the visiting groups about their poster. The B's will first be the visitors. They will move from poster to poster. Show them the route the B's will take. On a signal have the B's move to the next poster. Give the B's about a minute at each poster and then signal them to move. When the B's have seen all of the posters, have them switch roles with the A's and let the A's take the tour.

After the tours, announce that their posters will be on display for several weeks so that everyone can read them. You might refer to the display of posters as the “Democracy Wall.”

Important note: Before the next lesson, remove student posters from the display. When the class reassembles, tell them that British authorities have ordered British soldiers to take down all posters that speak out against King George and the British Government.

Reference: This lesson is from *Adventures in Law and History*, Volume II, “Coming to America, Colonial American, and the Revolutionary Era” Second Edition published by the Constitutional Rights Foundation.

Events that Led to Conflict between the British Government and American Colonists

- British and French fought the French and Indian War to decide who rules America.
- The war cost the British a lot of money.
- The British wanted Americans to help pay for the war.
- The British imposed new tax laws on Americans.
- The British Parliament passed tax laws without American representation.
- The Americans began to fight British authority by boycotting and smuggling goods and refusing to pay taxes.

What did the
Americans
think was unfair?

Directions

- Read the play among yourselves and decide who will play each part.
- Answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.
- Rehearse your play.
- Present your play to the class as a reader's theater.
- Ask the class to identify what Americans thought was unfair.

Boston Play

Imagine you are living in Boston a long time ago. One day, this happened to you...

Narrator: It is winter in Boston. The year is 1765. The weather is very cold. John and Susan are alone at home. They are playing catch with a ball. Susan throws the ball and John can't get it. It breaks a window. Wind and snow blow inside. Their mother and father will be angry. John and Susan run to the store. Inside the store is the Storekeeper and a British soldier, who is keeping warm by the fire.

Susan: Help! Quick! We need a piece of glass to fix our window.

John: Here is our money.

Storekeeper: You don't have enough money to buy a piece of glass.

Susan: Why not?

Soldier: The Parliament put a tax on glass.

John: What is a tax?

Storekeeper: Extra money you must pay for things that come from Great Britain.

Susan: Why would Parliament do that?

Soldier: We won the war against the French. Now you must help King George pay for the war.

John: That's not fair. **Nobody asked us if we want to help King George pay for the war.**

Storekeeper: Sorry. No tax – no glass. That's the law.

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Narrator or Expert: What did the Americans think was unfair? Why?

Boston Play

Imagine you are living in Boston a long time ago. One day, this happened to you...

Narrator: It is late at night. Everything is quiet in Boston. The year is 1776. Martha is asleep in her attic bedroom. Martha's mother, Anne, is working downstairs. Martha's father is far away, delivering his newspaper to people who live outside Boston. Suddenly there is a loud knocking noise.

British Soldier: Open the door in the name of King George!

Martha: Please don't break down the door. This is our home!

Narrator: Crash! The door breaks open. Two men run into Martha's house.

Anne: Who are you? It is against our laws to enter my home without my permission.

Tax Collector: I am King George's tax collector. I follow the king's laws.

British Soldier: I am a British soldier. I am here to search your house for stolen goods.

Martha: That's against the law. We haven't stolen anything.

British Soldier: I found this bundle of paper hidden in the cellar!

Anne: My husband bought that paper! He uses it to print his newspaper.

Tax Collector: You do not have King George's tax stamp on this paper.

British Soldier: The paper has no tax stamp. We must take it with us.

Martha: That's not fair. **You have broken our laws. They say you can't come into our home and take things that don't belong to you.**

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Narrator or Expert: What did the American's think was unfair? Why?

Boston Play

Imagine you are living in Boston a long time ago. One day, this happened to you...

Narrator: The time is 1768. The place is Boston, Massachusetts. Nathan and his sister Mary are hungry. The two children spent all morning working hard. Nathan hauled water and Mary boiled it over the kitchen fire. Their mother, Sally, needed hot water to wash Sergeant Jones' dirty uniforms. Sergeant Jones is a British soldier who lives in their home. Now Nathan and Mary sit at the small kitchen table watching Sergeant Jones eat their food.

Sergeant Jones: Both of you look angry. What's wrong with you?

Nathan: We don't have enough food to feed you.

Mary: We don't have enough room for you to live here.

Nathan: We didn't invite you to live in our home.

Sally: You should go back to Great Britain where you belong.

Sergeant Jones: I want to go home. I miss Great Britain.

Mary: So why don't you go home?

Sergeant Jones: I am here to protect you.

Nathan: We don't need protection. The war is over.

Sergeant Jones: What if the French decide to attack Boston?

Mary: You already beat the French.

Sergeant Jones: Here in Boston we are all ruled by King George. He will decide when I can go home.

Sally: It's not fair. **We should not be forced to have soldiers living in our home. We don't have enough food. We don't have enough room in our homes to share with British soldiers.**

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Narrator or Expert: What did the Americans think was unfair? Why?

Boston Play

Imagine you are living in Boston a long time ago. One day, this happened to you...

Narrator: The time is 1774. Sarah is walking with her mother and father to the meeting house. The meeting house was a very important place. Here, the people are gathered to talk. Then they would make laws or decide other ways to fix problems in Sarah's town. Sarah wanted to hear her father speak at the meeting house. Her father wanted to speak out against the unfair things that the British soldiers were doing to the people of Boston. At the door of the meeting house, Sarah and her mother and father were stopped by a British soldier.

British Soldier: Halt! The meeting house is closed.

Mothers: Why?

British Soldier: King George has ruled that Americans cannot meet in groups.

Father: Our laws give us the right to meet and make our own decisions.

British Soldier: The people of Boston have broken King George's laws.

Sarah: What laws have we broken?

British Soldier: King George ordered you to pay a tax on tea.

Sarah: But people drink tea every day. We would have to pay a lot of taxes.

Father: Some people in Boston refused to pay the tax. Others poured the tea into the harbor.

Mother: They called it the Boston Tea Party.

British Soldier: Now King George has ordered us to close your meeting halls.

Sarah: But that's not fair. **We have the right to meet and make our own laws.**

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Narrator or Expert: What did the Americans think was unfair? Why?

Boston Play

Imagine you are living in Boston a long time ago. One day, this happened to you...

Narrator: It is January of 1774. Boston is very cold. A British soldier arrested a young boy named Tom Hewes for stealing a loaf of bread. His family is hungry. King George had closed Boston harbor to punish the people for the Boston Tea Party. Tom's father worked on the docks. Without ships in the harbor there is no work for Tom's father. Without work, there is no money or food for Tom's family. Now Tom was on trial.

British Soldier: Here ye! Here ye! The court of King George is now in session.

Judge: I am the judge of King George's court. What crime has been committed?

British Soldier: Your honor, I caught this boy stealing food from the store of Bess Williams.

Tom Hewes: I am innocent. Bess Williams said I could take the bread.

Judge: Silence, boy! You are a criminal.

Bess Williams: Please, judge. Let a jury decide if this boy is a criminal.

Judge: A British soldier caught this boy stealing. I am a British judge. I will decide if he is innocent or guilty.

Bess Williams: King George closed Boston Harbor. There is no work. People need to eat.

Tom Hewes: I took it for my family. They are hungry.

Bess Williams: Our laws say that a jury made up of people of Boston should decide. They will understand why Tom Hewes took the bread.

Judge: There will be no jury in this case. I will decide if he is guilty or innocent.

Tom Hewes: That's not fair. **I have a right to a trial by jury.**

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Narrator or Expert: What did the Americans think was unfair? Why?