

Seeds of Liberty: Causes of the American Revolution

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: Social Studies

Lesson Duration: Four class periods

Program Description

Seeds of Liberty: Causes of the American Revolution—The seeds of liberty did not take root in Britain's American colonies by chance, but because a fertile ground of practical self-reliance and independent thought flourished there. This program uses live-action historical reenactments, still photos, and artwork to illustrate the extraordinary events that led to America's first disputes with Britain and, eventually, to the Revolutionary War. Through grassroots boycotts and blatant acts of defiance, the colonists showed their increasing resentment toward Britain's taxes and interference, setting the stage for the greater conflict to come.

Discussion Questions

- What motivated American colonists to challenge and defy their ruler, King George, and the British government?
 - How did the peaceful, farm-based societies of the colonies effectively resist the laws and military might of Britain, then one of the most powerful countries in the world?
 - Why did the colonists accept the taxes they imposed upon themselves yet resent the taxes the British put upon them?
 - What event finally united most of the colonists to fight against Britain?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Learn about the root causes of the tension between the American colonies and Britain.
- Understand how the outcome of the French and Indian War further strained this relationship.
- Participate in a petition group to help develop and write a document of protest and demands to the British government.
- Present the petition to the class, as if the other students were the British.

Materials

- *Seeds of Liberty: Causes of the American Revolution* video
- Computer with Internet access
- Print and Web resources about the lives of the colonists and events they experienced in the years before the American Revolution

Procedures

1. Review information from the video with the class. Ask students these questions:
 - What ties linked the colonies to Britain? (The colonies were linked to Britain through language, customs, trade, laws, and government.)
 - What differences began to pull them apart? (The vast transatlantic distance slowed communication and encouraged a sense of independence in the colonies. Through their colonial assemblies colonists began to exercise political power through self-government.)
 - Who fought the French and Indian War and for what reason? (France and Great Britain fought for control of North America.)
 - How did the outcome of the French and Indian War affect the American colonists? (The British wanted to reduce their huge debt after the war by taxing the colonists. Also, as a peace term with the Native Americans, the British drew the Proclamation Line of 1763, prohibiting colonists from any further westward expansion.)
 - What was the Stamp Act and why did the colonists object to it? (The Stamp Act imposed a British tax on all kinds of documents, including newspapers, calendars, and legal papers. Colonists considered the act taxation without representation since they had no vote in Parliament.)
 - What effect do you think Britain's trade plan had on the growth of American industries and manufacturing? (The trade plan, called mercantilism, discouraged the growth of American industries and forced American colonists to consume goods made in Britain.)
 - How did the colonists show their resentment of the Stamp Act? (Angry crowds forced stamp agents to shut their doors; representatives of the colonies attended the Stamp Act Congress and initiated a boycott of British goods.)
 - Who were the Sons and Daughters of Liberty? (They were organized groups of men and women who showed their opposition to British interference through boycotts and other acts of defiance.)
 - How did the women of Edenton and other colonial towns help make the boycott of British goods a success? (They did this by making and wearing homespun cloth instead of buying English cloth, drinking substitutes for British teas, and feeding their families foods grown in the colonies.)

- Why did the boycott of British goods successfully win some concessions from the British? (The economic consequences for British merchants influenced the king and members of Parliament to remove some of the taxes they had imposed on the colonies.)
 - How did the Boston Massacre affect the American colonists? (It united colonists, who might have disagreed about other issues, around the cause of liberating themselves from British tyranny.)
2. Ask students to imagine that they live as American colonists in the mid-1700s. Tell them to make notes regarding the following conditions of their imaginary situation:
 - The people who pass the laws that control your life and collect your tax money live in England, 3,000 miles away. Most have never even visited America, and they don't understand your life or the problems of the citizens in their own colonies.
 - You have no elected representatives in the British government and no say in the many important decisions it makes that affect you.
 - You, your family, and your community have suffered from the results of the Proclamation of 1763, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the Sugar Act, and the Quartering Act, and you were horrified when you heard news of the Boston Massacre.
 - You want to take action to improve your situation, but you hesitate to become involved with open acts of rebellion against the British crown.
 - You decide to join a group that will create a petition to send to the British government.
 3. Have students work in groups of six to eight individuals. Each group will select, by vote, one of the following six events, about which they will write a petition of protests and demands to the British: the Proclamation of 1763, Sugar Act (1764), Stamp Act (1765), Quartering Act of 1765, Townshend Acts (1767), or Boston Massacre (1770).
 4. Tell students that each group will write their petition explaining the colonists' point of view in the style called first person, meaning they will write it as if they are the colonists making demands to the British. Give the following instructions to students: You want to write about the problems you have faced because of British policies and about the changes you want the British government to make. You want the British to see the colonists' side of things and become more liberal regarding the laws they pass and the actions they take affecting the colonies. You want the British to make right some of the damage their policies have caused. But you must tell the British, in detail, what the damage to your family and community has been and exactly what they can do to improve your situation.
 5. Each student will take responsibility for reporting particular information about the chosen event to their groups and will write at least two grievances (or problems) and two demands to contribute to the petition. The groups will meet again to combine the individual contributions and formulate their final petition, using the material they mutually decide has the best chance of convincing the British to grant their requests. Group members will also discuss a plan for presenting the petition to the class, one that gives every member of the group a part of the petition to present.

6. Have students use print and Web resources to research the problems faced by the American colonists and the resentments they felt for the British. The following Web sites are a good starting point:
 - “No Taxation Without Representation”
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h640.html>
 - Nonimportation Agreements
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1247.html>
 - Stamp Act
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h642.html>
 - The Townshend Acts
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h643.html>
 - Sugar Act of 1764
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1211.html>
 - Boston Massacre
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h644.html>
 - Boston Tea Party
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h646.html>
 - Prelude to Revolution, 1763 to 1775
<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/revolution/rev-prel.htm>
 - The American Revolution: A Brief Chronology
<http://www.thisnation.com/revolution-time.html>
 - Yahoo!igans!: American Colonial Life (1585-1783)
http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/Around_the_World/Countries/United_States/History/Colonial_Life_1585_1783/
7. When the groups have completed their petitions, ask them to share their petitions with the class, presenting them as if their classmates were the British and must be convinced to accept the demands. Each group member should present a part of the petition and make at least one major point or demand.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; enthusiastically participated in formulating, writing, and presenting their group's petition; were highly responsible for the quality of the completed petition.

- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; participated satisfactorily in formulating, writing, and presenting their group's petition; took adequate responsibility for the quality of the completed petition.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions; participated minimally in formulating, writing, and presenting their group's petition; took little or no responsibility for the quality of the completed petition.

Vocabulary

boycott

Definition: A refusal to buy a product or service, as a protest

Context: Many colonial storeowners boycotted British goods until the Stamp Act was repealed.

currency

Definition: Money printed and used in a specific country

Context: The Currency Act said that colonists could not print their own paper money.

massacre

Definition: The brutal, bloody killing of people who cannot defend themselves

Context: A clash with British soldiers during which five Massachusetts colonists died became known as the Boston Massacre.

militia

Definition: An army of volunteers who fight in emergencies

Context: Armed American colonists formed a militia called the Minutemen to stand up to the British soldiers.

Parliament

Definition: The lawmaking body of Britain's government

Context: In 1764 Parliament passed two new tax laws, the Currency Act and the Sugar Act.

petition

Definition: A request in writing to a person or an institution of authority

Context: After the British taxed the tea sold in America, colonial assemblies began circulating a petition of protest.

repeal

Definition: To do away with or revoke, especially by an official or a formal act

Context: Eight of the American colonies asked Parliament to repeal the Sugar Act.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Behavioral Studies: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior; Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions
- History/United States History – Era 3, Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s): Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory
- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; Gathers and uses information for research purposes
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
- Life Skills – Working With Others: Contributes to the overall effort of a group; Uses conflict-resolution techniques; Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations; Displays effective interpersonal communication skills; Demonstrates leadership skills

National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Global Connections
- Civic Ideals and Practices

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the DiscoverySchool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

Credit

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