



DISCOVERING JUSTICE CHILDREN DISCOVERING JUSTICE

Grade 8 Sample Lesson

The Intolerable Acts and the Continental Congress

Section objectives

1. Students will understand the multiple causes and effects of the British government's attempts to control and regulate their North American colonies.
2. Students will be able to compare and contrast a variety of approaches taken in response to this escalation of control and regulation.
3. Students will understand how some individuals and groups have historically reacted when they perceive their rights are being contracted.

Preparation

- Make copies of **Britain Passes the “Intolerable Acts,”** one for each student.
- Make copies of **Letter from Sam Adams to James Warren**, one for each student.
- Be prepared to divide students into groups of five, each portraying a colonial character (descriptions on **Colonial Characters** sheet). Make copies of **Colonial Characters**, one for each group of five students.

The Need for a Continental Congress: The “Intolerable Acts”

- Distribute copies of the article **Britain Passes the “Intolerable Acts”** to students.

Tavern Talk

- Assign each student one of the **Colonial Characters** from this activity and ask them to read the background information about their character. An alternative is to have them use their journal characters.
- Divide the class into groups so that each person in the group represents a different character.

Note: Since students will be talking, and likely disagreeing with one another in character, before beginning these conversations, it will probably be important to go over norms about how to disagree respectfully and about staying on-topic.

- Ask students to think about how their person would feel about:
 - the Boston Tea Party
 - the acts the British government passed in response to it
 - the increasing violence against tax collectors, British government officials, and soldiers stationed in the colonies
- Have one character in each group open up conversation with the group by saying, “So, I hear the British have blocked the harbor and aren’t letting anything in or out except food and firewood. What do you think about this?”

- Allow time for students to discuss their thoughts and feelings as they role-play their characters.

Closing

- After the Tavern Talk has wrapped up, ask students to reflect in writing on their experience at the tavern. Possible prompts include:
 - What do you think it may have felt like for your character to hear these different perspectives? How do you think it might have changed his/her point of view, if at all?
 - How did it feel for you to participate in the Tavern Talk? During what part of the conversation did you feel most comfortable? Least comfortable? Why do you think that is?
 - What did you learn about this moment in history from participating in this activity?
 - What did you learn about yourself or about human behavior from participating in this activity?
- Give students the opportunity to debrief together from the Tavern Talk and the writing reflection. You could facilitate a class discussion, starting with a general question such as, “What did you learn from this activity?” Or, you could begin the debrief discussion with students sharing one idea from their writing reflection.
- An essential question is asking students how they think they would react if they lived during that time. What do they think affected different people’s approaches to British policies and assertion of power and control during that time?

Unit Assessment

- As a **unit assessment**, ask students to revisit and polish a journal entry. You may additionally require that they annotate the entry with their own thinking about the choices they made in their journal writing.

Britain Passes the “Intolerable Acts”

- **The British Respond to the Boston Tea Party: The Coercive Acts**

The British were already frustrated with colonial boycotts and the harassment of customs officials. But, for Parliament, the destruction of the tea during the Boston Tea Party was the last straw. They felt that the Patriots were not only destructive, but because they wore disguises, they were not even courageous enough to take responsibility for their own actions.

The British called their responsive measures to the Boston Tea Party, the Coercive Acts. Boston Harbor was closed to trade and the British demanded that the owners of the tea be compensated. Only food and firewood were permitted into the port. Town meetings were banned, and the authority of the royally appointed governor of Massachusetts was increased.

General Gage, the British commander of North American forces, was appointed governor of Massachusetts and British troops and officials were now to be tried out of Boston when accused of crimes such as murder.

- **The Quebec Act**

Perhaps to anger the colonists and assert their authority, right after passing the Coercive Acts, Parliament passed the Quebec Act, a law that recognized the Roman Catholic Church as the established church in Quebec. A council appointed by the British Crown, rather than an elected body, would make the major decisions for the colony. The boundary of Quebec was extended into the Ohio Valley.

The British had been worried that the Canadians might support the growing American rebellion. The act now allowed Catholic Canadians to serve in public office without renouncing their faith. The British hoped the Quebec Act would please Canadians and would encourage Canadian allegiance to the Crown.

Following the passage of the Quebec Act, rage spread throughout the 13 colonies. With this one act, the British Crown granted land to the people of Quebec that was clearly desired by the American colonists. The extension of tolerance to Catholics was viewed as a hostile act by predominantly Protestant America. The Patriots felt that democracy took another blow with the establishment of British direct rule in Quebec.

- **A Call for Action**

Although the British made no explicit connection between the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act, they were seen on the American mainland as hostile actions and collectively called the **INTOLERABLE ACTS**.

Throughout the colonies, the people understood that what was happening in Massachusetts could happen to any of them if they spoke out against the British. Their sense of unity continued to grow. The other 12 colonies secretly sent supplies to Boston over land while British troops occupied the harbor.

For the first time since the Stamp Act crisis, a conference among all the colonies was called. It was under these tense circumstances that the **FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS** convened in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774.

There, the delegates came to an agreement to send a respectful message to King George. The message urged the king to consider their complaints and recognize their rights. They also agreed to a new boycott of British goods until the Intolerable Acts were repealed, and to meet again if the boycott didn't work. In the towns and cities throughout the colonies, Patriots appointed committees to enforce the boycott and began to organize militias.

Ask students what they have recently learned that should be added to the T-chart “Colonial Grievances and British Reasoning.” As students respond, have them record their classmates' ideas on their charts, while you write them on the class chart.

- To give students a sense of how some of the Patriots in Boston were reacting, display the quote from a [Letter from Sam Adams to James Warren](#) and have students answer the questions under the quote.

- Have students turn and talk to share their responses and then have a few students share out their responses to the whole class.
- Next, have students respond to [Comparing and Contrasting Colonial Responses](#).

Comparing and Contrasting Colonial Responses

How was Sam Adams' response to the "Intolerable Acts" similar to the response of the First Continental Congress?

What are some of the differences between their responses?

Colonial Characters

Colonist #1

Colonist #1 is a poor farmer in western Massachusetts. Up until now, he has paid little attention to the trouble brewing in Boston and in the other colonies. His day-to-day struggle to maintain his farm and family is what worries him. His problems have recently become worse; his landlord, a Loyalist, has had some financial troubles and for his landlord to get himself out of his enormous debts, he has raised Colonist #1's rent three times in the last five months. Colonist #1 barely earns enough from selling his crops to pay the original rent and now with the raise in the rent, Colonist #1 is going to be evicted from his farm. He and his wife have seven children and fear they will have nowhere to go if they are forced to leave the farm. They would move west to the Ohio River Valley, but that has been closed to colonial settlement since the British Proclamation of 1763.

Colonist #2

Colonist #2 is a merchant who lives along the Boston waterfront. She has a shop where she sells mostly British goods such as cloth, furniture, dishes, and tea and some local products that have been hand-made in the colonies. Her business has been hurt badly by the boycotts and she has been torn between boycotting and selling British goods because her livelihood depends on these sales. Recently, her eldest son was threatened by a group of men from the Sons of Liberty and warned they would beat him if his mother didn't stop selling British goods. Colonist #2 then joined the boycott, but now that the harbor has been closed, she can't get any of those goods to sell anymore, anyway.

Colonist #3

Colonist #3 is a ship-builder living in Salem, Massachusetts. He hasn't always been interested in politics, he usually tends to spend his evenings playing cards and dice with a rough crowd in the taverns along the docks. Lately, he sometimes travels down to Boston to attend political meetings and discussions. The Sons of Liberty have noticed him and have been trying to recruit him. He hasn't joined, but he's been thinking about it. If the British keep up this blockade, he will be out of a job. No one will need the ships he has been hired to help build.

Colonist #4

Colonist #4 is a wealthy businessman from New York who often travels through Boston on his way to New Hampshire to visit his daughter and her new husband. Colonist #4's business earns him tremendous wealth and honor for his family. He claims to be related to several members of Parliament and has spent many vacations back in England visiting with friends and family. On his way to the tavern this evening he saw an effigy hanging from a tree and a group of young men spitting on it as they passed, yelling, "Burn, tax collector! Burn!"

Colonist #5

Colonist #5 is a Boston schoolteacher for a Dame School, which she runs in her house for a group of middle class boys. She is a member of the Daughters of Liberty and has been boycotting British goods for several months. Her most difficult sacrifice has been giving up her beloved English tea, but she has been able to purchase smuggled tea occasionally. She's also discovered that boiling basil leaves creates a brew similar to tea and it certainly lifts her spirits when she's down. When she isn't teaching her group of schoolboys, she has been giving lessons to other women on how to weave locally raised wool into cloth. For a while she was courting a young man, but he refused to join the Sons of Liberty so she has stopped seeing him. Her father disapproves of his daughter's "despicable, law-breaking, revolutionary" actions, but her mother has secretly told her she supports her efforts to stand up to the British government.