

## Exploring Perspectives of the Boston Massacre

### Overview

Through the examination of images and the creation of role plays, students will explore the various perspectives of the Boston Massacre, understanding how this controversial day in history played a part in the outbreak of the American Revolution.

### Grade

8

### North Carolina Essential Standards

- 8.H.1.1 - Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues.
- 8.H.1.2 - Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context.
- 8.H.1.3 - Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.
- 8.H.1.4 - Use historical inquiry to evaluate the validity of sources used to construct historical narratives (e.g. formulate historical questions, gather data from a variety of sources, evaluate and interpret data and support interpretations with historical evidence).
- 8.H.1.5 - Analyze the relationship between historical context and decision-making.
- 8.H.2.1 - Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts (e.g. war, slavery, states' rights and citizenship and immigration policies) on the development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.2 - Summarize how leadership and citizen actions (e.g. the founding fathers, the Regulators, the Greensboro Four, and participants of the Wilmington Race Riots, 1898) influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.

### Essential Questions

- What events occurred on March 5, 1770 that became known as the Boston Massacre?
- Who was involved in the Boston Massacre and in what way did they participate in and/or instigate the events?
- What role did perspective and propaganda play in the recounting of the events of the Boston Massacre?
- In what ways did the Boston Massacre lead to the outbreak of revolution in the colony?

### Materials

- Boston Massacre Image from Colonial perspective, attached
- Boston Massacre Image from British perspective, attached
- The Boston Massacre, reading attached

### Duration

60 minutes (additional time may be necessary based on how much time allotted for preparing and presenting scenes)

### Procedure

#### The Boston Massacre – Murder or Self Defense?

1. As a warm-up, project or distribute copies of the attached *Boston Massacre Image 1* (do not share the title of the image with students). Pair your students and have them examine the image and discuss/complete the following:
  - Summarize the contents of this image. What do you see (objects, people, actions, symbols, setting, etc.)

- Characterize the actions depicted. What seems to be occurring?
  - Describe the attitudes and emotions that are represented.
  - When and where might this be occurring? What evidence makes you think this?
2. Once partners have had ample time to discuss, have them report their interpretation of the image back to class. Then, explain to students that this image is an engraving produced by **Paul Revere** representing what became known as the **Boston Massacre**. Share a few facts regarding the incident:
    - On March 5, 1770 a brawl occurred between British soldiers stationed at a tax office located in Boston, MA and colonists.
    - During this time tensions between British soldiers and Patriot colonists were rising. Colonists yelled insults at the British guards, chaos broke out, and the confusion eventually led to troops discharging their muskets
    - 4 civilians were killed at the scene, and one died after the incident.
  3. Ask students to consider these facts and reexamine the image. Discuss:
    - According to this image, who appears to be the aggressors in the situation? Who appears to be the victims? What evidence makes you think this?
    - If this image were the only information you had to guide you in recounting the story of the Boston Massacre, what story would you tell?
  4. Next, project or handout the *Boston Massacre Image 2*. Ask students to examine this image and then compare it to the first:
    - What do you see in this image? What seems to be occurring?
    - According to this second image, who appears to be the aggressor? Who appears to be the victims?
    - How does this representation of the Boston Massacre differ from the first image that we examined?
    - Were this image the only information you had to guide you in recounting the story of the Boston Massacre, what story would you tell this time?
  5. Explain that after the event occurred on March 5, 1770, a very important question remained to be solved. Were the soldiers provoked to fire and acting in self defense; or, were the colonists murdered? Ask students to discuss why two such different images could exist of the same event. Ensure the class mentions the difference in perspectives, and go over the term **propaganda**. Explain that propaganda is a type of message aimed at influencing opinions and/or the behavior of people. Propaganda may provide only partial information or be deliberately misleading. Ask students to discuss how the two images illustrate propaganda.

#### **The Boston Massacre – Exploring Perspectives with Role Plays**

6. Divide students into groups and handout the attached reading on the Boston Massacre. Tell students that they will be reading background information on the Boston Massacre, then preparing a short scene about the event from the perspective of the person assigned to them. Give each group a different perspective from which to prepare their scene:
  - John Adams
  - Samuel Quincy II
  - Private Hugh Montgomery
  - Captain Thomas Preston
  - Crispus Attucks
  - A Patriot sailor in the crowd
7. Tell students that after reading the handout, they should begin writing and practicing their scene. Teachers should set guidelines for the scenes, such as:

- Your scene should illustrate aspects of the Boston Massacre from the perspective of the person assigned to your group. (Consider having your assigned person serve as the main character in the scene.)
- Your scene may take place before, during, or after the events occurring on March 5, 1770. Consider sharing aspects of the Boston Massacre others may overlook. Think outside the box!
- Your scene should last around 5 minutes and have a beginning, middle, and end.
- The purpose of your scene is to share information about the Boston Massacre from the perspective of the person assigned to you. The purpose is not to be comedic. Ensure each of you take the role you play seriously, and make the scene as believable as possible.

8. Once students are ready to perform, go over your expectations for respectful audience members (listen to and watch the performers, clap loudly when they are finished, etc.) Instruct students to take notes as they watch the scenes by creating the following chart on notebook paper and filling in the appropriate information:

List the historical characters present in the scene:	Summarize the events depicted in the scene:	From whose perspective was this scene based on? What evidence makes you think this?

9. Once all scenes have been presented, discuss:
- In what ways did the scenes differ? Why did they differ?
  - How can such different perspectives of the same event arise?
  - Based on the events as you have learned them, who is to blame for the Boston Massacre?
  - Do you agree or disagree with the court's decision? Explain.
  - What actions were taken to ensure the soldiers receive a fair trial? Why do you think this was necessary?
  - Characterize John Adams. What do you think of his decision to represent the soldiers?
  - It has been debated whether or not the Boston Massacre should be classified as a "massacre." Does the situation merit such a classification in your opinion? Why or why not? Who might have pushed for such a classification of the event and why?
  - What can such a debate teach us about the way history is recounted?
  - The Boston Massacre is considered one of the causes of the American Revolution. Why might this event have instigated revolution?

### **Culminating Activities**

- Have students create a timeline of events leading up to and causing the American Revolution. Tell students that their timeline must contain:
  - 10-15 events titled, in chronological order
  - A 3+ sentence description of each event, noting why it contributed to causing the American Revolution
  - A drawing or visual image for each event
- Have students research those killed in the Boston Massacre and write their obituaries.

### **Differentiation**

#### ***Students with Special Needs***

- Students can be given alternate assignments to the roll play. For example, assign a student a character and have them create an illustration of the Boston Massacre from that character's perspective.

## **AIG**

- Instruct students to reenact the trial following the Boston Massacre:
- 1. Choose one student to serve as the judge, then divide the class into three groups:
  - Defense:
    - Defendant: Captain Thomas Preston, 29th regiment British army
    - Attorney: John Adams
    - Witnesses: British soldier involved in Gray's rope walk incident, British soldier involved in firing upon colonists in Massacre, Massachusetts colony Lt. Governor Thomas Hutchinson
  - Prosecution:
    - Plaintiff: John Green, wounded member of Patriot mob
    - Attorney: John Hancock, Boston merchant
    - Witnesses: Edward Payne (wounded member of Patriot mob), Benjamin Frizzell (wounded member of Patriot mob), Samuel Adams (patriot leader)
  - Jury: Remainder of class
- 2. Students will research the events of the Boston Massacre and complete the following:
  - All students should research the case (use the Internet to uncover facts from the actual event and trial following), compiling information that may help your side
  - Attorneys and witnesses will work together to prepare witness testimony; Determine two-three questions witnesses will be asked on the stand; it is advised groups infer and consider what the cross-examination may include and try to have an answer prepared
  - Prepare opening arguments (3-5 minutes)
  - Prepare closing arguments (3-5 minutes)

Boston Massacre Image 1



Source: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/exploring/images/massacre2a.jpg>

Boston Massacre Image 2



Source: <http://web.mit.edu/17.508/www/images/bostonm.jpg>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Boston Massacre

On March 5, 1770, a young apprentice named **Edward Garrick** called out to a British officer, **Captain John Goldfinger**, that he was late paying his barber's bill. Goldfinger had in fact settled his account that day but did not reply to the boy. When Garrick remained quite vocal in his complaints an hour later, the British sentry outside the customs house, **Private Hugh White**, called the boy over and clubbed him on the head. Garrick's companions yelled at the sentry and a British sergeant chased them away. The apprentices returned with more locals, shouting insults at the sentry and throwing snowballs and litter.

White sent a messenger to the Main Guard for reinforcements. The Officer of the Day, **Captain Thomas Preston**, according to his account, dispatched a non-commissioned officer and twelve privates, all soldiers of the 29th Regiment of Foot, and he followed soon afterward. The mob grew in size and continued harassing the officers, pelting them with stones, sticks, and chunks of ice. A group of sailors and dockworkers came carrying large sticks of firewood and pushed to the front of the crowd, directly confronting the soldiers. As bells rang in the surrounding steeples, the crowd of Bostonians grew larger and more threatening. Preston arrived with four other soldiers: Hugh Montgomery, Thomas Weems, John Carroll, and Mathew Kilroy.

In the midst of the commotion, **Private Hugh Montgomery** was struck down onto the ground by a piece of ice. He fired his musket, later admitting to one of his defense attorneys that someone had yelled "Fire!" All of the soldiers but one fired into the crowd. Their uneven bursts hit eleven men: Three - ropemaker **Samuel Gray**, mariner **James Caldwell**, and an African American sailor, **Crispus Attucks**—died instantly. Seventeen-year-old **Samuel Maverick**, struck by a ricocheting musket ball at the back of the crowd, died the next day. Thirty-year-old Irish immigrant **Patrick Carr** died two weeks later. The other six who were wounded survived.

To keep the peace, the day after the shootings royal authorities agreed to remove all troops from the center of town to a fort on Castle Island in Boston Harbor. Captain Preston and the soldiers were arrested and scheduled for trial in a Suffolk County court. The government was determined to give the soldiers a fair trial so there could be no grounds for retaliation from the British and so that moderates would not be alienated from the Patriot cause. A problem was that no lawyers in the Boston area wanted to defend the soldiers, as they believed it would be a huge career mistake. A desperate request was sent to **John Adams** from Preston, pleading for his work on the case. Adams, who was already a leading Patriot and who was contemplating a run for public office, nevertheless agreed to help, in the interest of ensuring a fair trial. Adams, **Josiah Quincy II**, and **Robert Auchmuty** acted as the defense attorneys. Massachusetts Solicitor General **Samuel Quincy** and private attorney **Robert Treat Paine**, hired by the town of Boston, handled the prosecution. To let passions settle, the trial was delayed for months, unusual in that period, and the jurymen were all chosen from towns outside Boston.

Tried on his own, Preston was acquitted after the jury was not convinced that he had ordered the troops to fire.

In the trial of the soldiers, Adams argued that if the soldiers were endangered by the mob they had the legal right to fight back, and so were innocent. If they were provoked but not endangered, he argued, they were at most guilty of manslaughter. The jury agreed with Adams and acquitted six of the soldiers. Two of the soldiers were found guilty of murder because there was overwhelming evidence that they fired directly into the crowd. However, John Adams used a loophole in British Common Law and by proving to the judge that they could read by having them read from the Bible their crime was reduced to manslaughter. Two privates were found guilty of manslaughter and punished by branding on their thumbs. The jury's decisions suggest that they believed the soldiers had felt threatened by the crowd. Patrick Carr, the fifth victim, corroborated this with a deathbed testimony delivered to his doctor.

The Boston Massacre is one of several events that turned colonial sentiment against British rule. Each of these events followed a pattern of Britain asserting its control, and the colonists chafing under the increased regulation. Events such as the Tea Act and the ensuing Boston Tea Party were examples of the crumbling

relationship between Britain and the colonies. While it took five years from the Massacre to outright revolution, it foreshadowed the violent rebellion to come. It also demonstrated how British authority galvanized colonial opposition and protest.

*Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston\\_Massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Massacre)*