

Lesson 6: Committees of Correspondence

Historical Career Assumed

- Politician

Historical Skills Practiced

- formulating historical questions
- identifying gaps in the historical record
- corroboration
- developing research skills
- chronological thinking

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about who the Committees of Correspondence were in relation to promoting the cause of the American colonists before the American Revolution. Students will work in groups taking on the role of one of the colonies' Committees of Correspondence. In these committees, students will read committee documents highlighting the decline in the relationships between Britain and the American colonies from 1763-1773. These documents will extend student thoughts within previous lessons such as the Proclamation of 1763, the Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party. Once each committee annotates these documents, they will pass their annotations along to another committee to comment on and ask questions. This activity will reflect how various Committees of Correspondence had to communicate with each other during the colonial times and will allow students to read other students' work and provide constructive and active feedback. The Clements Library has Nathaniel Freeman's papers that contain letters from the Committee of Correspondence that he was involved in.

Additionally, students will tackle challenging and contradictory views that many American colonists had through their rhetoric of "enslavement" from the British. Students will question why the colonists were so stuck on the symbolism of not being "slaves" to the British while at the same time promoting the enslavement of Africans in America.

Content Question:

- What were specific events and factors that led to the beginning of armed resistance by the American colonists against the British?

Topical Essential Question:

- How did the Committees of Correspondence affect the systems of communication between the colonies?

Overarching Essential Question:

- What are the causes of the American Revolution?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will summarize the specific events and factors that led to the beginning of armed resistance by the Americas.

- Students will explore alternatives to armed resistance by the American colonists.

Instructional Plan

Do Now:

If you lived in a time with no cell phones, televisions, internet, cars, or electricity, how would you communicate with people? How would you find out what was happening in the world? Where would you get your information from?

Introduction:

Share with students that during the colonial era, they did not have any of the technological luxuries we have today. Explain that to communicate with people far away, colonists wrote letters. Tell students that in order to get information quickly from one colony to another, the colonists created systems of communication called “The Committees of Correspondence.” While you give a short background about the Committees of Correspondence, have students write the key points down in their almanac.

Committees of Correspondence background:

Explain that the Committees of Correspondence were Patriot led governments and lines of communication that were established in response to various British policies such as the Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, and the Intolerable Acts leading up to the American Revolution. The committees were formed in major cities throughout the American colonies, but the most influential committees were in the colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Many leaders in the public Committees of Correspondence were also members of the secret, radical protest group, the Sons of Liberty, who were responsible for the Boston Tea Party. Some famous members of the Sons of Liberty and the Committees of Correspondence were Samuel Adams, John Adams (who both became US presidents), Benedict Arnold (who was a spy in the American Revolution), Patrick Henry (who wrote the speech “Give me liberty or give me death”), and Paul Revere (who painted the influential piece of the Boston Massacre).

The driving force behind the Committees of Correspondence was to rally colonial opposition against British policy, to establish political union among the Thirteen Colonies, and to institute lines of communication between Patriot leaders within multiple colonies.

Share the goals of today’s lesson:

Explain to students that today they will be divided into their own Committees of Correspondence and read a selection of primary sources that reiterate the decline in affiliation between the American colonists and the British that was starting to result in armed resistance by the colonists. Each committee will annotate primary sources and then exchange annotations with another committee. Then students will comment, reflect, and ask questions about the other committees’ annotations. This was very similar to how the Committees of Correspondence during the colonial time communicated strategies and ideas with one another.

Group Divisions:

Split students up in the following groups:

- Massachusetts Committee of Correspondence

- Rhode Island Committee of Correspondence
- New York Committee of Correspondence
- Delaware Committee of Correspondence
- Pennsylvania Committee of Correspondence
- Virginia Committee of Correspondence
- North Carolina Committee of Correspondence.

Once students are sitting with each of their committees, have them sit quietly to get the rest of the instructions. In each group, students should read, annotate, and respond to corresponding questions for each excerpt. After students complete this activity, they should trade their annotations with another group and comment on their annotations. They should make comments or ask questions that support, extend, or challenge their ideas about the excerpts. After a few minutes of this, have students return the annotations to the original groups so they can respond to the comments the other committee members made.

Whole Class Discussion:

After completing this activity, we will come back together as a whole class to discuss the various themes they noticed after reading the sources and responding to comments from other Committee members. Have students discuss the following questions:

- What were specific events that led to the start of armed resistance against the British by the colonists?
- Were there alternatives to resistance other than armed resistance and violence?
- Do they think the Committees of Correspondence would have been an efficient and effective way to communicate radical ideas amongst colonist leaders?
- Explain the symbol of “enslavement” stated by the colonists against the British. Why is this symbol hypocritical? Using the sources as evidence, what impact did enslaved people have in the colonies leading up to the American Revolution?

Exit slip:

Why do you think the Committees of Correspondence were such a significant predecessor for the start of the American Revolution?

Lesson sources

<http://files.campus.edublogs.org/cobblearning.net/dist/9/165/files/2011/06/On-the-Path-to-Revolution-2fphroy.pdf>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/committees-of-correspondence/>

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clementsead/umich-wcl-M-1727fre?rgn=Entire+Finding+Aid;view=text;q1=Committee+of+Correspondence>

http://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=438&pid=2