

Lesson 4: The Stamp Act

Content Question

Why did the British Parliament create and enforce the Stamp Act?

Topical Essential Questions

What were the varying perspectives surrounding the implementation of the Stamp Act?

Why were the colonists upset about the implementation of the Stamp Act?

Overarching Essential Questions:

What are the causes of the American Revolution?

Lesson Level Objectives:

Students will read and annotate sources about the Stamp Act to understand the varying perspectives between the British government and the American colonists about its implementation.

Do Now:

Imagine you are King George III of Great Britain. You just doubled Britain's national debt to \$129,586,789 because of the expenses from the French and Indian War. What would you do to try to pay that money back?

What did the Stamp Act (1765) tax?

Why is it important to look at historical stories from multiple perspectives?

Document A: B.W.'s Public Letter (Excerpted from Original)

This public letter appeared on the front page of The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal, a colonial newspaper, on October 7, 1765. The author's name was printed as "B.W."

To the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay.

MY DEAR COUNTRYMEN,

Had not His Excellency the Governor seen fit to adjourn the General Assembly so suddenly, the House of Representatives would doubtless, in a few days, have desired a recess; in order to consult with, and take the Directions of their Constituents, respecting the necessity of a Compliance with the *grievous* and *unconstitutional* Tax laid upon the Colonies by the Stamp Act.

I hope you will at this important Crisis, excuse an animated address, from a hearty Friend to your Civil Liberties, intended to warm your Imagination, and excite your Activity; in the Prosecution of which, I shall, with great Freedom use the Words and adopt the Sentiments of a late inspired Writer: without marking the particular Passages, for which I am obliged to that patriotic Genius.

It is a standing Maxim of English Liberty "That no man shall be taxed but with his own consent," and you very well know we were not, in any *sober* Sense, represented in parliament, when this tax was imposed. When the Legislature decree a Tax, as they represent the Community, such tax ought to be considered as the voluntary Gift of the People to be applied to such uses, as they, by their Representatives, shall think expedient.

Awake! Awake my Countrymen, and, by a regular & legal Opposition of those who enslave us and our posterity. Nothing is wanting but your own Resolution –For great is the Authority, exalted the Dignity, and Powerful the majesty of the people. –And shall you, the Descendants of Britain, born in a land of Light, and reared in the Bosom of Liberty –shall you commence Cowards, at a time when reason calls so loud for your Magnanimity? I know you scorn such an injurious Aspersion –I know you disdain the Thought of so approbrious a Servility.

To assert your Rights doth your Resolution fail you? Are you destitute of Courage? Tamely will you submit, and yield without a Contest? Come then, and by Imagination's Aid, penetrate into Futurity. Behold your Offspring bred up to Bondage. Behold the Province swarming with Slaves and beggars, and your Lands: those lands you so much delight in, all owned by haughty and domineering Lords!

B.W.

Source: B.W. "To the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay," The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal, October 7, 1765.

Sourcing:

Who wrote this?

When was it written?

Where was it written?

Why was it written?

Is this source reliable? Why or why not?

Contextualizing:

How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?

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Document B: From a London Newspaper (Original)

Will Alfred wrote this public letter to Secretary Henry Seymour Conway. Conway was one of two of Britain's Secretaries of State and was responsible for relations with the American colonies. The letter was first published in a London newspaper and then was published in the Boston Gazette Supplement on January 27, 1766, nearly three months after the Stamp Act went into effect.

From a late London Paper.

To Mr. Secretary Conway

There was an article lately in the news-papers, which well merits your utmost attention, and loudly calls for the interposition of government; I mean the insurrection at Boston in America to prevent the execution of the Stamp Act. Within these few years request have been the alarms, that the State was in danger, nor would I venture to affirm that they have been entirely without foundation; but government has never been in any perilous situation from any act of the Crown or its Ministers (whatever might have been the voice of a discontented faction) tho' it may at this moment totter on the brink of destruction from the unbounded licentiousness of the people. It is of little consequence to enquire by what means this evil has arisen to such an enormous height; but it is a work well worthy of the best man, or the ablest Minister, to check its progress, and prevent its finally overturning the constitution. The spirit of riot has so long disturbed the repose of the island, has at length infected our colonies, and already begins to embroil there the administration of public affairs.—The fire is kindled, which it may be difficult to extinguish, and it is much to be dreaded, that the evil example of the rebellious Bostonites will be followed in all the other provinces. How alarming are such acts of barbarity in a civilized country!

The occasion of the riotous behavior of the Bostonites is peculiarly remarkable: Had the Parliament taxed their small beer an half penny a quart, the tax would then have been most severely felt; they would naturally have murmured; and an improper conduct on such an occasion had been less a matter of surprize; and perhaps ought less to have roused the indignation of government: But in the present case, *the tax to be levied affects none of the necessaries of life; will never fall upon many of the poor; and will touch very gently and very seldom such of them as it may light upon:* Even a very poor person cannot be much hurt by paying a shilling or eighteen pence when he is married, puts his son for apprentice to a trade, or when he makes his will. The tax on News-papers concerns only a very few—the common people don't purchase news-papers. I hope administration will take the proper steps to counteract such traitors, and to bring the authors of such disturbances in the State to condign punishment.

My warmest wishes are for the prosperity of Britain.

WILL ALFRED

Analysis:

What happened in Boston?

Why the author was surprised?

Who read the newspapers?

Why were many American colonists upset about the Stamp Act (1765)?

Sourcing:

Contextualizing:

Analysis:

What are the differences between the first stamp and the second stamp?

Which stamp do you think was the official stamp?

What does the second stamp tell you about the response the colonists had to the Stamp Act?



Sourcing:

Contextualizing:

Analysis:

How did the newspaper publisher react to the Stamp Act?

How does the author describe the Stamp Act? What does he compare it to?

Document Analysis: [Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser - October 1765](#) By William Bradford (publisher of this newspaper)

Directions: Read the document below and answer the analysis questions that follow.

1	I AM sorry to be obliged to inform my Readers, that as The STAMP ACT, is feared to be
2	obligatory [mandatory] upon us after the First of November (Tomorrow) ...the Publisher
3	of this Paper unable to bear the tax burden, has thought it expedient [urgent] TO STOP
4	publishing this paper awhile, in order to think about, whether any Methods can be found to break the taxing Chains put on us, and escape the insupportable economic Slavery...

Document Analysis: [Thomas Hutchinson recounts the reaction to the Stamp Act in Boston \(1765\)](#)

Directions: Read the document below and answer the analysis questions that follow.

1	The distributor of stamps for the colony arrived in Boston from London; and, having
2	been agent for that colony, and in other respects of a very reputable character, received
3	from many gentlemen of the town such civilities as were due to him... A few days after,
4	early in the morning, a stuffed image was hung upon a tree, called the great tree of the
5	south part of Boston [subsequently called Liberty Tree]. Labels affixed denoted it to be
6	designed for the distributor of stamps...Before night, the image was taken down, and
7	carried through the townhouse, in the chamber whereof the governor and council were
8	sitting. Forty or fifty tradesmen, decently dressed, preceded; and some thousands of the
9	mob followed down King street to Oliver's dock, near which Mr. Oliver had lately
10	erected a building, which, it was conjectured, he designed for a stamp office. This was laid flat to the ground in a few minutes. From thence the mob proceeded for Fort Hill, but Mr. Oliver's house being in the way, they endeavored to force themselves into it, and being opposed, broke the windows, beat down the doors, entered, and destroyed part of his furniture, and continued in riot until midnight, before they separated.

A: Mr. Oliver was the distributor of Stamps for the Massachusetts Bay Colony

Sourcing:

Contextualizing:

Analysis:

Using lines 2-4, how did the colonists initially react to the arrival of the Stamp distributor?

What did the mobs do to the Stamp distributor's house?



Sourcing:

Contextualizing:

Analysis:

What is this image depicting?

Did the colonists' protests work?

Exit slip.

Do you think that the Stamp Act was a reasonable or unreasonable tax? Were the British violating the rights of colonists?