

Foundations of American Government: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

Investigate new findings from the night that helped bring America into the Revolutionary War. Watch Thomas Jefferson articulate the ideals of a new and free nation. Witness the struggles faced by the Constitution's framers. And peruse the first 10 amendments that were made to it.

- The Story Behind the Boston Massacre (35 min.)
 - Writing the Declaration of Independence (5 min.)
 - Composing the Constitution (3 min.)
 - Establishing the Bill of Rights (4 min.)
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Onscreen Questions

- What events helped trigger the Boston Massacre?
 - How could a weak Declaration of Independence have affected the outcome of the Revolutionary War?
 - Why was a strong central government important in the formation of the United States?
 - How did the Founding Fathers foresee the importance of individual rights?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Learn the traditional view of what happened during the Boston Massacre.
- Research different perspectives of this event.
- Have a class debate, with one side arguing that the event was a massacre and the other arguing that the American colonies provoked the British to further their own agenda.

Materials

- *Foundations of American Government* program
- Computer with Internet access

Procedures

1. Have students view “The Story Behind the Boston Massacre” segment of the *Foundations of American Government* program.
2. Briefly discuss the traditional viewpoint of the Boston Massacre— that with little or no provocation, the British opened fire on unarmed colonists, an event often thought of as the first incident of the Revolutionary War.
3. Then review what students saw in the program— that eyewitness accounts, such as testimony from the trial of the British commander and his soldiers, and modern-day forensic evidence have historians reexamining the traditional account of the Boston Massacre. Ask students to list some of the questions historians are now asking. Answers may include:
 - Did the British really shoot for no reason?
 - Were the colonists, in fact, armed?
 - Did the colonists provoke the British soldiers?
4. Divide students into two groups and explain that they are going to stage a debate about the Boston Massacre. Assign one group the position that the British opened fire on the colonists with little or no provocation. Assign the other group the position that the Americans provoked the British, who then acted in self-defense.
5. Refer students to the following sites, where they can gather information to support their arguments.
 - Boston Massacre information
http://www.crf-usa.org/bria/bria16_1.html#adams
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/index.htm>
 - Crispus Attucks information
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2p24.html>
 - Captain Preston’s account
<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1751-1775/bostonmassacre/prest.htm>
 - Anonymous eyewitness account
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/acct-anonymous1.htm>
 - John Adams’s trial speech
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/acct-adams1.htm>
 - Theodore Bliss deposition
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/d-bliss.htm>

- Robert Goddard deposition
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/d-goddard.htm>
 - Benjamin Burdick deposition
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/d-burdick.htm>
 - Richard Palmes deposition
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/d-palmes.htm>
 - John Hancock anniversary speech
<http://www.bostonmassacre.net/trial/acct-hancock1.htm>
6. Give students time in class to prepare for the debate. Remind them to draft an opening statement and to think about what points they want to make in their closing arguments.
 7. During the next class period, have students debate the issue. Make sure both sides have ample time to respond to the other side's arguments and to make their closing statements.
 8. Conclude with a classroom discussion. Which side do students think had the more compelling arguments? Why was the Boston Massacre an important event in American history? What did the American colonies and the British learn from this incident?

Assessment

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

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class and group discussions; researched their topic and were well prepared for the debate; presented clear, well-thought-out and accurate arguments during the debate.
- 2 points: Students participated in class and group discussions; researched their topic adequately and were reasonably well prepared for the debate; presented satisfactory arguments during the debate.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class and group discussions; did not research their topic thoroughly and were not well prepared for the debate; presented unsatisfactory arguments during the debate.

Vocabulary

John Adams

Definition: A patriot who also served as the lawyer for Captain Preston, commander of the British troops during the Boston Massacre

Context: John Adams was a masterful lawyer, and his persuasive arguments were one of the main reasons that Captain Preston was not found guilty of murder.

Crispus Attucks

Definition: Considered one of the leaders of the American colonists involved in the Boston Massacre; he was killed during the event.



Context: The history books claim that Crispus Attucks' blood was the first spilled in the cause of America's liberty.

Boston Massacre

Definition: The event that took place outside the State House on March 7, 1770, during which five colonists died and three were wounded

Context: Historians are still debating whether, during the Boston Massacre, the British soldiers opened fire for no reason or acted in self-defense.

Captain Preston

Definition: The commander of the British troops during the Boston Massacre

Context: Acoustical studies done by present-day engineers indicate that because Captain Preston had his back to his troops during the shooting, it was highly unlikely that they would have heard an order to fire even if he had given it.

Paul Revere

Definition: A patriot, artist, and silversmith; he produced an engraving that was thought to be the definitive statement about the Boston Massacre.

Context: Paul Revere's engraving, which shows the British soldiers lined up shooting the colonists, has been effective in conveying a particular point of view about the Boston Massacre.

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/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- U.S. History: Era 3 – Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory
- Historical Understanding – Understands the historical perspective
- Language Arts: Viewing – Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [DiscoverySchool.com](http://school.discovery.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>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How to Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four segments (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. The Story Behind the Boston Massacre (35 min.)

Investigate the Boston Massacre to determine if there is more to this incident than history books reveal.

II. Writing the Declaration of Independence (5 min.)

Explore how Thomas Jefferson's strongly worded Declaration of Independence changed the minds of colonists opposed to the Revolutionary War.

III. Composing the Constitution (3 min.)

Watch as representatives from the 13 colonies tackle the challenge of governing a young nation.

IV. Establishing the Bill of Rights (4 min.)

Examine how the colonists amended the Constitution to guarantee individual rights and set limitations on state and federal power.

Curriculum Units

1. Bloodshed in Boston

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about the Boston Massacre?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What made the Boston Massacre such an important incident?

A: The Boston Massacre occurred sometime between 9 and 10 p.m. on the night of March 5, 1770. Eight British soldiers fired their muskets into a crowd of several hundred colonists and rebels; when the smoke had cleared, three colonists were dead and two were mortally wounded. The Boston Massacre shootings were a culmination of a series of violent confrontations between British authorities and colonial Patriots and marked an important flashpoint in the American Revolution. The incident was a turning point in the history of the United States because it showed the rebel Patriots that the struggle for independence would require bloodshed.

2. Investigating the Massacre

Pre-viewing question

Q: What were the most important events of the American Revolution?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What do you think investigators will learn about the Boston Massacre?

A: Answers will vary.



3. Historical Inaccuracies

Pre-viewing question

Q: Are historical events always remembered exactly as they occurred?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are some known inaccuracies in Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre?

A: This engraving shows a group of unarmed civilians being cut down by a volley of musket fire during the day. However, we know that the event actually took place at night and that the colonists were not the passive victims depicted in the engraving. A thick layer of snow and ice lay on the ground, which is not shown in the engraving. There were a total of nine British soldiers that night, not the eight shown. In addition, Capt. Preston is standing behind his men, showing Revere's own anti-British bias.

4. Beginning the Reenactment

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever taken part in or witnessed the reenactment of an event?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What would you have done if you were in Hugh White's shoes?

A: Answers will vary.

5. A Lethal Turn of Events

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why might someone not tell the complete truth?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Did the British soldiers act in self-defense or commit murder?

A: Answers will vary.

6. Acoustic Simulation

Pre-viewing question

Q: Was the British captain, Thomas Preston, responsible for the Boston Massacre?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you agree with the findings from the acoustic simulation?

A: Answers will vary.



7. A Commemorative Star

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do you think the British soldiers fired on the colonists?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you believe the commemorative star is placed incorrectly?

A: Answers will vary.

8. Crispus Attucks: Hero or Unlucky Victim?

Pre-viewing question

Q: Was Crispus Attucks the first victim of the Boston Massacre?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What did the ballistics test prove?

A: The test proved that it would have been virtually impossible for Crispus Attucks to be shot by a two-ball musket fire. Based on the trajectory of the shots, there was no way that the balls would have hit him in the locations that the autopsy showed. Additionally, the ballistics test brought into question the "fact" that Attucks had been the initial victim of the Boston Massacre. Based on his wounds and the test, it is possible that the musket fire had first hit another victim and then struck Attucks.

9. The Truth Behind the Massacre

Pre-viewing question

Q: What modern incidents are similar to the Boston Massacre?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Was the incident truly a massacre?

A: Answers will vary.

10. A Call for Rebellion

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have words ever swayed your actions?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What does the Declaration of Independence mean to you?

A: Answers will vary.



11. We, the People

Pre-viewing question

Q: What type of government do you think works best?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why was the system of checks and balances established?

A: It was established to ensure that no single branch of government had too much power. In the U.S. power-sharing system, the executive branch, headed by the president, carries out the laws; the judicial branch, headed by the Supreme Court, settles disputes; and the Congressional branch, comprised of members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, makes the laws.

12. Protecting Our Rights and Freedoms

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about the Bill of Rights?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: In your opinion, what is the most important amendment in the Bill of Rights?

A: Answers will vary.

