

The Boston Massacre

Saving Dr. Warren... “A True Patriot”

Before starting this lesson you will need to have read Ch. 21-22 (pg. 104-112) of *Saving Dr. Warren... “A True Patriot.”*

Key Historical Question:

What happened in Boston on March 5, 1770? Who was responsible?

S.W.B.A.T:

- Source primary documents to know if they can be reliable or contain biases
- Corroborate sources to develop a full understanding of what happened March 5th, 1770

Plan of Instruction:

1. **Hook:** Present the students with this scenario and discuss their responses as a class.
Story: “A student has been assigned to be a hall monitor during lunch. While she’s standing at her post five students who she reported last week as being disruptive in the halls come up to her and start making fun of her. They tease her about the vest she has to wear, and make many insulting comments. She tries to ignore them, but soon they start throwing food at her. One of the bigger bullies throws an apple. It hits her in the nose and gives her a bloody nose. The teachers are in the lunchroom and don’t notice the comotion, but three other hall monitors notice what’s happening and come running to help. When they get there the students start throwing food at the other hall monitors too.”
Response: Have the students discuss with the person sitting next to them what they would do if they were one of the hall monitors, and the teachers were too far away to help. Have them share their answers with the class. Explain how today in class they will be analyzing the events of the Boston Massacre.
2. **Pre-Lesson Reflection:** Have students reflect on why there is unrest in the colonies. Why are the colonists so agitated? (*Various Acts by the king, but more specifically the Boston Massacre happens the night after the article on Christopher Seider’s death is published in the newspaper*)
3. **Document Analysis:**
 - a. Distribute documents to students, and place students in document groups (2-3 individuals is recommended for group size).
 - i. For time-management, it may make sense to allow students within one group to divide the documents (or, alternatively, assign reading at home).
 - b. Students are to fill in the Document Analysis sheet attached below as they read each document.
4. **Modern Connection:** Make comparisons of what they know about the Boston Massacre with modern violent protests (i.e. George Floyd 2020). How do they compare? How do they differ?
5. **Wrap It Up:** Have students fill out an exit slip answering the question, What led to the Boston Massacre?

**DOCUMENT A: David Hall Diary, 11-18 March 1770
(modified)**

March 11 [1770]

I find years heavy upon me now in my 66th year and fears are on every side. Here is some striking news from last Monday. A Regular (British) officer with 50 men marched near the rope workers in Boston where the Regulars had been troublesome a few weeks before. They fired their pieces and killed 3 men on the spot. Wounded many two of which died the next morning. The officers and soldiers were taken into custody. What will be the consequence we know not. Oh God appear for us on this dark day.

March 18 [1770]

The striking news of the Regulars was not quite as I had heard. Yet no less affecting. Lord go with me and rule over all things for us. I find my heart disposed to trust in God. Let me not be ashamed.

**DOCUMENT B: Deposition of Joseph Belknap regarding 5 March 1770
(modified)**

Delivered In Court At The Trial of Captain Preston on October 24, 1770:

Joseph Belknap of lawful age, testifies & says: On the 5th of March in the evening a little after 9 o'clock, coming from my neighbours I heard a considerable noise at a distance. I directly went over to Mr Tyler & desired him to go with me, for there was a great noise in town, & possibly we might be of service in preventing trouble. As we approached the commotion we heard several guns fired. We saw a number of people running down Shrimpton's Lane, saying there were men killed by the soldiers. I, being in doubt about what they said, continued closer to see for myself. When I got to the top of the lane I was thoroughly convinced of the truth of their story because of the quantity of blood spilt, which look'd to me to be near half a pail full in one place.

There was a number of people seemingly in great distress. There was confusion and many opinions about what was best to be done. I walked down the lane and met with his Honor the Lieutenant Governor. We then walked to King Street, & when we came to the place where the blood was, I pointed to it, saying to his Honor, "Here sir is the blood that has been spilt tonight — Then I went with him to the foot of the Town House where there was a number of soldiers drawn up with their guns all levelled down street with their bayonets fixed & I thought just ready to fire; I said to the soldiers, "Here is his Honor. the Lt. Governor come to talk with you, where is your officer?" His Honor & I passed by them almost to the points of their bayonets & went to Captain Preston who was upon the right wing of the soldiers,

His Honor said to Captain Preston, "Don't you know you can't fire your weapons without the permission of the Civil Magistrate?" Capt Preston Answered, "I did it for my own safety." The soldiers were ordered to return to their barracks; & I watched them march away. When his Honor promised the people justice would be done the mob began to disperse. A warrant was then issued & given to the Sheriff, who took Capt. Preston.

DOCUMENT C: Letter from Thomas Gage to Thomas Hutchinson, 30 April 1770

(modified)

Sir Thomas Hutchinson [Governor of Massachusetts],

I am worried about what will be expected in the trial of Captain Preston and his soldiers. When I think of the unhappy transactions of the 5th of March, I have tried to take the situation of the town, and the temper of the people. I see they are inflamed and want revenge. *These circumstances render it next to impossible that Captain Preston and his soldiers can have a fair and impartial trial, or any chance for their lives, whether guilty or not: unless the Government should interfere, and postpone executions, till reports were made to the King, that His Majesty might be able to judge.* But my Letters unfortunately go home late, and the trials will come on before any order can be received by the King.

The cause of justice demands delay, but I am not able to judge how far the law will permit it, and therefore may act improperly in asking you to try as best you can in your position of governor to delay the trial as long as it shall be possible. I hear nothing for certain about America, though I know because of the incident on March 5th all the Acts (taxes) complained of will be removed from the colonies. All but tea.

The people of England are greatly divided in their opinions about the colonies in America. Some are for enforcing obedience to the laws set on the colonies by the King. Others, though few in number, agree with the Americans in their sentiments about taxation. A third group is between these two extremes, and want to heal the relationship between the Americans and England with moderate measures.

I have the honour to be with perfect regard & esteem,

Sir,
Your most obedient
humble servant,
General Gage

**Document D: Captain Thomas Preston's Account While in Jail, Published in the London
Newspaper in June 1770
(Modified)**

At about 9 some of the guards informed me that people were gathering to attack the troops. On my way there, I heard the crowd threaten the troops. About 100 people went towards the Custom House, on King Street, where the king's money is kept. They immediately surrounded the soldier there and began taunting and threatening him. I was told that they were going to carry off the soldier and probably murder him. I immediately sent an officer and 12 men to protect both the soldier and the king's money. I followed them to prevent, if possible, any problems. I feared that the officer and soldiers might be provoked by the insults of the rioters. I told the troops to go out without loading their weapons and I never gave orders to load them.

The mob still increased, striking their clubs together, and calling out, "Come on you rascals, you bloody backs, you lobster scoundrels, fire if you dare." At this time I was between the soldiers and the mob, trying to persuade them to leave peacefully. Someone asked me if I was going to order the men to fire. I answered no, saying that I was in front of the guns, and would be shot if they fired. While I was speaking, one of the soldiers was hit with a stick, stepped a little to one side, and instantly fired. When I turned to ask him why he fired without orders, I was struck with a club on my arm. The soldiers were attacked by a great number of heavy clubs and snowballs were thrown at them. All our lives were in danger. At the same time, someone from behind called out, "D*mn your bloods — why don't you fire?" Instantly three or four of the soldiers fired and then three more fired in the same confusion. The mob then ran away, except three unhappy men who instantly died.

When I asked the soldiers why they fired without orders, they said they heard the word fire and thought it came from me. This might be the case as many of the mob called out fire, but I told the men that I gave no such order. My words were, "don't fire, stop your firing."

Name:
Period:

Document Analysis

Document A

1. David Hall is an American colonist living in Boston. Based on his two diary entries what are his thoughts about what happened March 5th? (*Use words and phrases from the document to support your answer*)
2. Do you think David Hall is a Son of Liberty, a Loyalist, or a neutral colonist? What from the document makes you think that?

Document B

3. List three things about March 5th, 1770, that you learned from Document B, that Document A didn't tell you:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. Document B is a deposition (a statement made in court where the person speaking is under oath to tell the whole truth). Would a deposition of somebody there on March 5th, 1770 be a trustworthy source? Why?
5. Based on what you read in Ch. 20 of *Saving Dr. Warren... "A True Patriot,"* would Steve be a good source to learn about what happened March 5, 1770? Why?

Document C

6. What is General Gage most concerned about in this letter?
7. What is he asking Governor Hutchinson to do?
8. If you were Governor Hutchinson would you do what General Gage is asking you to do? Why?

Document D

9. The soldier that is first targeted by the colonists is standing in front of the Custom House on King Street. Based on what the document says, what is the purpose of the Custom House?
10. Based on what we've discussed from previous class discussions, why is it significant that the colonists target the soldier standing in this location?
11. Based on Captain Preston's account, why did his men fire at the colonists?
12. At the bottom of pg. 110, and the top of pg. 111, in *Saving Dr. Warren... "A True Patriot"* it mentions a man the soldiers killed when they fired into the crowd. What was his name and who was he?

Walking in someone else's shoes: Based on what we've learned about the Boston Massacre from these four documents, how would you have responded to the situation if you were a British soldier? Explain why?