

The Boston Massacre: Analyzing the Evidence

Theme: The causes of the American Revolution

Grade Level: 8th Grade--but it is suitable for high school age students as well.

Duration: The lesson will take 2-3 class periods.

Content Standards: History 3.a, Social Studies Skills and Methods 1

Primary Sources Used: Boston Massacre Eyewitness statements.

Where to find the Online Sources:

Diagram used at the Boston Massacre Trial

http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com/art/253556/Plan_of_the_Boston_Massacre_of_1770_used_at_the_trial_of_the

History of the Boston Massacre and subsequent Trial

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/bostonmassacre/bostonaccount.html>

Link to eyewitness testimony.

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/bostonmassacre/prestontrial excerpts.html>

The lesson uses excerpts from the above. If teachers wish to use more or different accounts, they can find everything at the above website.

Summary of Lesson: Oftentimes, students make the mistake of thinking that primary sources are always accurate. They believe that if a person witnessed an event, what they say must be true. This lesson can be used to show that when using primary sources, one must be aware that people's memories are not always accurate and that things like bias can affect what they remember. Students will analyze several accounts from the trial of the soldiers that occurred after the shooting. When done, they will view part of the miniseries *John Adams*.

Lesson steps

- a. Teachers not familiar with the Boston Massacre should read the general history of the incident and trial at the website listed here:
<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/bostonmassacre/bostonaccount.html>
- b. Pass out copies of the eyewitness testimonies, diagram of the shooting and the chart to the students. If one chooses, students may work in pairs and only assign one witness for each student. Some of the shorter testimony may be given to students with learning disabilities.
- c. As students read the testimony, they will fill out the chart. Not all the questions will be answered by each witness.
- d. When done, a larger chart drawn on the board can be filled out by the students. When completed, it can be used by the whole class to compare the testimonies.

- e. When the chart has been completed and all the testimony analyzed, ask students about what factors may have influenced what the people said. Answers might include physical factors like darkness, distance from the shooting, or emotional ones like bias.
- f. Watch the *John Adams* episode dealing with the Boston Massacre and Trial. It starts at the beginning of Episode 1. Chapters 1-4. The segments pertaining to the Boston Massacre ends at time 43:30. The series is intended for adult audiences, however, the only parts not suitable is some language that is used during the trial. There is a very powerful scene later in Episode 1 that deals with tarring and feathering however it contains nudity so be sure to stop the movie at the time indicated above.

Post assessment guide. Students should be assessed on their ability to analyze primary sources. This can be done by the teacher analyzing how well the students completed the chart and their answers during discussions.

Teacher Materials:

- a. Worksheets with testimony of the witnesses
- b. chart to record witness answers to several key questions
- c. Diagram showing the massacre site.
- d. John Adams mini-series.

Student Materials

- a. Eyewitness worksheets
- b. Massacre site diagram

Developed by Todd Miller, Hillsdale Middle School, Hillsdale, Ohio

Write down your responses to the following questions as you read the following account

(not all questions will apply)

1. How was the crowd acting before the shooting?
2. How large was the crowd?
3. Was the order given to “fire” to the British soldiers?
4. What caused the first soldier to fire?
5. Where was Captain Preston standing in relation to the soldiers?
6. What was Captain Preston wearing?
7. What did Captain Preston do after the shooting occurred?
8. Does the witness seem to have any bias for against the soldiers?

Deposition of Theodore Bliss

At home. I heard the Bells for fire. Went out. Came to the Town House. The People told me there was going to be a Rumpus with the Soldiers. Went to the Custom house. Saw Capt. Preston there with the Soldiers. Asked him if they were loaded. He said yes. If with Ball (bullets). He said nothing. I saw the People throw Snow Balls at the Soldiers and saw a Stick about 3 feet long strike a Soldier upon the right. He sallied and then fired. A little time a second. Then the others 1 fast after one another.

One or two Snow balls hit the Soldier, the stick struck, before firing. I know not whether he sallied on account of the Stick or step'd back to make ready. I did not hear any Order given by the Capt. to fire. I stood so near him I think I must have heard him if he had given an order to fire before the first firing. I never knew Capt. Preston before. I can't say whether he had a Surtout (an overcoat) on, he was dressed in red. I know him to be the Man I took to be the Officer.

The Man that fired first stood next to the Exchange lane. I saw none of the People press upon the Soldiers before the first Gun fired. I did after. I aimed a blow at him myself but did not strike him. I am sure the Captain stood before the Men when the first Gun was fired. I had no apprehension (doubt) the Capt. did give order to fire when the first Gun was fired. I thought, after the first Gun, the Capt. did order the Men to fire but do not certainly know. I heard the word fire several times but know not whether it came from the Captain, the Soldiers or People. Two of the People struck at the Soldiers after the first Gun. I don't know if they hit 'em. There were about 100 people in the Street. The muzzles of the Guns were behind him. After the first Gun the Captain went quite to the left and I to the right.

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Daniel Calef

I was present at the firing. I heard one of the Guns rattle. I turned about and lookd and heard the officer who stood on the right in a line with the Soldiers give the word fire twice. I lookd the Officer in the face when he gave the word and saw his mouth. He had on a red Coat, yellow Jacket and Silver laced hat, no trimming on his Coat. The Prisoner is the Officer I mean. I saw his face plain, the moon shone on it. I am sure of the man though I have not seen him since before yesterday when he came into Court with others. I knew him instantly. I ran upon the word fire being given about 30 feet off. The officer had no Surtout (overcoat) on

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Deposition of Benjamin Burdick

When I came into King Street about 9 o'clock I saw the Soldiers round the Centinel. I asked one if he was loaded and he said yes. I asked him if he would fire, he said yes by the Eternal God and pushd his Bayonet (long knife like weapon attached to the end of the musket) at me. After the firing the Captain came before the Soldiers and put up their Guns with his arm and said stop firing, don't fire no more or don't fire again.

I heard the word fire and took it and am certain that it came from behind the Soldiers. I saw a man passing busily behind who I took to be an Officer. The firing was a little time after. I saw some persons fall. Before the firing I saw a stick thrown at the Soldiers. The word fire I took to be a word of Command. I had in my hand a highland broad Sword which I brought from home. Upon my coming out I was told it was a wrangle between the Soldiers and people, upon that I went back and got my Sword.

I never used to go out with a weapon. I had not my Sword drawn till after the Soldier pushed his Bayonet at me. I should have cut his head off if he had stepped out of his Rank to attack me again. At the first firing the People were chiefly in Royal Exchange lane, there being about 50 in the Street. After the firing I went up to the Soldiers and told them I wanted to see some faces that I might swear to them another day. The Centinel in a melancholy tone said perhaps Sir you may.

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Ebenezer Hinkley

Just after 9 o'clock heard the Cry of Fire. I saw the party come out of the Guard House. A Capt. cried out of the Window "fire upon 'em d___ 'em." I followed 'em down before the Custom House door. Capt. Preston was out and commanded 'em. They drew up and charged their Bayonets. Montgomery pushed at the people advancing. In 2 or 3 minutes a Boy threw a small stick over hand and hit Montgomery on Breast. Then I heard the word fire in 1/4 minute he fired. I saw some pieces of Snow as big as Egg thrown. 3 or 4 thrown at the same time of pushing on the other End of the file, before 1st gun fired. The body of People about a Rod (16 feet) off. People said D___ 'em they durst not fire don't be afraid. No threats.... I was a Rod from Capt. Preston. Kid not hear him give Order to fire 1/2 minute from 1st Gun to 2d. same to 3d. The others quicker. I saw no people striking the Guns or Bayonets nor pelting 'em. I saw Preston between people and Soldiers. I did not see him when 1st firing

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Diman Morton

Between 9 and 10 I heard in my house the cry of fire but soon understood there was no fire but the Soldiers were fighting with the Inhabitants. I went to King Street. Saw the Centinel over the Gutter, his Bayonet breast high. He retired to the steps loaded. The Boys dared him to fire. Soon after a Party came down, drew up. The Captain ordered them to load. I went across the Street. Heard one Gun and soon after the other Guns. The Captain when he ordered them to load stood in the front before the Soldiers so that the Guns reached beyond him. The Captain had a Surtout (overcoat) on. I knew him well. The Surtout was not red. I think cloth colour. I stood on the opposite corner of Exchange lane when I heard the Captain order the Men to load. I came by my knowledge of the Captain partly by seeing him lead the Fortification Guard

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Matthew Murray

I heard no order given. I stood within two yards of the Captain. He was in front talking with a Person, I don't know who. I was looking at the Captain when the Gun was fired

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Andrew, a Negro servant to Oliver Wendell

I jump'd back and heard a voice cry fire and immediately the first Gun fired. It seemed to come from the left wing from the second or third man on the left. The Officer was standing before me with his face towards the People. I am certain the voice came from beyond him. The Officer stood before the Soldiers at a sort of a corner. I turned round and saw a Grenadier who stood on the Captain's right swing his Gun and fire. I took it to be Killeroy [one of the soldiers on trial]. I look'd a little to the right and saw a Man drop. The Molatto (Crispus Attucks) was killed by the first Gun by the Grenadier on the Captains Right. I was so frightened, after, I did not know where I was....

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Jane Whitehouse

A Man came behind the Soldiers walked backwards and forward, encouraging them to fire. The Captain stood on the left about three yards. The man touched one of the Soldiers upon the back and said fire, by God I'll stand by you. He was dressed in dark colored clothes.... He did not look like an Officer. The man fired directly on the word and clap on the Shoulder. I am positive the man was not the Captain.... I am sure he gave no orders.... I saw one man take a chunk of wood from under his Coat throw it at a Soldier and knocked him. He fell on his face. His firelock (musket) was out of his hand.... This was before any firing

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James Woodall

I saw one Soldier knocked down. His Gun fell from him. I saw a great many sticks and pieces of sticks and Ice thrown at the Soldiers. The Soldier who was knocked down took up his Gun and fired directly. Soon after the first Gun I saw a Gentleman behind the Soldiers in velvet of blue or black plush trimmed with gold. He put his hand toward their backs. Whether he touched them I know not and said by God I'll stand by you whilst I have a drop of blood and then said fire and two went off and the rest to 7 or 8.... The Captain, after, seemed shocked and looked upon the Soldiers. I am very certain he did not give the word fire

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Thomas Handaside Peck

I was at home when the Guns were fired. I heard 'em distinct. I went up to the main guard and addressed myself to the Captain and said to him What have you done? He said, Sir it was none of my doings, the Soldiers fired of their own accord, I was in the Street and might have been shot. His character is good as a Gentleman and Soldier. I think it exceeds any of the Corps

Colonist's Name: _____ -

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