

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# American Revolution

“This Ain’t Working”

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. From 1754-1763, Britain and its colonies were involved in the French and Indian War—the American theater of Europe’s Seven Years’ War (1754-63). Britain won the war and gained control of all the land east of the Mississippi, including Canada. But after years of costly war, the British found themselves strangled in war debt. So, they enacted a series of acts to tax the colonies. The colonies protested. But the British ignored colonial interests.

Notes

In 1770, British soldiers killed five men for throwing rocks and snowballs in the Boston Massacre. Three years after the Boston Massacre, Parliament passed the Tea Act of 1773, which gave the British a monopoly on selling tea to the American colonies. This means the British controlled the tea trade, keeping other competitors from participating. The British monopoly made the price of tea so low that even smugglers couldn’t compete.

2. Samuel Adams and the radical Sons of Liberty were desperately looking for another Boston Massacre-type event to catalyze American resistance. The Tea Act provided just such an opportunity.

Notes

When three tea-laden cargo ships landed in Boston Harbor, Sam Adams led a group of 150 colonists dressed as Mohawk Indians to the docks. The men boarded the ships, smashed the crates and dumped tea into the water. By the end of the night, the Boston Tea Party had destroyed \$70,000 worth of British tea. It was a powerful message to the British. King George of England took it to be an act of defiance. “The die is now cast,” he told his prime minister. “The colonies must either submit or triumph.”

3. The British responded to the Boston Tea Party fiercely. They passed the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act. Together, they became known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts. These acts severely restricted democracy in Massachusetts, closed Boston Harbor and even established Roman Catholicism as the official religion in Quebec. The British also sent 4,000 more soldiers into Boston to suppress uprisings.

Notes

4. General Gage was the commander of the British troops in Boston. He heard rumors that the colonists were amassing ammunition and guns in a storehouse in Concord, a small town outside of Boston. Gage also heard that two of the rebel ringleaders—Sam Adams and John Hancock—were hiding in nearby Lexington. Sam Adams had led the Boston Tea Party. Hancock, the richest man in New England before the war, helped organize and fund the rebellion. Gage planned to march out to Lexington and Concord where he would arrest Adams and Hancock and then seize the ammunition. But Paul Revere and the Sons of Liberty expected this move. Revere set up a system of signals that would alert him if the British started to move.

Notes

5. In order to reach Lexington and Concord, the British had to cross the Charles River. Revere told a church deacon in Boston to watch troop movement. Revere asked the deacon to hang one lantern in the bell tower if the British were coming by land—that is, marching across the Boston Neck peninsula. He asked the deacon to hang two lanterns if they were coming by sea—that is, using the Charles River to cross into Cambridge. Revere and his horse were waiting on the other side of the Charles for the signal.

Notes

Late at night on April 18, 1775, the deacon in Boston hung two lanterns from his church. Revere and another rider, William Dawes, saw the sign and sped off on horseback to warn the townspeople. They were later joined by a third rider, Samuel Prescott.

Fun fact: Paul Revere probably didn't shout the legendary phrase, "The British are coming!" He and the other riders had to warn people discreetly that the Redcoats were on the move. Shouting through the towns on horseback would have been too conspicuous. Besides, at the time colonial Americans were still technically British, too.

6. The colonies didn't have a standing army. Instead, they relied on local militias and Minutemen, farmers who could grab a musket and assemble in a minute's time. Hearing Revere's call, a group of Minutemen assembled in Lexington to confront the British. The British, also known as redcoats or "lobster-backs" because of the bright red uniforms they wore, were clearly superior in training and numbers.

Notes

Captain John Parker, the leader of the Minutemen, instructed his troops: "Stand your ground; don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." No one knows who fired the first shot in the Battle of Lexington, but it became known as the "shot heard 'round the world" because of its far-reaching consequences.

7. Somehow, the rag-tag bunch of Lexington Minutemen weren't able to kill even a single British soldier, despite the fact that the British lined up in a straight line to fire and were wearing bright red coats. The British moved on to Concord, expecting another easy battle. In Concord, however, hundreds of Minutemen took position behind stone walls, houses, barns and trees, in a kind of primitive guerrilla fighting style. The British were sitting ducks: they took fire from Minutemen snipers hidden in trees and behind houses. The vulnerable British troops retreated to Boston. By the end of the first day of the Revolutionary War, the British counted 73 dead and 174 wounded.

Notes

8. The Revolutionary War picked up quickly after the Battles of Lexington and Concord. A series of battles, including the Battle of Bunker Hill, helped the rebel cause. The British took a heavy beating before winning the hill. In May 1775, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. Congress named George Washington from Virginia as commander in chief of the newly formed American Continental Army. The army was not a professional force, but a bunch of farmers who had little to no experience fighting in wars. Washington himself described the army as "excessively dirty." In the next year, support for American independence grew. This was due in part to Thomas Paine's influential pamphlet called Common Sense, which argued persuasively for independence.

Notes