

KS3 History

Lesson 4 on Did the Enlightenment fuel the American Revolution?

Why did war break out between Britain and its colonies?

Mr Arscott



In this lesson we shall be looking at a strange event that equally has a strange name, the Boston Tea Party. This was actually a major revolt against Britain. American colonists decided to throw away huge quantities of tea leaves. In the eighteenth century tea was a luxury item and it is estimated that in today's money, £1.15 million worth of tea was intentionally destroyed. But why did this happen?

In the mid-eighteenth century, the colonists who lived in America saw themselves as 'subjects of the crown', meaning they were loyal to the monarch of Britain. At this time the British monarch was called George III. Most colonists liked the fact that Britain had a parliament that protected the rights and liberties of Britons. However, the 13 Colonies were not themselves represented in the British parliament. As a consequence, some colonists who were inspired by Enlightenment ideas, questioned whether the British parliament should be able to pass laws affecting people living in the Americas. The London parliament saw the colonies as British and therefore thought the British Parliament had **sovereignty** over the colonists.



An argument developed between the British parliament and the colonists over **taxation**. Britain needed the colonists to contribute to the costs of defending the colonies. However, the colonists did not want to pay more taxes. The colonists argued that if the British parliament **imposed** taxes on the 13 Colonies, without their agreement then the taxes would violate their natural rights. They used the slogan “no taxation without representation.” By this, the colonists meant no parliament could tax them unless the colonists elected representatives to that parliament.

In the 1760s and 1770s Britain attempted to raise several different taxes on the Colonists, some of them on the **importation** of tea. The Colonists resisted these taxes and saw them as deeply unfair. The Boston Tea Party of 1773 was the climax of this rebellion. The British government was furious after the Boston Tea Party and passed a number of laws called the **Intolerable** Acts. This resulted in the closure of Boston’s port, the banning of meetings in Massachusetts and a large number of British soldiers being stationed in the Colonies.



It looked like Britain was not respecting the liberties of people who lived in the 13 Colonies. So, some colonists formed unofficial armed groups called **militias**. It was hoped these militias could be used to defend their rights to property and liberty against the British army. In April 1775 British troops clashed with local militias in two towns outside Boston called Lexington and Concord. At that point, a war had broken out between Britain and its colonies which no one had desired or expected.



Glossary

Importation: bringing in a traded good from another country.

Impose: to make something happen without consulting with those affected.

Intolerable: something that cannot be accepted

Militia: an armed group which is not part of an official army.

Sovereignty: a political concept which means: having supreme power or authority. In absolute monarchies, the king or queen was understood as The sovereign. But Enlightenment thinkers questioned whether the people should have sovereignty.



Comprehension Questions

1. What was the Boston Tea Party?

Sentence starter: *The Boston Tea Party was....*

2. What attitude did most colonists have towards the British monarch in the mid-eighteenth century?
3. Why did the British parliament want to tax the 13 Colonies?
4. Where were the first battles of the war between Britain and the 13 Colonies.
5. Challenge question: Why were the Colonists so determined to insist on “no taxation without representation”?



Extension Question

“The Boston Tea Party played a bigger role than Enlightenment ideas in the outbreak of war.” How far do you agree with this statement?

Use the sentence starters and the key words to try and provide an extended answer to this question.

Sentence starters	Words to use
<p><i>Arguably, Enlightenment ideas were an important cause of the war because...</i></p> <p><i>However, it could be argued the Boston Tea Party was more important because...</i></p> <p><i>Some historians might argue that the Boston Tea Party is connected to Enlightenment ideas because....</i></p>	<p>Colonist</p> <p>Rights</p> <p>Liberties</p> <p>Taxation</p> <p>Imports</p> <p>Parliament</p> <p>Rebellion</p> <p>Protest</p> <p>Militia</p> <p>Intolerable Acts</p>

