

ROAD TO REVOLUTION

Objectives

- Students will understand the key events that form the backstory of 1776.
- Students will create still and moving pictures that represent real events in American history.

Materials needed

- One Event Description Sheet for each group

Activity

The musical *1776* takes place in the summer of 1776 in colonial America. George Washington's Continental army is fighting against the British army, and the Continental Congress are arguing over whether or not the colonies should declare independence from England. But what caused the American revolution, and why did the American colonists wish to free themselves from British rule?

- Divide class into six smaller groups.
- Provide each group with an Event Description Sheet and assign them one to work on.
- Students should create a still image that reflects the described event. It can be literal or metaphoric.
- Students should also prepare to bring that image to life for five seconds, adding movement and sound. They can make sound effects, play background music, and/or speak. They could incorporate a line from the event description or ad-lib text. Every student should be involved in every picture in some way.
- Once the students have completed this task, students should show their creations in chronological order of events.
- Students should hold their still picture while the instructor reads a description of the event. Then, the instructor will activate the picture by calling "play," and pause it again after five seconds by calling "pause."
- Repeat until all six groups have shown their work.

Reflection Questions

- Have you learned this history before? Did you learn anything new?
- Were there any images you saw repeated?
- Who did you not see represented in these events? Why do you think they get left out?

As you watch *1776*, see if you can notice how many of these events are mentioned or portrayed in the show. And pay attention to the casting of actors – are the performers on stage the people you expected to see tell this story? Why do you think the director made the choice to cast it this way?

1776 EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

1. The Boston Massacre

March 5, 1770

"For God's sake, take care of your men. If they fire, they die!"

--American Henry Knox to British Captain Preston during the Boston Massacre

John Adams wrote that the "foundation of American independence was laid" on March 5, 1770. In Boston, tensions between the British and the American colonists were running high. A group of nine British soldiers shot and killed five people in a crowd of colonists who were harassing them and throwing things at them. The event was heavily publicized as "a massacre" by Paul Revere and Samuel Adams, and fueled anti-British sentiment among the colonies.

2. Boston Tea Party

December 16, 1773

"No taxation without representation!"

--Political slogan of the American Revolution

Seeking to pay for the costs of the French and Indian War, the British government began imposing high taxes on the American colonists. Having never been allowed to elect their own representatives to the British Parliament, many colonists raised the call, "No taxation without representation." They refused to buy heavily taxed British goods, like tea.

On December 16, 1773, a band of colonists dressed as Native Americans dumped several crates of tea from a British ship docked in Boston Harbor into the sea as a symbol of their unhappiness with the taxes. The "Boston Tea Party" stirred the anger of the colonists against British rule.

3. Lexington & Concord – The shot heard round the world.

April 19, 1775

"If they mean to have a war, let it begin here."

--American Colonist Captain John Parker, to his soldiers on Lexington Green

In 1775, the British Parliament declared the Massachusetts colony to be in a state of rebellion and authorized General Gage to use force to restore order. On April 14, 1775, General Gage was ordered to disarm and arrest colonial rebel leaders.

As British troops marched from Boston toward Concord on the night of April 18, 1775, a group of patriot spies including Paul Revere and William Dawes rode from Boston to Lexington alarming the colonial Minutemen to assemble. The next day, the Battles of Lexington and Concord sparked the American Revolutionary War.

1776 EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET (Cont.)

4. **George Washington leads the Continental Army June 15, 1775**

"Every post is honorable in which a man can serve his country."
--George Washington

The second Continental Congress authorized the creation of the Continental Army, and unanimously appointed General George Washington as its first commander. The army Washington lead was mostly untrained, under-equipped, and poorly organized groups of civilians and rag-tag militias. They were tasked to fight against the British army, one of the most powerful militaries on earth.

5. **Common Sense is Published January 1776**

"We have it in our power to begin the world over again."
--Thomas Paine

Colonial journalist Thomas Paine wrote a 47-page pamphlet, *Common Sense*, that was published in January 1776. This pamphlet eloquently argued the Americans should reject British rule and to build a new government in which people were free to govern themselves. This pamphlet sold an estimated half-million copies, the equivalent of "going viral" centuries before the internet. The pamphlet is credited towards turning the colonial American public in favor of declaring independence.

6. **The "Lee Resolution" is proposed at the second Continental Congress June 7th, 1776**

"Resolved: that these united colonies are...free and independent states, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is...totally dissolved."
--Richard Henry Lee

Months after the battles of Lexington and Concord, colonies elected delegates to attend the second Continental Congress, which convened in Philadelphia and served as the union's governing body during the war. On June 7, 1776, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution that "these united colonies are (and of right ought to be) free and independent states". John Adams seconded the motion. The congress broke into a debate between colonies that were ready to vote for independence, and those that were not.