

1770
The
B O S T O N
MASSACRE



The CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

FIRST NARRATOR • SECOND NARRATOR

BOSTON CITIZENS 1-8

ENGLISH SOLDIERS 1-8 (*nonspeaking roles*)

ENGLISH SENTRY

CRISPUS ATTUCKS: *Sailor*

LORD GEORGE GRENVILLE: *Member of English Parliament*

LORD CHARLES TOWNSHEND: *Member of English Parliament*

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT 1-8 (*nonspeaking roles*)

JOHN GREY: *Boston shopkeeper*

CAPTAIN THOMAS PRESTON: *English officer*

RICHARD PALMES: *Boston merchant* • JOHN ADAMS: *Boston lawyer*

NEWSBOY

Act 1

THE TIME AND PLACE

March 5, 1770; Boston, Massachusetts

THE SETTING

Outside the Customs House

FIRST NARRATOR: The American Revolution might have never happened. Not everyone in the 13 American colonies wanted independence, and almost no one imagined that the colonists, who had no standing army and no navy, could defeat the strongest military power in the world since the Roman Empire.

SECOND NARRATOR: And when we look back across the centuries, great events of history sometimes seem neat and orderly, planned out in advance, but many times the small events that led to great ones were disorderly and accidental. The Boston Massacre was one of those.

FIRST NARRATOR: Neither side meant for there to be bloodshed that day—

SECOND NARRATOR: March 5, 1770—

FIRST NARRATOR: In Boston, Massachusetts.

SECOND NARRATOR: A wet snow had fallen overnight—

FIRST NARRATOR: Perfect for making snowballs.

SECOND NARRATOR: Look. A crowd is gathering around the Customs House.

FIRST NARRATOR: That is where the money from the hated taxes is stored.

SECOND NARRATOR: A single sentry stands guard.

CITIZEN 1: Lobsterback!

CITIZEN 2: Go home, lobsterback!

FIRST NARRATOR: They called the British soldiers lobsterbacks because of their red coats.

SECOND NARRATOR: In those days, lobsters weren't considered a delicacy. Lobsters were everywhere along the shore, and in minutes, you could pick up more than you could carry. Only the very poor people ate them, and others used them for fertilizer.

CITIZEN 3: The British are thieves!

CITIZEN 4: Tyrants!

CITIZEN 5: Invaders!

CITIZEN 6: Tar and feather them!

CITIZEN 7: Lobsterbacks!

FIRST NARRATOR: Actually, the common British soldier wanted to be friendly with the American colonists.

SECOND NARRATOR: The British soldiers did not want to be here, so far away from their homes, but the colonists saw them as an occupying army, which they were.

FIRST NARRATOR: It was an impossible situation.

SECOND NARRATOR: The current of events was moving too quickly for anyone to control.

SENTRY: Go away, you thugs!

CITIZEN 8: Thugs? He calls *us* thugs?

CRISPUS ATTUCKS: If *we* had invaded London, then he might rightly call us thugs!

FIRST NARRATOR: Uh-oh, now they're starting to throw snowballs at the sentry.

CITIZEN 1: Down with British tyranny!

ATTUCKS: Down with the Townshend Acts!

SECOND NARRATOR: See that man who just shouted "Down with the Townshend Acts!"? That's Crispus Attucks, a black sailor.

FIRST NARRATOR: Most of the facts about his life have been lost in time, but he's about to pay a big price for his views.

SECOND NARRATOR: The Townshend Acts provoked all this.

FIRST NARRATOR: The Townshend Acts were import duties, in other words, taxes on goods imported from England.

SECOND NARRATOR: England taxed goods such as paper, glass, paint, and tea. The colonists didn't object to paying *all* taxes. Every English person paid taxes. It's just that the colonists wanted to be consulted about it.

FIRST NARRATOR: The men who wanted independence—patriots such as Sam Adams, Paul Revere, and Ben Franklin—needed a cause around which to rally the people to their side. Lofty talk and beautiful language about the rights of people wouldn't do it. They needed something concrete, something everyone could understand. With the Townshend Acts, the British handed the patriots a cause.

SECOND NARRATOR: Coincidentally, there was a political battle going on back in England between two competing parties, and one party used the issue of colonial taxes to taunt the other side. Neither really cared about the issue itself, but they should have.

FIRST NARRATOR: To see how this happened, let's shift the scene back to the English Parliament in London.

Act 2

THE TIME AND PLACE

1767; London, England

THE SETTING

Inside the English Parliament

LORD GRENVILLE: You're cowards. You're afraid of the Americans. "We dare not tax America!" you whine.

The members of Parliament mutter to each other. Some nod their heads in agreement. Others shake their heads violently to disagree.

SECOND NARRATOR: That was Lord Grenville. He used to be the head of Parliament, sort of like our president, but he got voted out of office, and now he wants to gain it back.

LORD TOWNSHEND: Do I fear Americans? No. Am I a coward? Dare I not tax America? I dare! I am no coward! I dare to tax America!

FIRST NARRATOR: And that was Lord Townshend. He's like our secretary of the treasury.

GRENVILLE: Do you, Townshend? I wish to God I could see it!

TOWNSHEND: By God, you will see it!

SECOND NARRATOR: It's interesting to wonder what might have happened if the British had behaved more diplomatically, more intelligently toward her colonies in America. But colonies, especially those so far away, were expensive to maintain. Lord Grenville, looking for a cause to help him get reelected, found a popular one in the idea that the colonies should help pay for their keep. It wasn't a smart move, but Lord Townshend jumped at it.

FIRST NARRATOR: That led straight to trouble—and back to Boston.

Act 3

THE TIME AND PLACE

March 5, 1770; Boston, Massachusetts

THE SETTING

Outside the Customs House

SECOND NARRATOR: As you can see, the angry crowd has grown.

CITIZEN 2: Tar and feather Lord Townshend!

SENTRY: That shows what you know! Lord Townshend's been dead these three years

CITIZEN 3: Good!

CITIZEN 4: May he rot!

CITIZEN 5: May all England rot!

SENTRY: Stop throwing things, you rabble, or I'll shoot in self-defense!

ATTUCKS: Defense? We're the ones who need defense! Against you!

SECOND NARRATOR: Here comes John Grey—

JOHN GREY: Break it up! Everyone, go home.

FIRST NARRATOR: John Grey owns that rope-making shop over there. Many merchants were against independence because they thought it would be bad for business.

GREY: Go home, I say. Leave that sentry alone or there will be trouble!

CITIZEN 6: You've got some nerve, John Grey!

CITIZEN 7: He's been hiring British soldiers at the expense of Americans.

CITIZEN 8: Shame on you, John Grey!

CITIZEN 1: You're a traitor, Grey!

SENTRY: He's not a traitor. You're the traitors—you've betrayed England and your king!

ATTUCKS: Tar and feather King George!

SENTRY: Hey, you, watch your mouth!

ATTUCKS: Down with England!

GREY: Break it up! Break it up, I say!

SECOND NARRATOR: They're throwing snowballs again.

FIRST NARRATOR: And rocks.

SECOND NARRATOR: Here comes an officer.

FIRST NARRATOR: It's Thomas Preston, captain of the guard.

PRESTON: Disperse, you troublemakers, disperse at once or I'll call out the guard!

ATTUCKS: Look, he's drawing his sword. He means to attack us!

SECOND NARRATOR: A rock hits the captain—

FIRST NARRATOR: Now it's going to turn serious—

GREY: Stop this!

CITIZEN 2: Go back and supervise your British soldiers!

CITIZEN 3: They're probably loafing—

PRESTON: Send in the guard!

SECOND NARRATOR: Here they come! One, two, three . . . five . . . eight. Eight soldiers, and they're armed for battle. Captain Preston takes his place at the head of the line.

ATTUCKS: Why don't you fire? You don't dare fire on us!

RICHARD PALMES: Wait, Captain! Wait! I'm certain we can settle this without violence!

FIRST NARRATOR: That's Richard Palmes, a respected local merchant who tries to act as peacemaker.

SECOND NARRATOR: But it's too late for peace.

PALMES: Sir, I trust you mean no harm to these people.

CAPTAIN: By no means, sir. But we'll fire in self-defense, make no mistake about that.

CITIZEN 4: Put down your weapons and fight like men!

ATTUCKS: Cowards!

CAPTAIN: Step back, you people! Do not crowd us! You stand warned.

PALMES: Stop throwing things! Stop this now!

FIRST NARRATOR: But someone reaches out and grabs one of the soldier's muskets.

PALMES: No!

SECOND NARRATOR: The gun goes off!

FIRST NARRATOR: Then all the soldiers fire!

There are sound of gunfire, shouts, and screams. Attucks and other citizens fall down, wounded. Then all sound stops.

FIRST NARRATOR: It's happened, the first bloodshed, and the war hasn't even started.

SECOND NARRATOR: Five people are dead, including Crispus Attucks, and several others are wounded. The wounded and the dead are carried from the street.

FIRST NARRATOR: Captain Preston seems panic-stricken. He didn't mean for this to happen, and he'll have to answer for it. He's marching his men away, screaming at them as the gun smoke fades in the cold winter breeze.

SECOND NARRATOR: But the story didn't end there.

Act 4

THE TIME AND PLACE

December 5, 1770; Boston, Massachusetts

THE SETTING

A courtroom

FIRST NARRATOR: Captain Preston and his men were placed on trial for murder. One of the most famous patriots, John Adams, volunteered to defend them.

CITIZEN 5: Are you out of your mind, Adams? Those men killed Americans in cold blood. How can you defend them?

JOHN ADAMS: I do it not because I love England, but because I love liberty. There can be no liberty if the right to a fair trial is denied to anyone.

SECOND NARRATOR: The soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter by a jury of Bostonians and given only token punishment. That was a fair verdict, because to be guilty of murder, you must have intended to kill a person.

FIRST NARRATOR: That wasn't the soldiers' intention, and besides, they were provoked by an angry crowd. Nobody in that crowd deserved to get shot, but without them—their words and actions—the incident would never have happened.

CITIZEN 6: I hope you're happy, Adams.

JOHN ADAMS: The truth, whether it serves our aims or not, is all that matters in the court of justice.

CITIZEN 7: John's right. How can we accuse the English of taking away our rights, and then turn around and do the same to their citizens?

SECOND NARRATOR: The radical patriot, Samuel Adams, agreed with his cousin John completely on everything—including the right to resist injustice and tyranny, the right of freedom.

FIRST NARRATOR: But Sam believed that to attain freedom, you sometimes needed to stretch the truth. He stretched it a lot. Let's move outside, and you'll see what I mean.

NEWSBOY: Read all about it. Murder! Redcoats murder the citizens of Boston! Get the latest by Sam Adams, eyewitness to massacre. **INNOCENT BLOOD CRYING TO GOD FROM THE STREETS OF BOSTON**, by Sam Adams. Get one while they last!

SECOND NARRATOR: Sam also encouraged his friend Paul Revere to engrave a picture of the shooting on a copper plate so that it could be printed on paper and widely distributed. It showed a line of British soldiers intentionally firing into a crowd of respectable unarmed citizens. This picture became the "truth" to most colonists. That's what propaganda is all about.

FIRST NARRATOR: Sam Adams was a true radical, but then the idea he and other Patriots believed in was also radical in those days. The idea was this: The general public should, and could, choose their own leaders.

SECOND NARRATOR: Oh, by the way, on March 5, 1770, the very day of the Boston Massacre, the English Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts. The good news about the taxes would reach American shores several weeks too late.



BACKGROUND ON THE BOSTON MASSACRE



ENGLAND VIEWED THE AMERICAN colonies as an economic offshoot. In 1651, the British Parliament passed the Navigation Acts: All goods going into the colonies from foreign countries had to first pass through English ports where customs fees would be collected; the colonies were forbidden to ship certain goods to any country but England. Some angry colonists defied the acts by smuggling goods in and out of America.

Then, in 1754, France moved into the Ohio Valley, which England considered its own territory. The French and Indian War broke out. Although England won, the war put the country heavily in debt. King George III reasoned that the American colonies should help pay that debt. He decreed that the Navigation Acts be strictly enforced. British soldiers were authorized to break into colonists' homes without search warrants to look for contraband goods. A force of 10,000 British soldiers was stationed in America. Under the Quartering Act of 1765, the colonists were required to house the soldiers in inns and other buildings.

King George III and Parliament also decided that colonists had to pay taxes on imported goods. The final straw came with the Stamp Act of 1765. Colonists had to buy government stamps to place on all legal documents, newspapers, insurance policies, and even playing cards. Because they weren't represented in Parliament, where they could vote on these issues, the Americans believed the act was a case of taxation without representation. Two groups, the Sons of Liberty and the Committees of Correspondence, sprang up throughout the colonies to fight the Stamp Act. Then taxes were levied on imported glass, lead, paper, and tea. The colonists refused to buy these items.

REVOLUTIONARY READING

The Boston Massacre (Famous Trials Series) by Bonnie L. Lukes (Lucent Books, 1998)

Crispus Attucks: Black Leader of Colonial Patriots by Dharathula H. Millender (Aladdin, 1986)

The Fifth of March: A Story of the Boston Massacre by Ann Rinaldi (Gulliver, 1994)



ACTIVITIES

Making Your Voice Heard

About which contemporary issues do students have strong feelings? How do, or would, they make their voices heard? Which methods—for example, letter writing, protesting, talking to friends and neighbors—do they feel would be most effective in getting their messages across?

A Taxing Question

Talk about the kinds of taxes people in your community pay, such as sales tax, state and federal income taxes, and property taxes. What items would students tax to raise money, and why?

News Travels . . . Slowly

Invite students to imagine how their worlds would be different without modern communication devices like telephones, fax machines, and electronic mail, or services like overnight mail delivery and international flights. Students might consider the methods of overseas communication available in the late 18th century and how this may have affected relations between King George and his Parliament and the colonists.

Dear King George

Encourage pairs of students to assume the roles of an American colonist and King George. The American colonist writes a letter to the English king expressing his or her views on the Navigation, Stamp, and Quartering Acts. The king then replies to the colonist, expressing his country's view of the colonies.

Slogans Instead of Snowballs

Suppose the Bostonians had carried signs with slogans on them instead of verbally taunting the British soldiers and then throwing snowballs at them. Ask students to create at least three different signs to show the colonists' discontent with the British soldiers, King George III, and Parliament.

Crispus Attucks Was . . .

Who was Crispus Attucks? Challenge students to find out more about this American patriot. Challenge them to present their findings in creative ways; for example, in the form of a plan for a short documentary or as a design for a Web page. What kinds of resource materials would they use—letters, maps, illustrations, oral histories, music, and so on?

John Adams: Traitor or Patriot?

John Adams defended the British soldiers who opened fire and killed the Boston citizens. Was he a traitor or a patriot? Direct students to research the trial. Then ask them to write a play about or a newspaper account of the trial, with the focus on John Adams's role. Students may work together in pairs or groups, or individually.