



SPHERE

Teaching Civic
Culture Together

NO VOICE, NO CHOICE! The Toll of Tyranny and The Fees of Being Unheard

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Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will explore how the absence of representation in government led to taxation, unrest, and ultimately rebellion in colonial America. Students will uncover the costs of being unheard by examining the grievances of colonists, analyzing primary sources, and engaging in a detective-style role-play activity. The lesson also draws connections to later uprisings, such as Shays' Rebellion, to show how unresolved economic and political grievances continued to shape America's path toward liberty.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- Identify where the phrase "taxation without representation is tyranny" originated and why it became a rallying cry of the American Revolution
- Explain how economic burdens like taxes or fees affected families and communities
- Analyze primary sources that reflect colonial grievances about taxation and representation.
- Explore connections between colonial resistance and Shays' Rebellion to better understand the similarities between the civic and economic grievances of these events.

Core Principles

- Purpose of government to secure rights
- Consent of the governed
- Rights of the people to alter or abolish government

Core Grievance

- No Taxation Without Representation

Primary Source Documents

- Rights of British Colonies Asserted (James Otis, 1763)
- Virginia Resolves on the Stamp Act (Patrick Henry, 1765)
- Declaration of Rights and Grievances (1765)
- The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering (Image)

Essential Questions

- Why is it dangerous for people to be taxed or punished without representation?
- How do economic burdens like taxes or fees affect families and communities?
- What did colonists mean when they said “no taxation without representation?”
- Why might someone like Daniel Shays still feel unheard after the Revolutionary War and choose to rebel?

Materials

- NO VOICE, NO CHOICE! Vocabulary
- NO VOICE, NO CHOICE! Closing Arguments
- Trading for Liberty Materials
- “Trust No One”—The Case of the Unheard Colonist Activity

Background Knowledge

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, colonists grew increasingly frustrated with British rule because they were being taxed without having any representatives in Parliament. Laws like the Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, and Tea Act forced colonists to pay fees on everyday items such as paper, glass, and tea, adding heavy burdens to families and businesses. These taxes were part of a larger system called mercantilism, which limited colonial trade so that Britain could grow richer at the colonists' expense. Many leaders, including James Otis and Patrick Henry, spoke out against this unfair system, warning that it was a form of tyranny to silence the voice of the people. Groups such as the Sons of Liberty organized protests, boycotts, and petitions to resist these policies, but Britain continued to pass laws without listening to colonial concerns. Even after the Revolution, the idea of “no voice, no choice” still mattered. Farmers, such as Daniel Shays, rebelled when crushing taxes and debts left them feeling unheard by their new state.

governments. These struggles showed that both political representation and economic justice were still at the heart of America's fight for liberty and economic freedoms.

Introduction to Lesson (10-15 Minutes)

OPENING PROMPT - "ENTRY FEE"

STEP 1

As students arrive, the teacher should let students know they will be given all of the required materials for the day, and they shouldn't take anything out. Depending on the set-up of the classroom, a box of classroom supplies (such as pencils, pens, erasers, sticky notes, paper clips, etc.) should be prepared for groups of students. These supplies should not be equal, and some groups should have more than others or very few of one type of item.

- Note: The teacher could also use [Bingo Counting Chips](#) instead of the classroom supplies and the different colors could be required as "tax."

STEP 2

The teacher should tell students that as they entered the classroom, they were all assessed an entry fee and would now be given a "Classroom Tax Notice." Then the teacher will give each group a handful of Classroom Tax Notices that they must now pay using their shared resources. If they don't have the required amount of resources, they should spend a few minutes trying to trade with other groups for those resources.

- Examples of Classroom Tax Notices:
 - To Sit Down: Pay 1 pencil or 1 red chip per group member
 - To Ask a Question: Pay 3 paper clips or 2 blue chips
 - To Raise Your Hand: Pay 2 sticky notes or 3 green chips

STEP 3

The teacher should select 1 or 2 students to be their "tax collector" and have them begin collecting the required tax. As they start collecting, the teacher should randomly hand out additional Classroom Tax Notices such as, "Luxury Fee: Because you are wearing sneakers, pay 1 pen or 2 yellow chips;" or, "Double Tax: Pay double the fee just because."

STEP 4

Once all taxes have been collected, the teacher should require students to purchase a piece of paper from them (at the teacher's randomly determined price) so they can write

down all of the names of the students in their group. Then the teacher will tell them they need to pay to submit the paper (again at the teacher's randomly determined price).

Student groups would then be allowed to purchase a sweet treat (candy) or fun treasure box toy if they had enough "money" left after the taxes had been collected.

STEP 5

Once students have complained (probably loudly) that they don't have enough left over, ask them the following questions:

- Were you required to come into class today? Did you really have a choice?
- How did you feel when you had to pay fees for ordinary things and were even "taxed" for random things?
- How did the role of the "tax collector" affect your feelings toward authority?
- What impact did the constant taxes and fees have on your group's supplies?
- What do you think you would do if this system continued every day?

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS

STEP 1

Read the following quotes.

- From the [Rights of British Colonies Asserted](#) (James Otis, 1763)

"no parts of His Majesty's dominions can be taxed without their consent; that every part has a right to be represented in the supreme or some subordinate legislature; that the refusal of this would seem to be a contradiction in practice to the theory of the constitution."

- From the [Virginia Resolves on the Stamp Act](#) (Patrick Henry, 1765)

"Resolved, Therefore that the General Assembly of this Colony have the only and sole exclusive Right & Power to lay Taxes & Impositions upon the Inhabitants of this Colony and that every Attempt to vest such Power in any Person or Persons whatsoever other than the General Assembly aforesaid has a manifest Tendency to destroy British as well as American Freedom."

- From the [Declaration of Rights and Grievances](#) (1765)

"That it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted right of Englishmen, that no taxes be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives."

Discuss

Have students consider what these writers might have said if they had just been in their seat and experienced this "Entry Fee" activity.

STEP 2

Show students the The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering image and have students analyze the image closely and identify some of the emotions that are depicted.

Have students consider the following questions:

- Civic Considerations:
 - Did you have any voice or choice in the rules that were created for you?
 - How did it feel to be required to follow laws or fees without being asked for your consent?
 - Were the rules and taxes applied fairly to everyone, or were some people treated differently?
- Economic Considerations:
 - How would being forced to pay taxes without giving consent create financial risks for families?
 - Did these writers not want to pay any taxes, or were they willing to pay taxes but just wanted to have a say in how those taxes were collected and spent?

Student Activity (30-40 minutes)

This role-play activity is a mystery game with secret roles. Students not only collect evidence about taxation without representation but gather information about spies who may be secretly in support of this grievance or might be working against Britain's attempt to tax the colonies. Students might find that it is a bit trickier to spot grievances when an individual's economic safety and security is at risk.

To facilitate this activity use the instructions and the materials in the "'Trust No One' - The Case of the Unheard Colonist Student Activity" document.

Closing (10-15 minutes)

Have students consider a situation in which taxation, debt, and lack of voice reappeared in the brand-new United States government.

DANIEL SHAYS' REBELLION (1786-1787)

SAY

After the American Revolution, many farmers in Massachusetts were deep in debt and faced heavy state taxes. When they could not pay, courts threatened to take away their

farms and even send them to jail. Daniel Shays, a former soldier in the Continental Army, led a group of farmers in protest. They shut down local courthouses to stop property foreclosures and marched to try and seize weapons.

The state militia eventually put down the uprising, but the rebellion revealed a major problem: under the Articles of Confederation, the national government was too weak to help control the crisis or respond to the farmers' grievances. Leaders like George Washington and James Madison saw Shays' Rebellion as proof that America needed a stronger central government. This event helped push the nation toward writing the U.S. Constitution, creating a system that could both protect citizens' rights and maintain order.

REFLECT

Have students reflect on the information and reflection question in the "NO VOICE, NO CHOICE! Closing Arguments" document.

Resources for Citation

- On this day: "No taxation without representation!" (National Constitution Center)
- No Taxation Without Representation (American Battlefield Trust)
- The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering (The Library of Congress)
- Taxation, Representation, and the American Revolution (Tax Foundation)
- 1776 Was More About Representation Than Taxation (National Bureau of Economic Research)
- Shays' Rebellion (Constitution Center)
- Shays' Rebellion (Bill of Rights Institute)
- Articles of Confederation
- Letter to John Jay from George Washington in August of 1786