



“Trust No One” - The Case of the Unheard Colonist

Student Activity

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.

ROLES

- Detectives in Training Teams: 2-3 students and can have several teams
- Colonist Characters: Farmer, Merchant, Printer, Parent, Patriot
- Authority Characters: Tax Collector, Colonial Assembly Member
- Colonist Spy: 1-2 students who are playing one of the Colonist Characters but who secretly supports Britain. *Special Note: Each character has both a honest and spy option that can be handed out*
- Authority Spy: 1 student who is playing one of the Authority Characters but who secretly supports the colonist's attempts to rise up against Britain. *Special Note: Each character has both a honest and spy option that can be handed out*
- Case Handler: 1-2 students who will collect the Detective Team Reports and announce who was chosen as the spy or spies. The case handlers know who the spies are and will also ask misleading questions to the characters that might sow doubt or confusion in the detective's minds.

INSTRUCTIONS

The teacher should select the roles for students. Each role should be given their handout or role cards for them to utilize. Students should be given a few minutes to read through their information and prepare for their roles.

Colonist Characters should spread throughout the room and Detectives in Training Teams should approach each Colonist Character and ask them questions about their character.

Make sure that separate Detectives in Training Teams have separate Colonist Characters. Encourage Colonist Characters to really embrace their backstory and try to make the Detectives in Training understand their view, even if they are taking on the role of a spy. Case Handlers can choose to walk with the Detective in Training Teams and ask additional questions (mostly misleading ones) to try and confuse the detectives. Detectives in Training should record their data. Then, at the end of the allotted time they should provide their final case report to the collectors who will then announce who the spies were. If all the spies were not identified, or if someone is designated a spy but isn't one, then the Detective Team in Training has failed and will be sent back to detective school.



Detectives In Training Team

Student Handout

The year is 1765, and the American colonies are in turmoil.

For years, colonists have worked the land, traded goods, printed newspapers, and raised families, all while paying their fair share to support their communities. But now, the British Parliament has begun passing new taxes to raise money after the costly French and Indian War. The Stamp Act places fees on newspapers, legal papers, and even playing cards. The Townshend Acts raise the prices of imported goods like glass, lead, and tea. The Quartering Act forces families to house and feed British soldiers.

The problem? The colonists had no representatives in Parliament. Decisions that affected their daily lives were being made thousands of miles away, without their voice or consent. Many call this tyranny — rule by unfair power.

Voices are rising across the colonies:

- Farmers are buried in taxes and debt.
- Merchants struggle under trade restrictions.
- Printers cannot publish without expensive stamps.
- Families are weary of random and unfair costs.
- Young patriots are whispering about rebellion.

Yet not everyone agrees. Some colonists argue that Britain protects the colonies with soldiers and ships, and therefore has the right to tax them. Others — perhaps secretly — remain loyal to the Crown. These hidden loyalists act like ordinary colonists but spread doubt and defend the taxes, hoping to divide and weaken resistance.

This is where you, the detectives, come in.

You have been called to investigate the growing unrest. Your job is to interview colonists, uncover the truth about their grievances, and answer the following questions:

- Why do so many colonists feel unheard and unfairly treated?
- What toll is taxation without representation taking on their families and communities?
- Which voices are honest? Which voices may secretly belong to spies who are loyal to the King or are actually working against the King's grievous rules?

Beware: not everyone who claims to be a patriot or a loyalist truly is. Some are playing both sides. Your task is to sift through their words, separate truth from deception, and write your Case Report on the Unheard Colonists. Also, your Case Handlers will be checking on your progress to see if you can cut it as a detective team or need to be sent back to detective school. They might ask additional questions (possibly misleading ones) to try and confuse you. You should record all your data and then, at the end of the time, should provide your final case report to the collectors who will then announce who the spies were. If all the spies were not identified, or if someone is designated a spy but isn't one, then your detective team has failed and you will be sent back to detective school.



Detectives In Training Log Sheet

Detective Team Members: _____

For each testimony, log what you learn. Look for contradictions, suspicious details, and patterns. Focus on both the Civic (Voice/Representation) and Economics (Taxes/Money/Trade) issues.

Character	What Did They Say?	Civic Issues	Economic Issues	Suspicion Level (0-5)
Farmer				
Merchant				
Printer				
Parent				
Patriot				
Tax Collector				
Assembly Member				



Closing Case Report

We, the detectives, conclude that following characters believed they had “no voice, no choice:”

List of Cleared Characters:

However, we have our suspicions that the following characters may be not what they seem and are perhaps choosing to use their voice and choice as a spy:

List of Spies:

Detectives In Training (Possible Questions)

Use some of the questions below to learn more about each character and consider their responses carefully to determine if they are secretly a spy.

Special Note: Remember not to let on that you might think they are a spy. This should be revealed at the end.

- How have these new taxes or laws affected your everyday life?
- What do you worry about most when it comes to your family, land, or business?
- What would happen to you if these taxes kept increasing?
- Do you think it's fair that Parliament makes laws for the colonies without colonists voting? Why or why not?
- Who do you think should have the right to decide taxes in the colonies?
- What would change if colonists had a voice in government?

- How have taxes like the Stamp Act or Townshend Acts impacted your work or trade?
- Have you been forced to give up anything because of these taxes?
- What happens when colonists can't afford to pay the required fees?
- Do you believe the King and Parliament have the right to tax the colonies?
- Should colonists remain loyal to Britain, even if the taxes feel unfair?
- What would happen if the colonies refused to pay these taxes?
- What do you think colonists should do about these taxes: obey, protest, or rebel?
- Have you joined or supported any boycotts, petitions, or protests? Why or why not?
- What risks do you see in resisting Britain?
- You said you want liberty, but what does liberty mean to you?
- Why do you think some colonists support Britain's taxes?
- If you had to choose between safety under Britain or freedom with risk, which would you choose?



Character Cards

#1 Farmer

PATRIOT FARMER (NOT A SPY)

Backstory: You own 50 acres of farmland in Massachusetts. You fought in the French and Indian War, and when you returned, you found your farm in debt. British taxes, like the Stamp Act on legal documents and court papers, make it harder to keep your land. You feel abandoned. You gave your blood for Britain, and now they bleed you dry.

How You See the Situation: Taxes are crushing farmers. Without a voice, your livelihood is at risk.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "I served in the war, and this is how Britain thanks me?"
- "If they tax my crops and papers, I'll lose my land."
- "We need representation, or we'll have no farms left to work."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Debt, unfair taxes, representation, land, livelihood, consent, liberty.

LOYALIST FARMER (SPY)

Backstory: You farm in Massachusetts, but you think rebels stir up trouble. Britain gave you protection from French and Native raids, and you believe paying taxes is a fair price for safety. You quietly report disloyal farmers to the authorities.

How You See the Situation: Taxes are annoying but necessary. Patriots are ungrateful.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "I know taxes sting, but without Britain, we'd be overrun."
- "The King's soldiers protect our farms. Why bite the hand that feeds us?"
- "Patriot farmers risk chaos. At least the Crown gives us order."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Order, loyalty, safety, protection, stability, the King, duty.

#2 Merchant

PATRIOT MERCHANT (NOT A SPY)

Backstory: You import cloth, glass, and tea from Britain. Every shipload is taxed by the Townshend Acts. Your customers boycott British goods, so you lose twice. You can't sell what you buy, and your profits shrink. You believe free trade is essential, and Parliament is strangling your business.

How You See the Situation: Britain's taxes destroy colonial trade and independence.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "My goods rot on the shelves while Britain takes its cut."
- "If I had a voice, I'd say let us trade freely!"
- "This is economic oppression, pure and simple."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Boycott, free trade, independence, unfair, liberty, rights, prosperity.

LOYALIST MERCHANT (SPY)

Backstory: You are wealthy and benefit from close ties with Britain. Loyal customers and British suppliers give you advantages. You fear rebellion will ruin trade completely. Secretly, you write to British officials warning them about Patriot unrest.

How You See the Situation: The empire brings stability. Trade is safest under Britain.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "Without Britain's navy, pirates would seize every ship."
- "Boycotts hurt us more than Britain. We're cutting off our own noses."
- "Why risk the freedom of the seas by defying the empire?"

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Stability, protection, empire, loyalty, order, trade security, the Crown.

#3 Printer

PATRIOT PRINTER (NOT A SPY)

Backstory: You publish newspapers in Boston. The Stamp Act forces you to pay for stamps on every page you print. You see this as censorship, a way to silence Patriot voices. You admire men like James Otis and Samuel Adams, who believe liberty requires a free press.

How You See the Situation: Britain is silencing truth and crushing liberty.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "Ink is my weapon, and Britain wants to chain it."
- "Taxing newspapers is the same as taxing freedom itself."
- "A people without a voice are already enslaved."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Free press, liberty, voice, consent, tyranny, censorship, truth.

LOYALIST PRINTER (SPY)

Backstory: You print newspapers, but secretly you believe Patriots spread dangerous lies. You publish carefully, praising the King while pretending neutrality. You hope to discredit Patriot leaders.

How You See the Situation: Printing must be controlled. Too many pamphlets cause rebellion.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "If paying for a stamp to make my words official, is that so bad?"
- "Do we really want mobs stirred up by fiery pamphlets?"
- "The King is only trying to prevent dangerous chaos."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Order, loyalty, the King, official, stability, danger, responsibility

#4 Grieving Parent

PATRIOT PARENT (NOT A SPY)

Backstory: You lost your spouse in the French and Indian War. Raising children alone, you find the cost of sugar, tea, and cloth unbearable. Every tax feels like salt in a wound. You want your children to grow up free, not burdened.

How You See the Situation: Families cannot survive if their voices are ignored.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "How do I feed my children when every necessity costs more?"
- "I gave my spouse's life to Britain, and they repay us with taxes."
- "I want my children to inherit liberty, not chains."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Family, burden, freedom, fairness, liberty, survival, future.

LOYALIST PARENT (SPY)

Backstory: You lost your spouse to a patriot uprising and they were shot by a stray bullet. You tell others rebellion is dishonorable and will only make families suffer worse.

How You See the Situation: Families need order, not rebellion.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "Rebellion would starve my children faster than taxes."
- "The King's rule gives us peace. I'd never dishonor my spouse's sacrifice."
- "Better a steady burden than chaos without Britain."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Honor, loyalty, the King, peace, duty, sacrifice, order.

#5 Young Patriot

PATRIOT YOUTH (NOT A SPY)

Backstory: You are 17, inspired by fiery speeches like Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death!" You distribute pamphlets and stir friends to action. You dream of a nation where youth have a voice.

How You See the Situation: The future belongs to liberty, not tyranny.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "We are not children of the King. We are sons and daughters of liberty!"
- "If we remain silent, our future is stolen."
- "I'd rather die free than live voiceless."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Liberty, freedom, rights, future, courage, rebellion, tyranny.

LOYALIST YOUTH (SPY)

Backstory: You pose as a fiery patriot, but you whisper doubts. You tell peers that rebellion is foolish and dangerous. You believe loyalty to Britain ensures safety.

How You See the Situation: Liberty talk is reckless! Britain knows best.

Possible Interview Responses:

- "We want liberty, yes, but should we risk everything for it?"
- "Britain is wiser than we are and maybe we should trust them."
- "Freedom without safety is meaningless."

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Safety, loyalty, protection, wisdom, patience, stability.

#6 Colonial Assembly Member

PATRIOT ASSEMBLYMAN (NOT A SPY)

Backstory: You serve in the Virginia House of Burgesses. You know British law, and you know Parliament is breaking it. Only the colonial assemblies have the right to tax their people. You believe in local power and representation.

How You See the Situation: Parliament violates liberty and law.

Possible Interview Responses:

- “Only we, the chosen representatives, may tax our own people.”
- “Britain denies the very rights they claim to defend.”
- “This is not just unfair — it is unconstitutional.”

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Representation, rights, constitution, liberty, self-government, law.

LOYALIST ASSEMBLYMAN (SPY)

Backstory: You serve in the assembly but think rebellion is rash. You tell others to compromise, hoping Britain will eventually listen. Secretly, you assure British officials you'll calm the Patriots.

How You See the Situation: Liberty talk is reckless! Britain knows best.

Possible Interview Responses:

- “We want liberty, yes, but should we risk everything for it?”
- “Britain is wiser than we are and maybe we should trust them.”
- “Freedom without safety is meaningless.”

Key Words to Use During the Interview: Safety, loyalty, protection, wisdom, patience, stability.

Spy Cheat Sheet (Secret Loyalist)

Congratulations! You are secretly a Spy for the Crown. Your job is to pretend to be a colonist while quietly defending Britain's right to tax and making the Patriots sound unreasonable. Your goal is to avoid being discovered while still dropping hints of loyalty to the King.

YOUR MISSION

- Blend in: Sound like a colonist at first.
- Subvert: Slip in arguments that favor Britain.
- Confuse: Cast doubt on Patriot complaints.
- Survive: Don't get caught being too obvious!

SPY STRATEGIES

START WITH SYMPATHY

- Begin by agreeing with the Patriots a little:
 - "Yes, taxes are frustrating..."
 - "I understand why people are upset..."
 - This makes you seem trustworthy.

SLIP IN LOYALIST LANGUAGE

- Begin by agreeing with the Patriots a little:
 - "...but Britain protects us from enemies."
 - "...and order is better than chaos."
 - "...rebellion would ruin our trade and families."
- Use Loyalist Keywords - Sprinkle these words into your answers:
 - Loyalty, order, stability, safety, protection, duty, obedience, the King, empire, compromise, patience.

SOW DOUBT ABOUT PATRIOTS

- Plant little seeds of suspicion:
 - "Are boycotts really helping, or just hurting us?"
 - "Do we really want mobs in the streets?"
 - "Maybe rebels are stirring up trouble for their own gain."

STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE

- If someone suspects you, don't panic. Say something like:
 - "I want liberty too, but we must be wise."
 - "I'm just thinking of the risks for families."
 - "Is it so wrong to want peace?"

Spy Cheat Sheet (Secret Patriot)

Congratulations! You are a Patriot Spy in disguise! Your job is to pretend to be loyal to Britain while secretly slipping in Patriot ideas. Your goal is to stay hidden and encourage rebellion without being discovered.

YOUR MISSION

- Blend in with Loyalists: Start by sounding loyal to the King.
- Subvert: Quietly plant seeds of doubt about British rule.
- Encourage: Nudge others toward rebellion... without making it too obvious.
- Survive: Don't get caught as a Patriot spy!

SPY STRATEGIES

START WITH OBEDIENCE

- Begin by sounding Loyalist:
 - "We must obey the King..."
 - "Taxes are the law..."
 - "Rebellion would be dangerous..."

SLIP IN PATRIOT SEEDS

- Add quiet questions or doubts:
 - "...but how long can families survive under these taxes?"
 - "...is loyalty still fair if we never have a voice?"
 - "...the King protects us, yes — but at what cost to our liberty?"

USE PATRIOT KEYWORDS SPARINGLY

- Mix in words that hint at your true leanings, but don't overuse them. Sprinkle them in like breadcrumbs:
 - Liberty, consent, representation, rights, freedom, unfair, justice.

DISTRACT SUSPICION

- If someone accuses you of being a Patriot spy, deflect:
 - "I'm just trying to be practical."
 - "I don't want chaos — I just want fairness."

- "You're reading too much into my words."

TURN LOYALISTS AGAINST THEMSELVES

- Ask questions that make them defend unfairness:
 - "If taxes are fair, why are so many starving?"
 - "If the King protects us, why won't he listen to us?"
 - "Should loyalty mean losing our freedom?"