



COLONIAL COURTROOM CHAOS!

Justice or Jobs? The Boston Massacre on Trial (Extension Activity)

Students will analyze how jury decisions in the Boston Massacre trial were not only about fairness but also about protecting the colony's fragile economy and trade.

Quick Background Recap: In the Boston Massacre of 1770, British soldiers fired into a crowd, killing 5 colonists. The soldiers were put on trial, defended by John Adams. This trial was not only about justice but also had major economic consequences. In this student exercise, if soldiers are punished harshly, Britain might shut down trade or enforce stricter laws. If they are acquitted, Boston risks looking weak, but Britain could keep Boston Harbor open, which would help keep the economy running.

Student Instructions: Student groups will be given an economic impact card to consider. Each person's "perspective" has been chosen to be on the jury that will decide the fate of the soldiers on trial. Each group will identify how they might be affected personally in their decision.

Dockworker's Perspective

Background: You work on the Boston docks loading and unloading ships. Since 1768, when British soldiers arrived, you've been competing with them for jobs. Off-duty soldiers take day-labor work, undercutting wages.

Economic Concern: If the jury convicts the soldiers, the Crown may close Boston Harbor or send more troops to enforce order, costing you your only source of income. On the other hand, if the soldiers go free, they'll keep taking jobs from colonists like you.

Tension: You feel trapped! Justice for your neighbors might mean losing your livelihood.

Shopkeeper's Perspective

Background: You run a small shop near King Street, where the Boston Massacre happened. Business has already suffered because customers avoid crowded areas with soldiers patrolling. The soldiers often hassle locals and discourage trade.

Economic Concern: If soldiers are convicted, Boston risks harsher restrictions from Britain,

cutting supplies and raising prices. If soldiers go free, colonists may boycott shops near the soldiers, costing you customers.

Tension: You want peace to restore business, but you also want customers to trust that you support liberty.

Merchant's Perspective

Background: You are a wealthy merchant who ships goods like rum, molasses, and lumber across the Atlantic. You pay heavy taxes and deal with British customs officials regularly. Smuggling is common but risky.

Economic Concern: If the soldiers are convicted, Britain could retaliate by tightening trade laws, seizing ships, or even closing Boston Harbor (as it would after the Tea Party in 1773). That would devastate your business.

Tension: You want stability to protect your trade, but you also don't want colonists to think you're siding with the Crown.

Farmer's Perspective

Background: You live outside Boston and bring produce into the city market. Soldiers sometimes buy your goods, but most of your income comes from city families and taverns that rely on a free-flowing marketplace.

Economic Concern: If the soldiers are convicted and Britain punishes Boston, the harbor could be shut, blocking goods in and out. If that happens, your produce may rot before you can sell it.

Tension: You dislike the soldiers, but your family's survival depends on Boston staying open for trade.

Patriot Activist's Perspective

Background: You are a sympathizer to the Patriot cause. You believe Britain's taxes and soldiers are destroying freedom. You attend town meetings, print pamphlets, and join protests.

Economic Concern: You argue that freedom and rights are worth more than short-term profits. If the soldiers go free, Britain will believe colonists can be intimidated into submission. In the long run, that will cost even more in unfair taxes, fines, and seizures.

Tension: You know supporting harsh punishment for the soldiers could mean economic pain now, but you believe it will spark a stronger independence movement and protect future prosperity.