

The Boston Massacre

By Jane Runyon

In 1765, the British Parliament passed a law stating that the soldiers being sent from England to protect their interests in the colonies were to be housed by the colonists. They were to be given access to the homes, barns, or shelters that the colonists owned without having to pay for the privilege. You can imagine that the colonists did not like this law at all. They didn't want the British soldiers in their colonies in the first place. They made life as miserable for the British soldiers as they could. They refused to let them in their homes and even called them names like "Lobsterbacks." They chose this name because when a lobster is cooked, it turns a bright red color. The colonists thought this looked a lot like the color of the uniform coats the soldiers wore. The colonists also threw sticks and stones at the soldiers as they passed by to show their unhappiness.

Actually, the soldiers really didn't want to be in the colonies. They were thousands of miles away from their homes and families. They were receiving very little pay for what they were doing. And to top it off, they really didn't care what happened to the citizens of this new land because the colonists had chosen to leave the mother country of England in the first place. Neither side was very happy.

One very cold day in March of 1770, a British soldier was out looking for some extra work when he came upon a group of particularly boisterous colonists. They made some rude comments to the British soldier who was feeling very menaced by the group. They began throwing sticks and stones as well as snowballs with ice at their core. As the soldier neared an encampment of other soldiers, he called for help. A British captain and eight of his troops came to the rescue. The story isn't quite clear as to what happened next, but there was pushing, shoving, and the throwing of more snowballs. It is said that the colonists dared the soldiers to fire on them. It is said that the captain ordered his men not to fire. But somehow, the first shots were fired by the British. When the shooting stopped, the soldiers had killed five colonists and wounded seven more.

Although both parties to this unfortunate incident were to blame for the outcome, Samuel Adams and Paul Revere decided to use it to fuel the argument that the colonists needed to rid themselves of the British. They advertised the incident as a massacre, or very gruesome killing. They printed engravings of the event depicting the British soldiers firing their guns on innocent, unarmed colonists.

The soldiers were arrested and brought to trial for the murder of innocent citizens. One man saw that the soldiers were not going to be given a fair trial and offered his services as a lawyer to the men. His name was John Adams, and he happened to be the cousin of Samuel Adams who was pushing for freedom. John Adams also believed that the colonists should be free from England, but he believed very strongly in the fair use of the law. He defended the soldiers by saying that they were only trying to protect themselves from an angry mob. He was so convincing that the jury of colonists found six of the soldiers not guilty and two of the soldiers guilty of manslaughter instead of murder. The sentence for these two soldiers was that they be branded on their thumbs.



Name _____



Date _____

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Questions

- _____ 1. This whole situation started because:
- A. It was a cold, hard winter.
 - B. There was a shortage of workers.
 - C. Parliament passed a law making colonists house soldiers.
 - D. The colonists didn't like lobster.
- _____ 2. What effect did the law passed by Parliament have on the colonists?
- A. They refused to house the soldiers.
 - B. They threw things at the soldiers.
 - C. They called the soldiers names.
 - D. All of the above.
- _____ 3. What conclusion can you draw about how the British soldiers felt about being in the colonies?
- A. They thought this was a good opportunity to fight.
 - B. They would rather have been back at home.
 - C. They were making good money so they were happy.
 - D. They liked to travel.
4. How many colonists were killed in this fight?
- _____
- _____
- _____ 5. What kinds of weapons were used in this fight?
- A. sticks versus stones
 - B. rifles versus snowballs
 - C. knives versus guns
 - D. snowballs versus sticks
- _____ 6. Who defended the British soldiers in court?
- A. John Adams
 - B. General Gage
 - C. Samuel Adams
 - D. Paul Revere
- _____ 7. Who was on the right side of this argument in your opinion?
- A. the British soldiers
 - B. the colonists
 - C. neither side
 - D. both sides

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_____ 8. Why did John Adams think it was important to defend the British?

- A. He believed that they deserved a fair trial.
- B. He liked taking on difficult cases.
- C. He didn't like his cousin Samuel.
- D. He wanted them to lose and be sent home.

Has anyone ever made fun of you or called you names? How did that make you feel?

There's an old saying that goes, "There are two sides to every story." Do you know what that means?
