



# America 250 SAR Programs

## *Lesson 4* *The Stamp Act*



Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute



## Lesson 4: The Stamp Act

### *Historical Career Assumed*

- Historical Researcher

### *Historical Skills Practiced*

- Sourcing
- Corroborating
- Contextualizing
- Close reading
- Developing research skills
- Comparing competing historical narratives

### *Lesson Overview*

The French and Indian war was a huge expense for the British government and put them in millions of dollars of debt. In order to attempt to pay off this debt, the British government imposed a direct tax on the American colonies called the Stamp Act (1765). This act mandated that printed materials such as contracts, newspapers, licenses, pamphlets, and playing cards would be taxed at the colonists' expense. The Stamp Act was the first direct tax used by the British government to collect revenue from the colonies. All prior taxes were paid at ports so this was the first experience the colonists had with being taxed first-hand.

In this lesson, students will work as historical researchers by reading and annotating primary sources about the Stamp Act to recognize the multiple perspectives colonists and British Parliament members had surrounding the implementation of the Stamp Act and argue why these perspectives caused outrage among the colonists. To conduct these investigations, you will work through the "I do, we do, you do" framework to provide scaffolds for students to learn how to independently analyze written primary sources. Students will then examine the ways in which colonists responded to the passing of the Stamp Act which paved the way for the start of the American Revolution.

### *Content Question:*

- Why did the British Parliament create and enforce the Stamp Act?

### *Topical Essential Questions:*

- What were the varying perspectives surrounding the implementation of the Stamp Act?
- Why were the colonists upset about the implementation of the Stamp Act?

### *Overarching Essential Question:*

- What are the causes of the American Revolution?

### *Lesson Level Objective:*

- Students will read and annotate sources about the Stamp Act to understand the varying perspectives between the British government and the American colonists about its implementation.

### *Instructional Plan*

**Do Now.**

Imagine you are King George III of Great Britain. You just doubled Britain's national debt to \$129,586,789 because of the expenses from the French and Indian War. What would you do to try to pay that money back?

**Share the goals of today's lesson:**

After sharing and discussing a few of the Do Now responses, explain to students that after the French and Indian War, Britain was in so much debt from war expenses, they needed a way to pay the money back. Britain decided that to pay it back they would directly tax the colonists. (Make sure every student understands how taxes work before moving on.) This tax was known as the Stamp Act (1765) which directly taxed the American colonists for all newspapers, legal documents, pamphlets, almanacs, playing cards, and dice to pay for the cost of the French and Indian War and to secure a defense system in the colonies. In this lesson, students will act as historical researchers and analyze primary sources from multiple perspectives about the Stamp Act. To do this analysis, students will read a variety of primary and secondary sources from multiple perspectives to examine why the colonists were adamantly against the Stamp Act and what they did to resist it.

**Have students flip to the Historical Skills section of their almanac.**

Share with students that today they will become historical researchers, a very popular job for historians. Explain that researchers *corroborate* a multitude of primary sources, sometimes thousands of them, to understand a particular story in history. It is important for a researcher to look at sources from multiple perspectives so they can develop an argument that is as unbiased as possible. In order to effectively analyze documents, it is important to *source* and *contextualize* documents to get as much outside information as possible. Have students write in their "Historical Jobs" section of the almanac the description of a historical researcher specifically explaining that they *corroborate*, *source*, and *contextualize* primary and secondary sources to understand and tell a historical story. Share that they already learned the definition of contextualization in the previous lessons, but they will learn through demonstration what corroboration and sourcing means and how historical researchers use those skills to learn about history.

**Document Analysis Activity Description:**

Explain to students that today they will be looking at multiple primary sources about the Stamp Act (1765) to try to understand the general story and feelings of people who it affected. Students will investigate why the Stamp Act (1765) tax was fervently resented by the American colonists. Each primary source will show a different perspective of who was affected by the Stamp Act (1765). Ask students why it is important to look at stories from multiple perspectives. Explain that, especially in telling historical stories, oftentimes only one side of the story is told, which would not be an accurate description of the story. Instead, if a story is told from the perspective of multiple people and groups, then it is a much more in depth and accurate portrayal of events.

**Defining Sourcing:**

Have students flip their almanacs to the "Historical Skills" section and write down the word "sourcing." Explain that every time a historical researcher starts reading a primary or secondary

source, they first have to source the document. Sourcing means that the researcher thinks about and tries to figure out who wrote the document, what the author's perspective was, why the document was written, when was it written, and where it was written. Additionally, and most importantly, the researcher should attempt to determine if the source is reliable. Have students write these points down for their definition.

### **Document A analysis, "I do."**

Flipping back in their almanacs to today's lesson, students will follow along as you model sourcing with the first document in their investigation. This modeling can be done with whatever technology the teacher has, whether using a smart board, overhead projector, or just with individual documents, as long as the students follow along and write down what the teacher writes down, that will suffice.

### **Sourcing Document A.**

For Document A, start by sharing that the first thing you will do is source the information. To source a document, you try to answer the following questions:

- Who wrote this?
- When was it written?
- Where was it written?
- Why was it written?
- Is this source reliable? Why or why not?

Who wrote this?

- We don't know who wrote this document, all we know is that they used the name B.W.

When was it written?

- Share that you can see that the document was written in October 1765, so it would be a few months before the Stamp Act (1765) was put into effect.

Where was it written?

- Since it was in a Boston newspaper, we can assume it was written in Boston.

Why was it written?

- Thinking about what the Stamp Act taxed, i.e. mainly newspapers, you could imagine that newspapers would be hit fairly hard from the Stamp Act, so we can conclude that they would probably oppose the implementation of the act. So maybe it was written to talk negatively about the Stamp Act.

Is this source reliable? Why or why not?

- We can't know for sure if this source is reliable, but since it was published in a popular Boston newspaper, we can assume it was fairly reliable at the time.

Ask students if there's any other sourcing ideas they can see in this document from just a first glance.

### **Contextualizing Document A**

Now share that we will contextualize the document. Ask students to share the definition of contextualizing because we learned that a few lessons ago. Reiterate that contextualization is a

skill that historians use to connect historical events together to understand a broader historical narrative.

To source a document, you try to answer the following questions:

- When and where was the document created?
- How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?

When and where was the document created?

- In the case of this document, we have already done a little bit of contextualization. We already know the date this document was written, October 7, 1765.

How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its content?

- The Stamp Act (1765) was passed on May 22, 1765 and was supposed to go into effect on November 1, 1765. So, this document was written only a few weeks before it was supposed to go into effect. We also know that there were many protests and petitions in the colonies against the act that were currently happening.

Share with students that we already have a strong idea of the context in which this document was written from sourcing and contextualizing before we even started reading the document! Now, we are going to read the contents of the document to learn more about what was happening during this time.

### **Document A analysis.**

Go through the document and annotate it clearly to support students so they will eventually be able to annotate on their own. For example, share that B.W. says that the British are “enemies of truth and liberty” if they pass the Stamp Act (1765) which shows us that B.W. believes that the British were violating the rights of the American colonists through this tax. All in all, this document shows an example of how some colonists were upset about the passing of the Stamp Act (1765) because they believed it violated their rights.

### **Defining Corroboration:**

Have students flip back to the “Historical Skills” section of their almanac. Share that in addition to sourcing and contextualization, historical researchers must also corroborate documents. Share that corroboration is when historians look at multiple documents about the same event from different perspectives. Historians want to get a wide variety of information about the event, so they know they are trying to understand the story as unbiased as possible. This also helps them understand the feelings, beliefs, and experiences of all the people who were involved in an event. So, when we look at and investigate the next document together, we will be corroborating our information by using what we learned from the first document to either support, extend, or challenge our thoughts about the second document.

### **Document Analysis B, “We do.”**

Share with students that with this document, they will help you source and contextualize the document. They should still follow along as they did before, but instead of you annotating on your own, they will be the ones providing you with the information.

Ask students who wrote this document and what can we learn about the author?

- Students should note that the author's name is Will Alfred, but we don't know much else. We can guess that he might be British because this document is written in a London newspaper and is directed to a British government official.

When was the document written?

- It was written in January of 1766, so a few months after the Stamp Act (1765) was passed.

Now ask students where the document came from?

- Say it is a little bit challenging to know this because while it was from a London newspaper, it was reprinted in the Boston-Gazette. Ask students to predict what the author's perspective will be about the Stamp Act (1765).

Why was the document written?

- Share that because it was written in a London newspaper, we might guess that the document is in favor of the Stamp Act (1765).

Is the document reliable?

- We don't know entirely if the document is reliable because we don't know anything about Will Alfred, but we can assume that it is fairly reliable because it was a letter to a government official and it was printed in a reputable newspaper.

Now have students independently read the letter. After everyone has had a chance to read and annotate the letter, ask the students to talk about the following questions:

- What happened in Boston?
- Why the author was surprised?
- Who read the newspapers?
- Why were many American colonists upset about the Stamp Act (1765)?

### **Partner Work, "You do."**

Have students work in pairs to source, contextualize, and analyze the remaining 4 documents together. They should think about the same questions we discussed and analyzed for the first two documents. Share that you will be walking around the room to answer any questions or provide support.

### **Whole Class Discussion.**

Share that after corroborating 6 different documents about the Stamp Act (1765), students should have a better idea about the general tone and feeling surrounding its implementation. Ask students to discuss why they believe the colonists were upset by the Stamp Act (1765). Also have students examine the British perspective on the Stamp Act. Why did the British think the Stamp Act was a reasonable tax? Explain that after months of protest, the British Parliament voted to repeal the Stamp Act in March of 1776. While the colonists may have won that battle, the very same day, the British Parliament passed the Declaratory Acts which asserted that the British government had complete power over the colonies.

**Exit slip.**

Do you think that the Stamp Act was a reasonable or unreasonable tax? Were the British violating the rights of colonists?

***Lesson sources***

<https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/stamp-act>

<http://files.campus.edublogs.org/cobblearning.net/dist/9/165/files/2011/06/On-the-Path-to-Revolution-2fphroy.pdf>

Full Stamp Act: <https://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/stampact.html>