

Not Getting the News about the Stamp Act

Lesson Plan by Marge Stembel

In this lesson, colonial newspapers of the 1760s provide many insights into how citizens felt about the new taxes put in place by the British government after the French and Indian War. By using these primary and secondary source documents, students can interpret feelings of specific colonial groups and British groups. By analyzing and discussing the documents, students can see the particular bias of a colonial group for or against the stamp tax.

Materials

- Copies of a couple of contemporary, local newspapers
- Facsimile and transcription of *Pennsylvania Gazette*
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jan17.html>
- Newspaper facsimiles related to the French and Indian War
<http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/spring97/newspapers.html>

Preparation

Focus Question: *How does the format and content of the Pennsylvania Gazette of November 7, 1765, reflect attitudes about the Stamp Act?*

Step One

Ask students how we get news today. Encourage them to think of all the different types of media. Then ask them how people of the 1700s got the news. List the students' responses on the board or overhead on a T-chart. The responses might include the following:

How we get the news	How colonists got the news
TV	Newspapers
Radio	Broadsheets
Newspapers	Word of mouth
Word of mouth	Town crier
Internet	

Step Two

Display contemporary, local newspapers. Ask student groups to compare text features of contemporary newspapers to examples of pre-Stamp Act newspapers such as the *New*

York Mercury, its supplement, and the *Maryland Gazette*. Hold a class discussion of observations. Similarities and differences can be placed on a T-chart. Student responses might include the following:

Comparison of Text Features Colonial and Modern Newspapers	
Colonial Newspapers	Modern Newspapers
Masthead	Masthead
Date	Date
Volume and number	Number
Articles with titles	Articles
No bylines	Bylines
Few pages	Many pages
Few pictures	Many pictures

Step Three

Ask student groups to compare text features of Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* of November 7, 1765, to examples of pre–Stamp Act newspapers such as the *New York Mercury*, its supplement, and the *Maryland Gazette*. In a class discussion of observations, students may remark that the *Pennsylvania Gazette* lacks a masthead, date, and number. Discussion should focus on why these elements are missing. Students should make inferences. The teacher should point out that the Stamp Act required newspapers to be printed on imported, stamped paper. Students, aided by the teacher, may surmise that Franklin left off important elements of a newspaper because he did not comply with Stamp Act requirements.

Step Four (Reading Comprehension)

Ask the groups to read specific excerpts of articles from a transcription of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 7, 1765. Each group should determine how its excerpt answers the focus question and what bias is shown in the excerpt. Hold a class discussion in which the groups share this information. (See specific excerpts.) Students should complete the study-guide sheet below.

Focus Question: *How did the content of the Pennsylvania Gazette of November 7, 1765, reflect attitudes about the Stamp Act?*

Who, when, why	Answers to focus question	Point of view/bias shown
Halifax, Nova Scotia		
Fort George, New York City		
Essex Co., New Jersey		
Merchant meeting, New York City		
England		

Focus Question: *How did the content of the Pennsylvania Gazette of November 7, 1765, reflect attitudes about the Stamp Act?*

Who, when, why	Answers to focus question	Point of view/bias shown
Halifax, Nova Scotia <i>Oct 13, 1765</i> <i>Showed dislike of Stamp Act</i>	<i>Burned effigies of “stampman” and devil.</i>	<i>Against Stamp Act, will cause poverty, only one side shown.</i>
Fort George, New York City <i>Nov. 4, 1765</i> <i>Showed dislike of Stamp Act</i>	<i>Took lieutenant governor’s coach and possessions of Mr. J and burned them to show dislike of Stamp Act.</i>	<i>Against Stamp Act, only one side shown.</i>
Essex Co., New Jersey <i>Oct 25, 1765</i> <i>Showed dislike of Stamp Act</i>	<i>Inhabitants will use lawful ways to discourage the Stamp Act.</i>	<i>Against Stamp Act, supports the king.</i>
Merchant meeting, New York City <i>Oct. 31, 1765</i> <i>Showed dislike of Stamp Act</i>	<i>Merchants decided to boycott British goods.</i>	<i>Against Stamp Act, only one side shown.</i>
England <i>Nov. 7, 1765</i> <i>Showed dislike of Stamp Act</i>	<i>Merchants in England did not like the Stamp Act because they could not get money owed and goods were not being sold in America.</i>	<i>Against Stamp Act, will cause poverty, only one side shown.</i>

Step Five (Writing Skills – Point of View)

Conclude the lesson with a tiered activity in which some students write a note, from a colonist’s perspective, explaining the point of view of their article (see Stamp Act Note prompt and rubric) and gifted-and-talented or accelerated students write a letter to the editor, from an opposing point of view, discussing the bias in the article (see Stamp Act Letter to the Editor prompt and rubric).

Rubric for the Stamp Act Note

4

- Note clearly states reasons why you, as a colonist, agree with the newspaper article and are against the Stamp Act.
- Note includes a clear description of the Stamp Act.
- Note includes references to the newspaper excerpt.
- Writing is well-organized.

3

- Note states reasons why you, as a colonist, agree with the newspaper article and are against the Stamp Act.
- Note includes a description of the Stamp Act.
- Note may include at least one reference to the newspaper excerpt.
- Writing is organized.

2

- Note states at least one reason why you, as a colonist, agree with the newspaper article and are against the Stamp Act.
- Note includes a description of the Stamp Act.
- Note may include references to the newspaper excerpt.
- Writing may lack organization at times.

1

- Note may lack reasons why you, as a colonist, agree with the newspaper article, or may be unclear that you are against the Stamp Act.
- Note may lack a description of the Stamp Act.
- Note may lack references to the newspaper excerpt.
- Writing may lack organization.

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- Note may not be about the Stamp Act or may not be understandable.

Rubric for the Stamp Act Note to the Editor

4

- Note to the Editor clearly states your disagreement with the excerpt and gives examples of bias in the article.
- Note to the Editor includes a clear description of the Stamp Act.
- Note to the Editor includes references to the newspaper excerpt.
- Note to the Editor is written from the logical point of view of a stamp master.
- Writing is organized.

3

- Note to the Editor states your disagreement with the excerpt and gives examples of bias in the article.
- Note to the Editor includes a description of the Stamp Act.
- Note to the Editor includes at least one reference to the newspaper article.
- Note to the Editor is written from the point of view of a stamp master.
- Writing is organized.

2

- Note to the Editor states your disagreement with the excerpt and gives at least one example of bias in the article.
- Note to the Editor may include a description of the Stamp Act.
- Note to the Editor may include references to the newspaper article.
- Note to the Editor is written from the point of view of a stamp master.
- Writing may lack organization at times.

1

- Note to the Editor states your disagreement with the excerpt.
- Note to the Editor may include a description of the Stamp Act.
- Note to the Editor may lack references to the newspaper article.
- Note to the Editor may not clearly show the point of view of a stamp master.
- Writing may lack organization.

0

- Note to the Editor may not be about the Stamp Act or may not be understandable.

Rubric for Writing a Note in Social Studies

4

- Note contains a date of 1765 or 1766, a greeting, a body, and a signature.
- Note includes a well-written topic sentence and conclusion.
- Writing is well-organized with most spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar correct.

3

- Note may lack appropriate date or signature.
- Note includes a topic sentence, but may lack a conclusion.
- Writing is organized, with much spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar correct.
- Writing is organized.

2

- Note may lack date or signature.
- Note may lack a topic sentence and conclusion.
- Writing may lack organization at times, and may contain grammatical errors.

1

- Note may lack date and signature.
- Note may lack a topic sentence and conclusion.
- Writing may lack organization, and may contain many grammatical errors.

0

- Note may not be about the Stamp Act or may not be understandable.

Some Specific Excerpts from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*

Excerpts from the Pennsylvania Gazette are from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpe:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(rbpe34604500\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpe:@field(DOCID+@lit(rbpe34604500)))

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BOSTON, October 28,

WE hear from Halifax, in the province of Nova-Scotia, that on Sunday, the 13th inst. in the morning, was discovered hanging on the gallows behind the Citadel Hill, the effigies of a stampman, accompanied with a boot and devil, together with labels suitable to the occasion (which we cannot insert, not being favoured with the same) this we are informed gave great pleasure and satisfaction to all the friends of liberty and their country there, as they hope from this instance of their zeal, the neighbouring colonies will be charitable enough to believe that nothing but their dependent situation, prevents them from heartily and sincerely opposing a tax unconstitutional in its nature, and of so destructive a tendency as must infallibly entail poverty and beggary on us and our posterity, if carried in execution.

On the 23d instant the Great and General Court met here, according to adjournment; and we bear that almost every member of the honourable house of representatives have received instructions from their constituents; and that they are of the same import with those already published.

We hear that the merchants and friends to America in England, were determined to use their utmost endeavours the next session of Parliament, in order to get the stamp act repealed.

.....
Extract of a Letter from a principal House in England to a Gentleman in New-York.

If this cursed Act is not repealed, we shall be great Sufferers, and our Manufacturers thrown on their Parishes, for want of Support, whilst People who employed them, will not be in a much better Situation. The Avenues of Remittances are stopped with you, and Trade, the Basis and Foundation of England's Wealth, is intirely shut up. We dread the Consequence, and know not to what Fatality we are destined.

.....
NEW-YORK, November 4.

The late extraordinary and unprecedented preparations in Fort George, and the securing of the stamped paper in that garrison, having greatly alarmed and displeased the inhabitants of this city, a vast number of them assembled last Friday evening in the commons, from whence they marched down the Fly (preceded by a number of lights) and having stopped a few minutes at the Coffee-house, proceeded to the Fort walls, where they broke open the stable of the L--t G--r, took out his coach, and after carrying the same through the principal streets of the city, in triumph marched to the commons, where a gallows was erected; on one end of which was suspended the effigy of the person whose property the coach was; in his right hand he held a stamped bill of lading, and on his breast was affixed a paper with the following inscription, *The rebel drummer in the year 1715*: At his back was fixed a drum, the badge of his profession; at the other end of the gallows hung the figure of the devil, a proper companion for the other, as 'tis supposed it was intirely at his instigation he acted: After they had hung there a considerable time, they carried the effigies, with the gallows intire, being preceded by the coach, in a grand procession to the gate of the Fort, where it remained for some time, from whence it was removed to the Bowling green, under the muzzles of the Fort guns, where a bon-fire was immediately made, and the drummer, devil, coach, &c. were consumed amidst the acclamations of some thousand spectators, and we make no doubt, but the L--t G--r, and his friends, had the mortification of viewng the whole proceeding from the ramparts of the Fort: But the business of the night not being yet concluded, the whole body proceeded with the greatest decency and good order to Vaux-Hall, the House of M--r J--s, who, it was reported, was a friend to the stamp act, and had been over officious in his duty, from whence they took every individual article, to a very considerable amount; and having made another bon-fire, the whole was consumed in the flames, to the great satisfaction of every person present; after which they dispersed, and every man went to his respective habitation. The whole affair was conducted with such decorum, that not the least accident happened. The next evening another very considerable body assembled at the same place, having been informed that the L--t G--r had qualified himself for the distribution of the stamped paper, were determined to march to the Fort, in order to insist upon his delivering it into their hands, or to declare that he would not undertake to distribute the same; but before this resolution could be executed, the minds of the people were eased by the L--t G--r's sending the following declaration from the Fort, viz.

THE Lieutenant Governor declares he will do nothing in relation to the stamps, but leave it to Sir Henry Moore, to do as he pleases on his arrival.

*Council-Chamber,
New-York, November 2, 1765.,*

By Order of his Honour,
Gw. Banyar, D. Cl. Con.

.....
At a general meeting of the Freemen, inhabitants of the county of Essex, in New-Jersey, at the free Borough of Elizabeth, on the 25th day of October, in the year of our Lord 1765, being the anniversary of the happy accession of his present Majesty King George

the Third, to the crown of Great-Britain, &c. upon which occasion the said freemen unanimously, and with one voice declared,

- *First. That they have at all times heretofore, and ever would bear true allegiance to his Majesty King George the Third, and his royal predecessors, and wished to be governed agreeable to the laws of the land, and the British constitution, to which they ever had, and for ever most chearfully would submit.*
 - *Secondly. That the stamp act, prepared for the British colonies in America, in their opinion, is unconstitutional; and should the same take place, agreeable to the tenor of it, would be a manifest destruction and overthrow of their long enjoyed, boasted and invaluable liberties and privileges.*
 - *Thirdly. That they will, by all lawful ways and means, endeavour to preserve and transmit to posterity, their liberty and property, in as full and ample manner as they received the same from their ancestors.*
 - *Fourthly. That they will discountenance and discourage, by all lawful measures, the execution and effect of the stamp act.*
 - *Fifthly. That they will detest, abhor, and hold in the utmost contempt, all and every person or persons, who shall meanly accept of any employment or office, relating to the stamp act, or shall take any shelter or advantage from the same; and all and every stamp pimp, informer, favourer and encourager of the execution of the said act; and that they will have no communication with any such person, nor speak to them on any occasion, unless it be to inform them of their vileness.*
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We have certain information from Boston, that the printers there intend to continue their papers, and to risk the penalties--and that if any of them were to stop on account of the stamp act, their offices would be in danger from the enraged people.

CITY of NEW-YORK, October 31, 1765.

*AT a general Meeting of the Merchants of the City of New-York, trading to Great-Britain, at the House of Mr. George Burns, of the said City, Inn-holder, to consider what was necessary to be done in the present Situation of Affairs, with respect to the **Stamp Act**, and the melancholy State of the North-American Commerce, so greatly restricted by the Impositions and Duties established by the late Acts of Trade: They came to the following Resolutions, viz.*

- **First**, That in all Orders they send out to Great-Britain, for Goods or Merchandize, of any Nature, Kind or Quality whatsoever, usually imported from Great-Britain, they will direct their Correspondents not to ship them, unless the Stamp Act be repealed: It is nevertheless agreed, that all such Merchants as are Owners of, and have Vessels already gone, and now cleared out for Great-Britain, shall be at Liberty to bring back in them, on their own Accounts, Crates and

Casks of Earthen Ware, Grindstones, Pipes, and such other bulky Articles, as Owners usually fill up their Vessels with.

- **Secondly**, It is further unanimously agreed, that all Orders already sent Home, shall be countermanded by the very first Conveyance; and the Goods and Merchandize thereby ordered, not to be sent, unless upon the Condition mentioned in the foregoing Resolution.
- **Thirdly**, It is further unanimously agreed, that no Merchant will vend any Goods or Merchandize sent upon Commission from Great-Britain, that shall be shipped from thence after the first Day of January next, unless upon the Condition mentioned in the first Resolution.
- **Fourthly**. It is further unanimously agreed, that the foregoing Resolutions shall be binding until the same are abrogated at a general Meeting hereafter to be held for that Purpose.

In Witness whereof we have hereunto respectively subscribed our Names.

[This was subscribed by upwards of Two Hundred principal Merchants.]

In Consequence of the foregoing Resolutions, the Retailers of Goods, of the City of New York subscribed a Paper, in the Words following, viz.

*We the under-written, Retailers of Goods, do hereby promise and oblige ourselves not to buy any Goods, Wares, or Merchandizes, of any Person or Persons whatsoever, that shall be shipped from Great-Britain, after the first Day of January next; unless the **Stamp Act** shall be repealed--As Witness our Hands.*

.....

Extract of a Letter from a principal House in England to a Gentleman in New-York.

THE present Situation of the Colonies is really alarming to every Person who has large Sums to come from them.--We feel the Force of the late Act, in a very sensible Manner, being drove to our Wits End to pay our Tradesmen, agreeable to the Time their Payments become due; and if a Method is not taken, diametrically opposite to the former, you and we, and indeed every Person of Property, must unavoidably sink under the present Restrictions. The Colonies, at this present Moment, owe us One Hundred Thousand Pounds and upwards, too large a Sum to be kept out of above two Years, and no Remittances; and though two Vessels are arrived at London from New-York, the whole Remittance was a single Hundred Pounds--This is what we cannot bear, therefore are determined to stop our Hands in the Export Way, and will not ship off a single Shilling's Worth, but to Persons who can and will pay us: If this cursed Act is not repealed, we shall be great Sufferers, and our Manufacturers thrown on their Parishes, for want of Support, whilst People who employed them, will not be in a much better Situation. The Avenues of Remittances are stopped with you, and Trade, the Basis and Foundation of England's Wealth, is intirely shut up. We dread the Consequence, and know not to what Fatality we are destined.

PHILADELPHIA, November 7.

.....

Other news from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*:

An Agreement of the same Kind, with that under the New-York Head, relating to the Importation of Dry Goods, &c. from England, is now on Foot here.

On Friday and Saturday last, the **Dreadful First** and **Second** Days of November, our Bells were rung muffled, and other Demonstrations of Grief shewn.

From Lisbon we learn, that they had Advice there of Mosegong, a Settlement belonging to the Portugueze, on the Coast of Barbary, being besieged by a strong Body of Moors.

Captain Steel, from Leith, on the 11th of September, in Lat. 48:30, Long. 27, spoke the Brig Olive Branch, Captain Robinson, from this Place for Rotterdam, out 29 Days, all well. On the 11th of October, in Lat. 26:27, Long. 57:30, he spoke the Schooner Industry, Captain Davis, from Boston for Dominica, out 21 Days.--In Lat. 27:30, Captain Steel met with a Sloop belonging to Egg-Harbour, that had been blown off the Coast, without a Navigator on board, and brought her safe in with him.

Captain Adams, from Barbados, on the 29th ult. off Sinepuxent, spoke a Schooner from Rhode-Island, bound to Virginia.--Captain Adams left Bridgetown the 11th of October, when the Stamped Paper for that Island was not arrived.

Captain Hunter, from Lisbon, on the 24th of last Month, in Lat. 27:43, Long. 67, spoke two Sloops, from New-London for Barbados, out three Days; a third Sloop was in Company, but he did not speak with her.

Captain Keith, from Londonderry, on the 12th ult. in Lat. 44:47, spoke a Brig from Philadelphia for Glasgow. And on the 25th, in Lat. 38:51, spoke a Snow from Boston for South-Carolina.

We hear from Georgia, that neither the Stamp Master, nor Stamp Paper, had arrived there the 20th ult.

From Bermuda we have Advice, that Captain Copperthorn, in a Ship from Virginia for London, having lost her Main-mast, ran ashore, the Sixth of September, on the Rocks of that Island, when the Vessel was entirely lost, but the People, and Part of the Cargoe, saved.

Arrived. Captain Hervey at Barbados, and Captain Aldborough at Jamaica, both from this Port. And Captain Thompson, at Jamaica, from New-York.