Mapping the American Revolution in Boston

SUMMARY
This lesson introduces students to maps of the American Revolution in Boston and Massachusetts. The lesson begins by exploring pre-colonial Indigenous presence on the land that became known as New England and concludes with inquiry activities with maps of the conflict between colonists and the British Crown.

Students also engage cartographic concepts, from what a map really is to specific map elements: scale, compass, legend/key, purpose, audience, and the perspective of the cartographer.

LOCATIONS:
Boston and New England

TIME PERIOD:
Late 18th Century

GRADE LEVEL:
3-5

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
How did ideas about land change in what became known as New England from before European settlement to the American Revolution?

How did mapmakers tell the story of the American Revolution at the time, and what stories did they tell?

How can maps help us understand an historical event differently than other types of materials?

OBJECTIVES
Students consider the relationship between maps and documenting history.

Students engage with visual and geographic representations of events from the American Revolution.

Students practice looking for clues on maps to a mapmaker’s perspective and purpose.

Students learn or review common map elements.

TIME COMMITMENT: 1 class period of 75 to 90 minutes
A NOTE ON TIME

This lesson can be completed in 75 minutes, but 90 minutes provides more time for close looking at the final maps and more discussion along the way.

LESSON PLAN MATERIALS

**Slideshow:** Link to Google Slide Presentation

*Copy the presentation to save, change format, edit or revise, substitute images, etc.*

Access to laptops or tablets

Maps used in group inquiry activity

- **Bonner, 1769**
  A map of pre-Revolutionary Boston showing its booming development

- **Williams, 1775**
  A map showing the envelopment of the city by “Rebel” forces that would lead to the evacuation of all English troops from Boston for the duration of the war

- **De Costa, 1775**
  A 1775 map showing the battle at Lexington and Concord

- **Sayer & Bennett, 1775**
  A map made by an American volunteer of reinforcements coming to Boston and a detail of the battle of Bunker Hill

Worksheets, one per group or one per student

*Printable worksheets are included in this document following the Lesson Plan.*

*Worksheets are also available as online activities. To make use of the online inquiries use the links below. Tell students not to submit their answers until the class has finished with this section of the lesson. Once the students click “SUBMIT” the form will close and students will not have access to their answers. To make your own versions of these map activities using a Google form and maps from the Leventhal Map & Education Center digital collections and beyond, use this activity generator.*

**Mapping the American Revolution: Inquiry 1, Bonner 1769**

**Mapping the American Revolution: Inquiry 2, Williams, 1775**

**Mapping the American Revolution: Inquiry 3, De Costa, 1775**

**Mapping the American Revolution: Inquiry 4, Sayer & Bennett, 1775**
Massachusetts History & Social Science Frameworks, 2018

This lesson supports the following content topics in the MA Frameworks

**Grade 3**
Topic 1: Massachusetts cities and towns today and in history
Topic 2. The geography and Native Peoples of Massachusetts
Topic 3: European explorers’ first contacts with Native Peoples in the Northeast
Topic 6. Massachusetts in the 18th century through the American Revolution

**Grade 5**
Topic 1. Early colonization and growth of colonies
Topic 2. Reasons for revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the formation of government

Map Center Lessons also support the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards.
Introduction to the Map Center: 2 minutes/Slides 2-3

For the same reasons we think it’s important for students to think about who made a map they are exploring, we believe it’s important for students to know who created their lessons! We include sample scripts for each part of this lesson so you can see how we teach it (look for the italicized sections), but we expect that you will adapt what you find here to reach your own objectives.

Sample script: (Advance to slide 2) The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center is in the Boston Public Library in Copley Square, downtown Boston, Massachusetts. It was started in 2004 by Norman Leventhal, a wealthy real estate developer and map collector who grew up in Boston in an immigrant family and attended the Boston Public Schools. His idea was that all the maps in the Boston Public Library, over 200,000 maps and 5,000 atlases, should be well-cared for and available for anyone to come and see them and learn from them for free. (Advance to slide 3) So today the Map Center takes care of the maps for the enjoyment and education of all through exhibitions in the Map Center, educational programs, and lessons like this one. We even give classes on how to make digital maps. We believe that maps show us how people understand the world and can help us form questions about how we want the world to be. If you like maps, visit our website and you can see almost 10,000 maps online that you can explore, download and print if you want to.

Is this a map?: 5 minutes/Slide 4

This section is a group discussion about whether or not the first photograph of the planet Earth taken from space can be considered to be a map. The idea is to tease out what our expectations of maps are. Usually there are some yes answers and some no answers and sometimes students think both yes and no. It’s best to have a range, so be sure to emphasize that there is no wrong answer. Expand on what students say for their explanations. If students say, yes, because they see continents, ask if they can identify them. If they can’t, ask what would help them to do that. If a student says, it’s just a photograph, you can ask about Google Earth or satellite view in Google Maps. If a student says there are no labels, you can ask if all maps have to have labels. After students have shared their answers according to the way that works best for your students and circumstance, ask them to imagine it IS a map and, if it is, what purpose it could have: a map for astronauts to compare what they see from space, a weather map for meteorologists, a continent quiz for students?

Finish this section by sharing a definition we use at the map center.

Sample script: (Advance to slide 4a) Before we narrow in to our focus on the American Revolution, let’s consider maps in general, starting with a definition. Take a look at this image. Is this a map? Take a minute to think about it and have a reason for your answer. Then we’ll hear what you think. Ok. Who says yes, this is a map? Who says no?
In some ways we can think of this picture as a map, and in other ways we might not. But if we are going to think broadly about maps, we might use this definition. Maps are representations of **places**, and they show some kind of **information** about about those places. But they don’t show all the information about that place—they are **selective**, which means the mapmaker has to make choices about what information to put on the map depending on the **purpose** of the map and who the **audience** for the map is. These choices create the map’s story—what it’s trying to say and to whom.

**Purpose and Audience Direct the Story: 5 minutes/Slide 5**

This section of the lesson asks students to think about maps through the idea of narrative, that maps have a particular perspective and message to convey, a story. Some stories are based on visual interpretation and some take into consideration purpose and audience. All are useful, but for this lesson we ask students to think about the purpose and audience to suggest stories. Stories they may see in this Boston transporation map example are: the center of Boston is important because all the lines come together there, Boston is big but it’s not hard to find your way around, it seems confusing to get around in Boston but knowing the colors of the lines helps with wayfinding, a lot of people live or have things to do on the green line, etc.

**Sample script:** (Advance to slide 5) If you are familiar with the Greater Boston area, you have probably seen this map. But it’s not necessary to have ever seen this map before to have an idea about the story it is trying to tell. This is a transportation map of Boston. When you look at it, what stories do you see? One way to think about this is to consider what the purpose of the map is and who it was created for. When you think about who this map is for and what its purpose is, what story do you think it tells about Boston?

**Transition:**

As we move into the rest of the maps in this lesson, try to keep each map’s **purpose**, **audience** and **story** in mind.

**Whose Land Is It?: 15 minutes/Slide 6-13**

We begin our study of the American Revolution in Boston by looking at maps that document the presence of Indigenous people. The first map is a detail from native-land.ca, a collaborative and interactive digital map created from the submissions of Native people that illustrates where the traditional lands of Native communities are. Then students engage with a series of 17th century maps by European cartographers that show Native people in different ways. We start here to establish the concept of how different people assert their understandings of who the land on maps belongs to and to acknowledge that the history of the United States does not begin with the Revolutionary War, but with settler colonialism and its attendant violence.
LESSON, continued

Students are asked to think about the story each map is telling. Be sure to ask what they are using for evidence for their answers. You may need to interrupt or reframe narratives that incorporate stereotypes of Indigenous people or historical myths, but as some of these myths and perspectives can be seen in the maps, return to the questions What does this tell us about the mapmaker?, What might the mapmaker’s purpose be?, Who is the audience for these maps? to unpack those stories.

Sample script: (Advance to slide 6) This map has a story to tell. What do you notice about this map? [overlapping colors, words, names of tribes, shape of Massachusetts underneath] What story do you think this map is telling about who the land belongs to or who belongs to it? (Advance to slide 7, but be ready to flip back and forth between 6 and 7) Now compare this map to the previous one (slide 6 and back to slide 7). What is different about this map? What story does it tell about who belongs to the land or who the land belongs to? Another way to think about the stories maps tell is to look for where the people are. Where are the people on these maps? Is there a story to tell? [If students suggest a story that the Native people are gone, be sure to let them know that there are Native people from all of the tribes on the map still living in New England, though it’s true that Native people no longer inhabit the full areas as shown on the map.]

(Advance to slide 8) This map tells a different story about who the land belongs to. It was made about one hundred years before the American Revolution and it was made by British mapmakers. There are a lot of new place names and labels on this map, and many of them tell us something about who the mapmakers were and what they knew and understood about the place they were mapping. (Advance to slide 9a) We can see some of the same names on this map as the one we have already looked at, though they are a little different. (Advance to slide 9b and 9c) The Massachuset people’s land is labelled here, as is the Wópanâak’s (Wampanoag’s), even though on this map they are labelled as “Wapanoos” and the label doesn’t accurately show their territory. How is the story of this map different from the one with all the colors overlapping? What do you think the mapmakers’ purpose is and who do you think the audience for this map is?

(Advance to slide 10) Here’s another map made around the same time. (Advance to slide 11) Look at the illustrations this mapmaker put on his map. Here we see Native people’s villages. (Advance to slide 12) And we see Wópanâak (Wampanoag) territory labelled again, though this time it’s written as “Wippanaps”. (Advance to slide 13) And in this close-up view, we see fighting. What story is this map telling? What do you think this mapmaker’s purpose is and who do you think the audience for this map is?
Transition:
In lessons about the American Revolution, the story of who had the right to control the land along the east coast of the United States often begins with English colonists. We want to make sure the story starts with the people already living on this land, some that would give their lives fighting in the Revolutionary War, like the Wôpanâak people living in Mashpee who hoped the colonists would include them when talking about freedom and liberty and self-rule. But by the time the war broke out, the colonists had succeeded in gaining control over most Native-held land in New England. This was another kind of revolution, and this is the background to remember as we move into the conflict between the English colonists and the English government across the Atlantic.

What Do We Know?/5 minutes: Slides 14-15

In this section students share out people, places and events they have already studied or heard about in order to orient themselves to the time period and to remember that they have heard some of the names and places and events they will see on the maps already. Let students share what they know, revising any misunderstandings as necessary. The painting of Crispus Attucks can be used to talk about the Boston Massacre and also the continuity between Indigenous New England, as Attucks was of mixed African and Indigenous ancestry.

Sample script: (Advance to slide 14) Now we are going to shift our focus to what people usually think about when they talk about the American Revolution, and maps can be very useful tools to help us imagine the people, places and events in history. Let’s start by hearing what you already know about this time period. What people, places and events come to mind when you think about the American Revolution?

(Advance to slide 15) Here’s a timeline of a few key events in the years before and during the Revolutionary War. Is there anything you want to share about any of these events?

Setting the Scene: Early Boston and the Arrival of the Troops/Slides 16-18

Sample script: (Advance to slide 16a) In the years before the American Revolution, Boston looked very different than it does today. (Advance to slide 16b) Here’s a map from 1769 that shows the shoreline of Boston at the time. You can see how much land Boston has added to the city over the years. (Advance to slide 17) In 1769, Boston was contained in the Shawmut peninsula, or Mashwomuk according to some Native language speakers. And there was a lot of tension between the English colonists and the English government across the Atlantic Ocean. As the British government pushed for more taxes on the colonists, it faced more resistance in the form of formal letters of protest and threats to government officials. Not wanting to back down, in 1768 England sent troops to occupy Boston and make a strong statement that the colonies needed to fall in line. The blue arrow on this map points to Long Wharf, where the British soldiers landed. (Advance to slide 18) This drawing by Paul Revere shows his interpretation of the soldiers arriving from the point of view of the arrow on the map.
Scale and Map Elements/Slides 19-20

In this section, students see examples of how scale is used to show different kinds of information. Then there is a quick review of map elements or features: compass, legend/key, title and date, scale, illustrations.

Sample script: Many people have heard of Paul Revere because of his ride to the countryside to let colonists know that the British soldiers were starting to move west to confront the colonists at Lexington and Concord. But Revere was also an artist and craftsman who lived in what is now Boston’s North End. We can use his house as a way to talk about how different maps show different amounts of area or distances. (Advance to slide 19a) The word for this is **scale**. (Advance to slide 19b) This is a map of Paul Revere’s house. (Advance to slide 19c) This is a map of his house at a different scale, one that shows part of the neighborhood it is in. (Advance to slide 19d) We can zoom out even more to a different scale and see where his house is located in the city of Boston. (Advance to slide 20) Here is his house on a zoomed out map of another scale that shows the entire Eastern coast of what would become the United States. The maps you will be exploring in this lesson are all of different scales, and it is something you should notice.

(Advance to slide 21) Before you are assigned the map for your group, let’s review some of the features of maps that help us understand what the mapmaker is telling us. (Advance one at a time through the map elements on slide 21, asking students what the purpose of each element is.)

Map Inquiry and Sharing Out/Slides 22-27

Now that students have explored some map concepts (purpose, audience, stories), map elements (scale, compass, legend or key, title, date, illustrations) and some touch points that lead up to the war and the start of the war itself, they are ready to explore a map of the period in more depth. There are four maps for them to work with, and it is necessary for the educator to be familiar with them before the lesson. Students can work individually (but divided into four groups) or in groups with one student as scribe, though every student should have access to a laptop so they can zoom and pan around the map image. They may need help identifying map keys or legends, called references or explanations here, and will likely need support to read the script on the maps. Be sure to read how we introduce this part of the lesson to see a few helpful reminders that will make a big difference to how the students understand their maps.
As students work, circulate and help them puzzle out complicated text or think through what the illustrations are showing. Depending on where students are in their study of the American Revolution when they engage with this lesson, they may need reminders about which “side” is which and what words like “rebels” and “provincials” as opposed to “His Majesty’s army” mean.

When students complete the inquiry activity, have them share out what they saw on the maps by posing the questions on the worksheet to them. The slides move students through the maps in order of scale, with the map view covering more territory with each map. It’s important to draw attention to this each time a new map is presented by having students find the shape of the Shawmut Peninsula in the first three maps.

Depending on how much time there is, choose which questions best support your objectives for the class. For example, it might be more important for a class to think about the audience for a map (someone in the British government or colonists considering whether or not to join the fight?) or its purpose (a news report or an advertisement for coming to Boston) than to discuss where particular locations are, or vice versa. But be sure to have students discuss the final question for each map: What is the most important thing this map shows about the American Revolution in Boston?

Sample script: (Advance to slide 22) Now you will have a chance to explore a map on your own. The first thing you will have to do is look for the map elements and say if you can find them on the map or not. Can you find a compass? Can you find the date? If you do, write it down. Can you find the title? If you can, read it carefully. If you are working in a group, read the title out loud so everyone can follow along. Can you find the name of the mapmaker? Are there any clues about who he might be sympathetic to in the war?

After you finish that section, answer the rest of the questions, thinking about purpose and where you see people on the map and what they might be like: the mapmaker, the audience, the people drawn on the map, and any other names of people that you can see.

When you are finished, you’ll present your maps to the rest of the class.
Wrap Up

To conclude the lesson, we suggest telling the students the outcome of the armed conflict in Boston, with the colonial army occupying the high ground surrounding the city and the British army deciding to cut its losses and join the fight further South, in effect ending the active part of the war in Boston. Then we suggest having students share their responses to generative questions. Examples are: What was new learning for you and what does it make you think about? What implications does this history and its legacy have for us when thinking about society today? How do maps share information differently than other ways of conveying information and in what ways are the differences significant?
1. Can you find the following map elements? Circle or check them off.

- Compass
- Title (read it out loud)
- Date (write it here _______)
- Scale
- Name of the mapmaker
- Legend or key (might be called a reference or explanation)
- Extra illustrations

List any other details you think are important:

2. How would you describe the shape and size of Boston? Using the map scale and a strip of paper or piece of string, figure out how many miles Boston was from end to end.

3. What was important to the mapmaker to include on this map? List three things you think the mapmaker wanted to show people about Boston.

   1.
   
   2.
   
   3.

4. What clues can you find about who the mapmaker was?

5. With your group, finish this statement: The most important thing this map shows us about Boston at the time of the American Revolution is...
1. Can you find the following map elements? Circle or check them off.

- Compass
- Title (read it out loud)
- Date (write it here _______)
- Scale
- Name of the mapmaker
- Legend or key (might be called a reference or explanation)
- Extra illustrations

List any other details you think are important:

2. These locations were important to the progress of the war. Circle if you find them, and pay attention to any buildings or labels in these areas.

- Boston Common
- Cambridge
- Dorchester Neck
- Castle Island

What do you see on Boston Common? What do you think those little triangles are, and who do you think put them there?

3. What was important to the mapmaker to include on this map? List three things you think the mapmaker wanted to show people about Boston during the Revolution.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. What clues can you find about who the mapmaker was?

5. With your group, finish this statement: The most important thing this map shows us about Boston at the time of the American Revolution is...
1. Can you find the following map elements? Circle or check them off.

- Compass
- Title (read it out loud)
- Date (write it here _______)
- Scale
- Name of the mapmaker
- Legend or key (might be called a reference or explanation)
- Extra illustrations

List any other details you think are important:

2. Circle if you find:

- Boston
- Cambridge
- Lexington
- Concord

3. What events are shown on this map? How do you know?

4. Who do you think would have used this map during the time of the American Revolution? Who would be the audience?

5. What clues can you find about who the mapmaker was?

6. With your group, finish this statement: The most important thing this map shows us about Boston at the time of the American Revolution is...
1. Can you find the following map elements? Circle or check them off.

- Compass
- Title (read it out loud)
- Date (write it here _______)
- Scale
- Name of the mapmaker
- Legend or key (might be called a reference or explanation)
- Extra illustrations

List any other details you think are important:

2. First look at the small map of Boston on the right. What battle is being shown? What is happening to Charlestown?

3. Now look at the bigger map of New England. What do you see on the roads leading to Boston from the North, West and South?

4. What clues can you find about who the mapmaker was?

5. Who do you think would have used this map during the time of the American Revolution? Who would be the audience?

6. With your group, finish this statement: The most important thing this map shows us about Boston at the time of the American Revolution is...
ONLINE RESOURCES

Leventhal Map & Education Center

Visit our Tools for Teachers search page and type in American Revolution to see a number of map-based lessons

Visit our past exhibition We Are One: Mapping America’s Road from Revolution to Independence online

PBS Africans in America: Part 2, Revolution 1750-1805 Resource Bank

BOOK-LENGTH RESOURCES

An Indigenous People’s History of the United States, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz