

**TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT**  
***Lesson Title –Boston Massacre Mock Trial***  
***Kyra Kasperson***

**Grade –7**

**Length of class period** –Four 42 minute-periods

**Inquiry**

1. Was the Boston Massacre an actual massacre or were the British soldiers acting in self-defense?
2. Was the verdict of the trial just?
3. Did colonists use the massacre as a catalyst to incite revolution?

**Objectives**

1. Students will analyze primary sources with conflicting information to try to reconstruct actual events.
2. Students will consider evidence and effectiveness of arguments in a mock trial to better understand the judicial process.
3. Students will recognize propaganda as a tool to sway public opinion.

**Materials (Numbers 2-5 are attached)**

1. John Adams Miniseries from HBO (available from HBO or Amazon)
2. Cast of Characters
3. Eyewitness Accounts
4. 2 prints depicting the Boston Massacre
5. Response Worksheet

**Activities**

1. Ask students to define massacre. Emphasize that a massacre involves the unnecessary and indiscriminate killing of a large number of people or animals.
2. Discuss the events of March 5, 1770.
3. Show the Boston Massacre scene from the HBO miniseries.
4. Introduce the mock trial procedure to the students.
  - Lawyers will work in pairs and must prepare a 2 minute opening argument and 2-3 minute closing argument. They may ask each witness 2 questions.
  - Witnesses must prepare statements which must include at least one sentence from their primary source. They cannot, however, simply read their eyewitness accounts; they must use some of their own words. Witnesses will work together with the attorneys on the questions and try to anticipate cross-examination questions.
  - Jurors must collectively write a list of criteria that they will use in considering evidence. They must also write a list of key questions which they believe must be answered in the course of the trial. At the time of jury deliberations, the jury may choose to address 1 question to the prosecution and 1 to the defense.

5. Assign roles to students and distribute the eyewitness accounts. If possible, have someone in the legal profession volunteer to serve as the judge. Allow the students 1 class period, preferably in a computer lab, to briefly research their characters and collaborate with their teams.
6. Run the trial in one class period. Allow the jury time for deliberation and ask them for a verdict. The jury's verdict is not to be based upon the historical verdict, but rather upon the effectiveness of arguments and credibility of the witnesses.
7. On the day following the trial, ask the jurors' to explain their decision. Compare their verdict with the actual verdicts in the Boston Massacre trials. Analyze the eyewitness testimonies to identify points of similarity and divergence. Show the two prints; 1 by Paul Revere and 1 by an anonymous artist. Ask the students which print seems more historically accurate based on their knowledge and trial experience. Discuss the use of propaganda at the time of the Boston Massacre. Ask students to reconsider the word massacre and whether they perceive the events in Boston as a massacre or whether it was propagandized as a massacre to incite colonist fervor for revolution. If time allows during this lesson, you might show a clip of the trial from the John Adams miniseries.
8. Assign the Boston Massacre response worksheet for homework.

### **How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?**

Monitor the group work and assess each student's preparation for the mock trial performance. Students will also do a formal assessment in the form of a response worksheet given for homework.

### **Connecticut Framework Performance Standards**

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including electronic media (e.g. maps, charts, graphs, images, artifacts)

2.4 Demonstrate an ability to participate in social studies discourse through informed discussion, debate, and effective oral presentation.

3.1 Use evidence to analyze, identify and evaluate historical interpretations.

3.2 Analyze and evaluate human action in historical and/or contemporary contexts from alternative points of view.