

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# A Participant's First-Hand Account of the Boston Tea Party

By George Hewes  
1834

*The Tea Act of 1773 was passed by the British government to restrict the American colonies from buying tea from any source other than the British-controlled East India Trade Company. This angered many American colonists who already thought that Britain was taxing the colonies too much, because it meant that colonists could only buy tea that was taxed, and was therefore more expensive. Colonists in Boston decided to protest the Tea Act by storming the East Indian Trade Company's ships in Boston Harbor and throwing the tea onboard into the water to ruin it. George Robert Twelve Hewes, a Boston shoemaker, participated in many of the key events of the Revolutionary crisis. Over half a century later, Hewes recounted his role in the Tea Party. As you read, take notes on the specific goals of the American rebels in the text.*

- [1] The tea destroyed was contained in three ships, lying near each other at what was called at that time Griffin's wharf,<sup>1</sup> and were surrounded by armed ships of war, the commanders of which had publicly declared that if the rebels,<sup>2</sup> as they were pleased to style the Bostonians, should not withdraw their opposition to the landing of the tea before a certain day, the 17th day of December, 1773, they should on that day force it on shore, under the cover of their cannon's mouth.<sup>3</sup>



*"The Destruction of Tea at Boston Harbor" by Nathaniel Currier is in the public domain.*

On the day preceding<sup>4</sup> the seventeenth, there was a meeting of the citizens of the county of Suffolk, convened at one of the churches in Boston, for the purpose of consulting on what measures might be considered expedient<sup>5</sup> to prevent the landing of the tea, or secure the people from the collection of the duty.<sup>6</sup> At that

1. A wharf is a dock used to load and unload ships.
2. American colonists that protested the Tea Act of 1773
3. using the cannons on ships to force the rebels to allow the tea to come into the harbor
4. **Precede (verb)** to come before
5. **Expedient (adjective)** effective and appropriate

meeting a committee was appointed<sup>7</sup> to wait on Governor Hutchinson,<sup>8</sup> and request him to inform them whether he would take any measures to satisfy the people on the object of the meeting.

To the first application of this committee, the Governor told them he would give them a definite answer by five o'clock in the afternoon. At the hour appointed,<sup>9</sup> the committee again repaired<sup>10</sup> to the Governor's house, and on inquiry<sup>11</sup> found he had gone to his country seat at Milton, a distance of about six miles. When the committee returned and informed the meeting of the absence of the Governor, there was a confused murmur among the members, and the meeting was immediately dissolved,<sup>12</sup> many of them crying out, "Let every man do his duty, and be true to his country"; and there was a general huzza<sup>13</sup> for Griffin's wharf.

It was now evening, and I immediately dressed myself in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet, which I and my associates denominated<sup>14</sup> the tomahawk,<sup>15</sup> with which, and a club, after having painted my face and hands with coal dust in the shop of a blacksmith, I repaired to Griffin's wharf, where the ships lay that contained the tea. When I first appeared in the street after being thus disguised, I fell in with many who were dressed, equipped and painted as I was, and who fell in with me and marched in order to the place of our destination.

- [5] When we arrived at the wharf, there were three of our number who assumed an authority to direct our operations, to which we readily submitted. They divided us into three parties, for the purpose of boarding the three ships which contained the tea at the same time. The name of him who commanded the division to which I was assigned was Leonard Pitt. The names of the other commanders I never knew.

We were immediately ordered by the respective commanders to board all the ships at the same time, which we promptly<sup>16</sup> obeyed. The commander of the division to which I belonged, as soon as we were on board the ship appointed me boatswain,<sup>17</sup> and ordered me to go to the

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6. a tax on goods coming into a market
  7. **Appoint (verb)** to choose for a particular job
  8. Thomas Hutchinson served in the colonial government throughout the colonies in America from 1737-1774. As governor, Thomas Hutchinson was extremely unpopular for trying to find a middle ground between the desires of the British government and the rebellious colonists, and most of his attempts to compromise ultimately failed.
  9. that was decided upon
  10. visited
  11. **Inquiry (noun)** the act of asking for information
  12. **Dissolve (verb)** to officially end
  13. a yell of excitement
  14. named
  15. a light ax used as a weapon by Native Americans
  16. **Promptly (adjective)** immediately

captain and demand of him the keys to the hatches and a dozen candles. I made the demand accordingly, and the captain promptly replied, and delivered the articles; but requested me at the same time to do no damage to the ship or rigging.<sup>18</sup>

We then were ordered by our commander to open the hatches and take out all the chests of tea and throw them overboard, and we immediately proceeded to execute<sup>19</sup> his orders, first cutting and splitting the chests with our tomahawks, so as thoroughly<sup>20</sup> to expose them to the effects of the water. In about three hours from the time we went on board, we had thus broken and thrown overboard every tea chest to be found in the ship, while those in the other ships were disposing of the tea in the same way, at the same time. We were surrounded by British armed ships, but no attempt was made to resist us.

We then quietly retired<sup>21</sup> to our several places of residence, without having any conversation with each other, or taking any measures to discover who were our associates;<sup>22</sup> nor do I recollect of our having had the knowledge of the name of a single individual concerned in that affair, except that of Leonard Pitt, the commander of my division, whom I have mentioned. There appeared to be an understanding that each individual should volunteer his services, keep his own secret, and risk the consequence for himself. No disorder took place during that transaction,<sup>23</sup> and it was observed at that time that the stillest night ensued that Boston had enjoyed for many months.

During the time we were throwing the tea overboard, there were several attempts made by some of the citizens of Boston and its vicinity<sup>24</sup> to carry off small quantities of it for their family use. To effect that object, they would watch their opportunity to snatch up a handful from the deck, where it became plentifully scattered, and put it into their pockets.

- [10] One Captain O'Connor, whom I well knew, came on board for that purpose, and when he supposed he was not noticed, filled his pockets, and also the lining of his coat. But I had detected him and gave information to the captain of what he was doing. We were ordered to take him into custody, and just as he was stepping from the vessel, I seized him by the skirt of his coat, and in attempting to pull him back, I tore it off; but, springing forward, by a rapid effort he made his escape. He had, however, to run a gauntlet<sup>25</sup> through the crowd upon the wharf nine each one, as he passed, giving him a kick or a stroke.

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- 17. a supervisor of the crew on a ship
  - 18. the system of ropes and cables used to support a ship's sails and masts
  - 19. **Execute (verb)** to do something you have been asked to do
  - 20. **Thoroughly (adverb)** including every possible part
  - 21. In this situation, "retired" means to return to a particular place.
  - 22. **Associate (noun)** a person you work with
  - 23. **Transaction (noun)** the act of conducting business
  - 24. **Vicinity (noun)** the area around or near a particular place
  - 25. "Gauntlet" refers to a situation in which someone is attacked by many people.

Another attempt was made to save a little tea from the ruins of the cargo by a tall, aged man who wore a large cocked hat and white wig, which was fashionable at that time. He had slightly<sup>26</sup> slipped a little into his pocket, but being detected, they seized him and, taking his hat and wig from his head, threw them, together with the tea, of which they had emptied his pockets, into the water. In consideration of his advanced age, he was permitted to escape, with now and then a slight kick.

The next morning, after we had cleared the ships of the tea, it was discovered that very considerable quantities of it were floating upon the surface of the water; and to prevent the possibility of any of its being saved for use, a number of small boats were manned by sailors and citizens, who rowed them into those parts of the harbor wherever the tea was visible, and by beating it with oars and paddles so thoroughly drenched it as to render its entire destruction inevitable.<sup>27</sup>

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26. secretly

27. **Inevitable** (*adjective*) sure to happen

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Part A: Which of the following TWO choices describe a central idea of the text?
  - A. The rebels in Boston threw tea overboard to protest the actions of Governor Hutchinson.
  - B. The rebels in Boston boarded the ship dressed as Indians to confuse the British.
  - C. The rebels in Boston refused to board the ships because they were surrounded by cannons and felt their lives were in danger.
  - D. The rebels in Boston threw the tea overboard because they felt the government was not responding to their desires.
  - E. The rebels wanted to ensure that none of the tea onboard the ships could ever be used.
  - F. The rebels were unsuccessful in stopping most of tea from being used because people in Boston took tea that washed ashore.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following TWO quotes best support the answer to Part A?
  - A. "they should on that day force it on shore, under the cover of their cannon's mouth." (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "At that meeting a committee was appointed to wait on Governor Hutchinson," (Paragraph 2)
  - C. "the meeting was immediately dissolved, many of them crying out 'Let every man do his duty, and be true to his country'" (Paragraph 3)
  - D. "It was now evening, and I immediately dressed myself in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet," (Paragraph 4)
  - E. "it was discovered that very considerable quantities of it were floating upon the surface of the water;" (Paragraph 12)
  - F. "beating it with oars and paddles so thoroughly drenched it as to render its entire destruction inevitable." (Paragraph 12)

3. How does the phrase "there appeared to be an understanding that each individual should volunteer his services, keep his own secret, and risk the consequence for himself" from paragraph 8 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
- A. It demonstrates that rebels were willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause they were fighting for.
  - B. It reveals that the participants in the Boston Tea Party did not tell anyone their names so that they could avoid getting in trouble.
  - C. It reveals that the rebels wanted to keep the Boston Tea Party a secret.
  - D. It demonstrates that the Boston Tea Party was started by people who did not realize the consequences of their actions.
4. What connection does the author draw between Captain O'Connor and the "tall, aged man" (Paragraph 11)?
- A. Both tried to take tea out of the harbor, and the captain was treated more harshly once he was caught.
  - B. Both participated in the Boston Tea Party by throwing tea into the Boston Harbor.
  - C. Both tried to take tea out of the harbor and were violently attacked for doing so.
  - D. Both were spies working for the British that tried to save the tea from being ruined.
5. Analyze the relationship between Governor Hutchinson's actions and the actions of the men that threw tea into the harbor. Use specific evidence from the text to support your answer.

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## Discussion Questions

***Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.***

1. The Boston Tea Party is an iconic moment of rebellion in United States history. When is it acceptable to break the law?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The rebels knew that by throwing the tea overboard, the British government would seek to punish them for their actions. Why do you think the rebels decided to participate in the Boston Tea Party when they knew they might be punished? What is more important: freedom or security?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why do you think that the colonists who participated in the Boston Tea Party were angered by the actions of Captain O'Connor and the "tall, aged man." Did those men deserve to be punished? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. In 2010, a political movement called the "Tea Party" rose to prominence. Why do you think that current political figures would try to connect themselves and their beliefs with the Boston Tea Party?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. If you were living in Boston at the time, would you have participated in the Boston Tea Party? Why or why not?