

The *Gaspee* Raid: Prelude to the Boston Tea Party?

GUIDING QUESTION:

How important is the burning of the *Gaspee* to the American Revolution? Should it be included in the national narrative of events that caused American Independence?

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► OVERVIEW

The narrative of the revolutionary era consists of a series of events that eventually led to the American Revolution. Using primary sources and an optional virtual reality immersive experience, students will analyze the effects of the burning of His Majesty’s Schooner *Gaspee* in 1772. Students will analyze critically and debate the importance of this event from Rhode Island’s history and place in the national narrative of the causes of the American Revolution.

► OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- › Describe the chronology of the *Gaspee* Raid;
- › Analyze primary source documents to place the *Gaspee* Raid in the historical context leading to the American Revolution; and
- › Present an evidence-based conclusion about the importance of this historical event leading to the American Revolution.

► STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- › CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- › CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- › CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- › D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- › D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

► DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Broadside, Joseph Wanton, A Proclamation, June 12, 1772
Rhode Island Historical Society (G1157 1772 No. 3)
https://rihs.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN_DLL/144/BIBLIO/WEB_BIBLIO_DETAIL_REPORT?SESSIONSEARCH&exp=sisn%2021645

Map, Harding Harris, *A Map of the State of Rhode-Island taken mostly by Surveys by Caleb Harris*, 1795
Rhode Island Historical Society (RHIX174543)

Newspaper article, *Providence Gazette*, June 13, 1772
Rhode Island Historical Society

Newspaper article, *Providence Gazette*, December 26, 1772 (excerpt)
Rhode Island Historical Society

Oration, Reverend John Allen, *An oration, upon the beauties of liberty : or the essential rights of the Americans*, 1773 (excerpt)
Florida Atlantic University Digital Library (B2F13)
<http://purl.flvc.org/fau/fd/fauwsb2f13>

Painting, Charles De Wolf Brownell, *The Burning of the Gaspee*, 1892
Rhode Island Historical Society (1893.10.1)
https://www.rihs.org/collection_item/the-burning-of-the-gaspee/

Royal Decree, King George III, *Gaspee Proclamation*, June 12, 1772
Rhode Island Department of State, Rhode Island State Archives (C#00554)
https://rihs.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN_DLL/144/BIBLIO/WEB_BIBLIO_DETAIL_REPORT?SESSIONSEARCH&exp=sisn%2021898

SECONDARY SOURCES

Book, Steven Park, *The Burning of His Majesty's Schooner Gaspee: An Attack on Crown Rule before the American Revolution*, 2016

Video, Adam Blumenbthal, *Burning The Gaspee—They Rowed to Revolution*, June 8, 2020
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WCSCY_5REw

VR App, Adam Blumenthal, *Burning the Gaspee VR*, 2021
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/burning-the-gaspee-vr/id1573343826>
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.NuccoBrain.GaspeeVR&hl=en&gl=US>

► TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- *Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet*
- *Gaspee Document Analysis Form*

► ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- Organize students into four groups.
- Arrange the classroom into table groups (consider additional table groups in larger classes as needed).
- Print one copy of the primary sources for all groups.
- Print one *Gaspee Document Analysis Form* for each group.
- Print one copy of the documents for each student in the group (one through four) from the *Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet*.
- Project the video, *Burning The Gaspee—They Rowed to Revolution*.
- If using the virtual reality option, have students download the app to their devices. Test the app to familiarize yourself with the content and options.

► PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE (15 MINUTES)

- Organize students into four groups.
 - » Using the virtual reality option:
 - ◆ Play the video, *Burning The Gaspee—They Rowed to Revolution* from 4:17–8:03 to set the event in historical context.
 - ◆ Provide students with instructions to use the app and give them time to experience the events of the burning of the *Gaspee*.
 - » If not using the virtual reality option, play the video, *Burning The Gaspee—They Rowed to Revolution* (11:35).

ACTIVITY TWO (20 MINUTES)

- Review the timeline of events of the *Gaspee Raid*. Emphasize:
 - » The *Gaspee* was a British ship of His Majesty's Royal Navy aimed at stopping smuggling in the American colonies. It was lured onto a sandbar in central Rhode Island while chasing a smuggling ship, the *Hannah*.
 - » The attackers rowed out at night to board the *Gaspee*. They captured the captain and threw cargo off the ship.
 - » After all the people were removed from the ship, someone set it on fire. The fire reached a store of gunpowder, which caused an explosion.
 - » A Committee of Inquiry was commissioned by King George III to capture the leaders of the attack.
- Instruct the groups to discuss and reflect on the guiding question:
 - » *How important is the burning of the Gaspee to the American Revolution? Should it be included in the national narrative of events that led to American independence?*

- › **Teacher Tip:** Remind students that they need to use evidence to support their group’s claim.
- › Explain that students will analyze primary sources from the raid. Allow students to select roles:
 - › Scribe (one per group): to document your table’s findings on the *Gaspee* Document Analysis Form.
 - › Facilitator (one per group): to manage time and keep their group on task.
 - › Reporters (two or three per group): to collaborate and report the table’s findings to the class.
- › Distribute the primary sources and the *Gaspee* Document Analysis Form to each group.
- › Set a timer for ten minutes. Circulate and provide support as needed.

ACTIVITY THREE (40 MINUTES)

- › Call on each group’s reporters. Give each group two to three minutes to share their group’s responses:
 - › Describe your primary source document(s) to the class.
 - › Explain its significance to the *Gaspee* Raid and its aftermath.
 - › Synthesize your group’s conclusion about the importance of the burning of the *Gaspee*.
- › Read the following reactions by Founding Fathers to the *Gaspee* raid and aftermath:
 - › Samuel Adams: “Such an event will assuredly go down to future ages in the page of history.”
 - › Benjamin Franklin: “If the [colonists are] unable to procure other justice, should attack the Aggressors, drub them and burn their boats, you are to call this High Treason and Rebellion, order Fleets and Armies into their country, and threaten to carry all of the Offenders three thousand Miles to be hang’d, drawn and quartered. O! this will work admirably!”
 - › Samuel Adams believed a Commission of Inquiry was a threat to colonial liberties, describing it as “a court of inquisition . . . a star chamber . . . within this colony.”
 - › Thomas Jefferson was alarmed by the threat of trial in England. He formed the Virginia Committee of Correspondence to get “first hand” accounts from other colonies.
 - › In response to the royal inquiry, Samuel Adams stated on December 25, 1772, “An attack on the liberties of one colony is an attack upon the liberties of all.”
 - › On June 10, 1774, George Washington attended fireworks in Williamsburg, Virginia, to commemorate the second anniversary of the burning of the *Gaspee*.¹

Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- › **The Liberty Affair (1768)**
- › **Philadelphia Tea Party (December 25, 1773)**
- › **Battle of Golden Hill (January 19, 1770)**
- › **The Trent Affair (1861)**

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to: nhd.org/RevIdeals.

¹ This information is sourced from Stephen Park’s book, *The Burning of His Majesty’s Schooner Gaspee*.

Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet: All Groups

Painting, Charles De Wolf Brownell, *The Burning of the Gaspee*, 1892
Rhode Island Historical Society (1893.10.1)
https://www.rihs.org/collection_item/the-burning-of-the-gaspee/



Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet: Group One

Oration, Reverend John Allen, *An oration, upon the beauties of liberty : or the essential rights of the Americans, 1773* (excerpt)
Florida Atlantic University Digital Library (B2F13)
<http://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A44888#page/2/mode/2up>

This is an excerpt from a sermon Reverend John Allen preached to the Second Baptist Church in Boston on December 3, 1772. It was later printed as a popular pamphlet in several editions and shared in multiple cities across the American colonies.

Your Lordship [has let] us know that the case of the burning the Gaspee Schooner has been laid before the law servants of the Crown, and [it is being considered as a] crime of a deeper . . . than piracy namely, an act of high treason, and levying a war against the King.

Well my Lord, and supposing this to be the case, are not the Rhode Islanders subjects to the King of Great Britain? Has not the King his attorney, his courts of judicatory to decide matters between the King and the subjects? Why then must there be New Courts of Admiralty erected to appoint and order the inhabitants to be confined, and dragged away three thousand miles, from their families, laws, rights and liberties, to be tried by their enemies? . . .

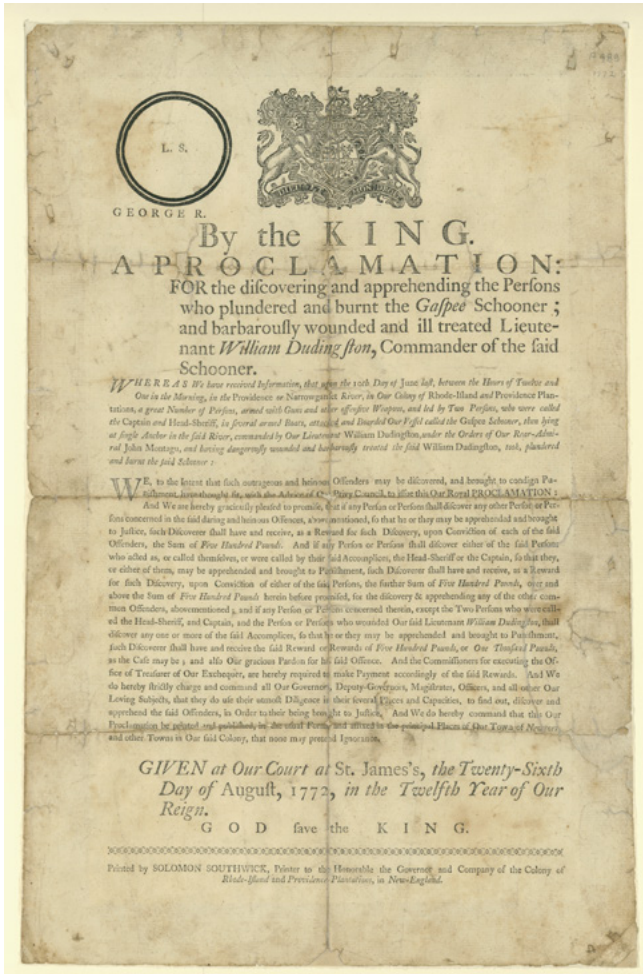
Your Lordship's letter frequently reminds us that this destructive authority, (to destroy the lives and liberties of the people) is his Majesty's will and pleasure . . . To attempt such tyranny . . . destroys his Right as King to reign over them, for according to his Coronation oath, he has no longer a Right to the British Crown or Throne... For violating the people's rights, [Charles I], King of England, lost his Head, and if another King, who is more solemnly bound than ever [King Charles] was, should tread in the same steps, what can he expect? I . . . love my King, but I revere the rights of an Englishman before the authority of any King upon the Earth. I distinguish greatly between a King and a Tyrant, a King is the guardian and trustee of the rights and Laws of the people but a Tyrant destroys them.

Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet: Group Two

Royal Decree, King George III, Instructions of King George III to the Gaspee Commission, September 4, 1772 (excerpts)
Rhode Island Historical Society (G1157 BroadSides 1772 No. 1)

https://rihs.minisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/144/BIBLIO/WEB_BIBLIO_DETAIL_REPORT?SESSIONSEARCH&exp=sisn%2021898

King George II sent a set of instructions to the King's official commission to investigate the five New Englanders who were charged with the attack on the *Gaspee*.



Art. 3d. . . . the persons concerned in the plundering and destroying the *Gaspee* schooner, and in the inhuman treatment of our officer who commanded her . . . [shall be] sent to England to be tried for that offence; . . . the persons concerned in that daring attack upon our authority and commission, . . . may be accordingly arrested and delivered to the custody of the commander-in-chief of our ships and vessels in North America . . .

Art. 5th. And, whereas, there may be reason to apprehend, from the outrages which have been committed within our said colony of Rhode Island, by numbers of lawless persons, that insults may be offered to you; it is therefore our will and pleasure that if any disturbance shall arise with a view to obstruct you in the execution of your duty, and any violence should in consequence thereof be offered to you, you do in such case, give immediate notice thereof to the commander-in-chief of our forces in North America, and require of him to send such a military force into the Colony as you shall judge necessary for your protection, and for the aiding the civil magistrates in suppressing any tumults or riots and preserving the public peace.

Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet: Group Three

Newspaper article, *Providence Gazette*, June 13, 1772
Rhode Island Historical Society

P R O V I D E N C E, June 13.
Monday last a Sloop from New-York arrived at Newport, and after reporting her Cargo at the Custom-House, was proceeding up the River on Tuesday. The Gaspee armed Schooner, then lying near Newport, immediately gave Chace to the Sloop, crowding all the Sail she could make; but the People on board not being acquainted with the River, at Three o'Clock in the Afternoon she ran on Namquit Point, near Pawtuxet. About Twelve at Night a great Number of People in Boats boarded the Schooner, bound the Crew, and sent them ashore, after which they set Fire to the Vessel, and destroyed her. A Pistol was discharged by the Captain of the Schooner, and a Musket or Pistol from one of the Boats, by which the Captain was wounded, the Ball passing through one of his Arms, and lodging in the lower Part of his Belly. He was immediately taken to Pawtuxet, and we are told is in a fair Way to recover.
We hear that one Dagget, belonging to the Vineyard, who had served the before mentioned Schooner as a Pilot, but at the Time of her being destroyed was on board the Beaver Sloop of War, going ashore a few Days since at Narraganset to a Sheep-Shearing, was seized by the Company, who cut off his Hair, and performed on him the Operation of Shearing in such a Manner, that his Ears and Nose were in imminent Danger.

Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet: Group Three (Con't)

Proclamation, Governor Joseph Wanton, June 12, 1772

Rhode Island Historical Society (RHIX172160)

https://rihs.minisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/144/BIBLIO/WEB_BIBLIO_DETAIL_REPORT?SESSIONSEARCH&exp=sisn%2021645



A. 494
1772

By the Honorable JOSEPH WANTON, Esquire, Governor,
(L. S.) *Captain General, and Commander in Chief, of and over the English
Colony of Rhode-Island, and Providence Plantations, in New-England,
in America.*

A P R O C L A M A T I O N .



HEREAS on *Tuesday*, the ninth Instant in the Night, a Number of People, unknown, boarded His Majesty's armed Schooner the *Gaspee*, as she lay aground on a Point of Land, called *Nanquit*, a little to the southward of *Provincetown*, in the Colony aforesaid, who dangerously wounded Lieutenant *William Dudingston* the Commander, and by Force took him with all his People, put them into Boats, and landed them near *Provincetown*; and afterwards set Fire to the said Schooner, whereby she was entirely destroyed:

I HAVE, therefore, thought fit, by and with the Advice of such of His Majesty's Council, as could be seasonably convened, to issue this Proclamation, strictly charging and commanding all His Majesty's Officers within the said Colony, both Civil and Military, to exert themselves with the utmost Vigilance, to discover and apprehend the Persons guilty of the aforesaid atrocious Crime, that they may be brought to condign Punishment. And I do hereby offer a Reward of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS, Sterling Money of *Great-Britain*, to any Person or Persons who shall discover the Perpetrators of the said Villainy, to be paid immediately upon the Conviction of any one or more of them.

AND the several Sheriffs in the said Colony are hereby required, forthwith, to cause this Proclamation to be posted up in the most public Places, in each of the Towns in their respective Counties.

GIVEN under my Hand and Seal at Arms, at Newport, this Twelfth Day of June, in the Twelfth Year of the Reign of His Most Sacred Majesty, GEORGE THE THIRD, by the Grace of God, King of Great-Britain, and so forth, Annoq; Dom. One Thousand, Seven Hundred and Seventy-two.

J. WANTON.

By his Honor's Command,
HENRY WARD, Sec'ry.

G O D S A V E T H E K I N G .

Gaspee Primary Source Document Packet: Group Four

Newspaper article, *Providence Gazette*, December 26, 1772 (excerpt)
Rhode Island Historical Society

This is an excerpt from an article that appeared in the December 26, 1772, edition of the *Providence Gazette* in response to the Royal Inquisition into the Gaspee Raid. The article is signed by “Americus,” and may have been written by Stephen Hopkins. Hopkins (1707–1785) was a Founding Father from Rhode Island. He was a governor of the Colony of Rhode Island, a chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

A court of inquisition¹ more horrid than that of Spain and Portugal, is established within this colony, to enquire into the circumstances of destroying the Gaspee Schooner, and the persons who are the commissioners of this new fangled court, are vetted with most exorbitant and unconstitutional power. – They are directed to summon witnesses, apprehend persons not only impeached,² but even suspected! . . . to deliver to Admiral Montague, who is ordered to have a ship in readiness to carry them to England, where they are to be tried . . .

So much has transpired respecting this alarming Star Chamber³ inquisition. – And who among the natives of America can hear it without emotion! – Is there an America, in whose breast there glows the smallest spark of public virtue, but who must be fired with indignation and resentment, against a measure so replete with the ruin of our free (Rhode Island) constitution. – To be tried by ones peers is the greatest privilege a subject can wish for; and so excellent is our constitution, that no subject shall be tried, but by his peers.

1 a judicial or official inquiry

2 called into question

3 The Star Chamber was an English court. It was known for social and political oppression through abuse of power, arbitrary rulings, secretive proceedings, and a lack of due process rights for the accused.

Gaspee Document Analysis Form¹

Guiding Question: How important is the burning of the *Gaspee* to the American Revolution? Should it be included in the national narrative of the causes of American Independence?

Describe your primary source document(s). What type of source(s) do you have? (e.g., newspaper, proclamation, etc.)?

Observe its parts. Who wrote it? Who read or received it? When was it created? Where was it created?

Try to make sense of it. What is it talking about? Write one sentence summarizing this document.

Why did the author write it? Quote evidence from the document that tells you this. What was happening at the time in history this document was created?

Use it as historical evidence. What did you find out from this document that you might not learn anywhere else? What other documents or historical evidence will you use to help you understand this event or topic?

¹ Adapted from the Document Analysis Worksheets from the National Archives and Records Administration. Learn more at [archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets](https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets).