

Thirteen Things Every High School Student Should Know
Causes of the American Revolution



1. **The Revolution began as an argument inside the British Empire, not as a plan to invent the United States.** Until late 1775–1776, most citizen leaders in British America said they wanted their rights of Englishmen, not a new country. Independence was the last step, not the first goal.
2. **Victory in the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War) made conflict more likely, not less.** Britain won in 1763 and took a huge debt and a giant western territory. To pay the debt and manage the frontier, London tightened rule over colonies that had gotten used to running themselves.
3. **“Salutary neglect” matters because it created expectations.** For decades, Britain had loosely enforced trade laws and let colonial assemblies levy local taxes. After 1763, Parliament treated the colonies as a source of revenue. Colonists experienced that as a change in the constitution of the empire, not as a return to normal.
4. **The core constitutional claim was representation—and what “representation” meant.** Britain said colonists were virtually represented in Parliament, as many English towns were. Colonists said only their own elected assemblies could tax them. That was a fight about sovereignty: who had the final right to bind the colonies by law.
5. **The Proclamation of 1763 was a western and Native policy, not just a land grab story.** Britain tried to limit settlement west of the Appalachians to reduce war with Native nations and to control the fur trade and land speculation. Settlers and speculators called it a betrayal after a war they had helped win. Native nations were not bystanders; they were defending territory.
6. **Not every British measure was a “tax.” Enforcement and courts mattered as much as rates.** Writs of assistance, vice-admiralty courts (no colonial juries), tighter customs, and the presence of troops changed daily power. People can accept a small duty and still reject a system that looks like it can punish them without local consent.
7. **The Stamp Act crisis taught both sides a dangerous lesson.** Colonists learned that boycotts, crowds, and intercolonial meetings could force repeal. Britain learned to repeal the tax but pass the Declaratory Act (1766), asserting that Parliament could bind the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.” The next fights were about that claim.
8. **Violence and propaganda fed each other.** The Boston Massacre (1770) killed five people, including Crispus Attucks. Patriot writers turned it into proof that a standing army in a city threatened liberty. Loyalists saw a riot against soldiers doing an ugly job. High school students should read both kinds of sources, not only Revere’s engraving.
9. **The Tea Act was about monopoly, precedent, and cheap tea—not only a high price.** Tea would have been cheaper for many consumers. Patriots still rejected it because paying the duty accepted Parliament’s right to tax and because it favored the East India Company over colonial merchants. The Boston Tea Party destroyed private property. Britain answered with the Coercive/Intolerable Acts, which punished a whole colony.
10. **Punishment of Massachusetts unified other colonies more than any pamphlet did.** Closing Boston Harbor, altering the Massachusetts charter, and restricting town meetings looked like a template that could be used anywhere. Aid to Boston and the First Continental Congress (1774) were responses to that fear.
11. **Ideas were weapons, but they were mixed, not a single “Locke quote.”** Colonists used English common law, colonial charters, Protestant resistance theory, and Enlightenment natural rights. “Life, liberty, and property” and later “pursuit of happiness” were arguments about when government loses consent. The Declaration (1776) is an effect of the crisis as well as a cause of independence.
12. **The Patriot movement was never the whole population. Rough splits are often taught as one-third Patriot, one-third Loyalist, one-third neutral**—too neat, but the point stands. Enslaved people weighed British freedom offers against Patriot talk of liberty. Many Native nations allied with Britain to check colonial expansion. Women enforced boycotts and ran farms. Any cause list that includes only white male assemblymen is incomplete.
13. **War began before most people chose independence.** Lexington and Concord (April 1775), Bunker Hill, and the king’s proclamation that the colonies were in rebellion made reconciliation much harder. Congress’s failed Olive Branch Petition (July 1775) ultimately became the turning point toward revolution. Once blood was shed and the king rejected petitioning, independence became thinkable. Citizens knew they had to choose sides when they learned that Crown troops and their Hessian auxiliaries were coming to occupy the towns. Thomas Paine’s pamphlet, *Common Sense* (January 1776) convinced many Americans that independence was the only choice.

Pertinent... Do not treat the thirteen points as thirteen equal “causes.” Points 1–4 were background events that lead to growing protest. Points 5–10 are the escalating events that lead to more violent actions. Points 11–13 are meaning, who counted, and timing.

