

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



The Revolution did not start because of one tax. After 1763, Britain tried to tighten control over the 13 colonies and raise revenue. Many colonists concluded that this violated their rights as English subjects—and, later, their natural rights. These thirteen developments show how that argument turned into a war.

1. **The French and Indian War created a British debt crisis.** - The war (1754–1763) left Britain victorious and nearly bankrupt. London believed the colonies should help pay for a conflict fought in part to defend them. Colonists had fought in the war too, and many felt they had already paid in service and lives.
2. **The end of salutary neglect.** - For decades, Britain had loosely enforced trade laws and let colonial assemblies handle local affairs. After 1763, Parliament and royal officials supervised the colonies more closely. What Britain called order, many colonists called interference.
3. **The Proclamation of 1763.** - Britain banned settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains to limit conflict with Native nations and to control the frontier. Land speculators and settlers who expected to move west treated the line as a broken promise after a war they had helped win.
4. **Taxation without representation.** - Beginning with measures such as the Sugar Act (1764), Parliament taxed the colonies directly. Colonists sent no elected members to Parliament. Their claim was not “we refuse all taxes.” It was that only their own assemblies had the right to tax them.
5. **The Stamp Act (1765).** - This was an internal tax on paper items used every day—newspapers, legal documents, playing cards. It reached people who had never thought much about imperial policy. Protests, boycotts, and the Stamp Act Congress forced repeal, but the Declaratory Act (1766) insisted Parliament still had full authority to bind the colonies.
6. **The Quartering Act.** - Colonists were required to house and supply British troops. In peacetime, standing armies in colonial towns looked less like protection and more like a threat to self-government.
7. **The Townshend Acts (1767).** - These placed duties on imported glass, paint, paper, and tea, and strengthened customs enforcement. Colonists revived boycotts. Britain sent more soldiers to Boston, which raised the chance of a violent clash.
8. **The Boston Massacre (1770).** - A confrontation between soldiers and civilians ended with troops firing into the crowd. Five people were killed, including Crispus Attucks. Patriot writers used the event as proof that a standing army in a city endangered liberty. The soldiers were tried in colonial court; John Adams defended them, which also showed colonists claiming the rule of law.
9. **Committees of Correspondence.** - Towns and colonies built letter-writing networks to share news of British laws and local protests. Information moved faster than royal officials expected. The 13 colonies began to coordinate instead of reacting one by one.
10. **The Tea Act and the Boston Tea Party (1773).** - The Tea Act kept a tax on tea and gave the East India Company advantages that undercut colonial merchants. In Boston, protestors destroyed a large shipment of tea. Britain treated the destruction of property as a challenge to sovereignty, not a petition.
11. **The Coercive Acts, called the Intolerable Acts (1774).** - Parliament closed Boston Harbor, altered Massachusetts government, restricted town meetings, and allowed trials of officials to be moved. The goal was to isolate Massachusetts. The effect was the opposite: other colonies sent aid and treated the punishment as a warning to all of them.
12. **Arguments about rights.** - Colonists drew on the English Bill of Rights, colonial charters, and Enlightenment ideas of natural rights—life, liberty, and property. If a government repeatedly violated those rights and offered no real consent, resistance could be justified. That idea later shaped the Declaration of Independence.
13. **Intercolonial government, then open war.** -The First Continental Congress (1774) petitioned the king, organized a boycott, and claimed the right to speak for the colonies as a whole. Britain refused to reverse course. Fighting at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 turned a political crisis into a military one.



Context: Middle Schoolers should not skip - Independence was not unanimous. Loyalists stayed loyal to Crown rule. Enslaved people weighed freedom offers from both sides. Native nations defended their own land and alliances. Women managed farms, boycotts, and households that made protest possible. These thirteen causes explain why enough colonists—especially in the assemblies and port cities—decided British authority had lost its legitimacy.