

Battle of Lexington Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
What happened at the Battle of Lexington?

Materials:

- Textbook excerpt on the Battle of Lexington
- Overhead of Document A: Barker Document
- Copies of Barker Document
- Overhead of Document B: Mulliken Document
- Copies of Mulliken Document
- PPT of two images of Lexington

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: In the 1770s, tensions between colonists and the British continued to escalate. By 1774, the colonists had begun to organize and train militias. The Battle of Lexington, on April 19, 1775, is considered the first battle of the American Revolution. Today, we're going to try to figure out who fired the first shot.
2. Students read textbook passage on the Battle of Lexington. Ask students: *According to the textbook, who fired the first shot? Did the colonists stand their ground or start to disperse?*
3. Explain that today you will once again model historical reading skills. Put Document A: Barker document on overhead. Cognitive modeling:

*First thing I want to do is look at the **source**. I see here that it was a diary by a British soldier written on April 19. I know from the textbook that this is the day of the battle. I wonder if he actually wrote this on the day of the battle; probably not. We've all back-dated our diary entries . . .*

*"Wading through a long stream": As I read I want to **contextualize** or imagine the setting. This makes me realize that the soldiers were probably cold, wet and tired. I bet they were jumpy and nervous when they saw minutemen on the Green.*

"200 to 300": That's a lot of minutemen. Did the textbook say how many minutemen? It could be that he just imagined there were a lot of people there . . . (What you say here depends on whether the textbook differed in its account).

"They fired": He makes it clear that the colonists fired first. I wonder if he's telling the truth. It could be that he's trying to cover his back. If this battle

ended up starting the war, there's definitely going to be an investigation into who fired first.

4. Guided practice on Document B: Mulliken. Lead class in a discussion of the document, using the following questions:

Sourcing: Before reading body of document

What kind of document is this? Do you trust it more or less than a diary entry?
When was this written?
Whose side does this document represent?
What do you predict they will say?

Context/ Imagine the Setting: After reading through document

What story do the minutemen tell?
How does this differ from Barker's account?

Close reading:

What is the significance of the phrase "to our knowledge?"

Corroboration:

Which account do you find more reliable? Why?
Are there any facts that both accounts agree on?

**(Students should arrive at the conclusion that the only thing we know for sure, based on BOTH accounts, is that the minutemen were dispersed and running. They did NOT "stand their ground.")*

5. Hand out two Lexington images. Share with students that the Sandham painting was printed as a stamp by the Post Office in 1925 and again in 1975 during the Bicentennial. Ask students to decide:
 - Which of these images is probably more accurate based on our reading of the documents? (They should say Doolittle because both accounts claimed that the minutemen dispersed).
 - Why would the Post Office commission a stamp with an inaccurate image?
 - Is it irresponsible for the Post Office to commission such a stamp?
6. Assessment: Have students re-write the textbook excerpt about Lexington, telling the story of the first shots of the Revolutionary War.

Citations:

John Barker, dairy entry, April 19th, 1775, in R. H. Dana, Jr. (1877). A British officer in Boston. *Atlantic Monthly*, 39, 389-401. <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/why.html>

Nathaniel Mulliken, Philip Russell, sworn testimony, in C. C. Sawtell, (1968). *The*

nineteenth of April, 1775: A collection of first hand accounts. Lincoln, MA: Sawtells of Somerset.

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Document A: Barker (Modified)

19th. At 2 o'clock we began our march by wading through a very long stream up to our middles. About 5 miles away from a town called Lexington, we heard there were some hundreds of people collected together intending to oppose us. At 5 o'clock we arrived there and saw a number of people, I believe between 200 and 300, formed in a common in the middle of the town. We still continued advancing, prepared for an attack though without intending to attack them. As we came near them, they fired one or two shots, upon which our men without any orders, fired and put them to flight. We then formed on the Common, but with some difficulty, the men were so wild they could hear no orders; we waited a considerable time there, and at length proceeded on our way to Concord.

Source: Entry for April 19th, 1775, from the diary of Lieutenant John Barker, an officer in the British army.

Document B: Mulliken (Modified)

We Nathaniel Mulliken, Philip Russell, (Followed by the names of 32 other men present on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775)...All of lawful age, and inhabitants of Lexington...do testify and declare, that on the nineteenth of April, about five o'clock in the morning, we proceeded towards the Green, and saw a large body of troops marching towards us. Some of our men were coming to the Green, and others had reached it, at which time, they began to disperse. While our backs were turned on the British troops, they fired on us, and a number of our men were instantly killed and wounded, not a gun was fired by any person in our company on the British soldiers to our knowledge before they fired on us, and continued firing until we had all made our escape.

Lexington, April 25, 1775.

Source: Sworn by 34 minutemen on April 25 before three Justices of the Peace.