



The Whisky Rebellion

Introduction to war, taxes and rebellion

For centuries, kings and governments have waged wars. And wars are expensive. One of the primary ways to pay for war has been to collect taxes.

By the end of the American War of Independence, the total debt incurred by the new nation and its individual states was around \$65 million. Faced with this massive debt, the Secretary of the Treasury needed to come up with revenue so he introduced a series of taxes including an excise tax on whisky. But the small farmers in Pennsylvania started to talk rebellion and the United States government raised an army to fight its own people.

Instructional strategies

1. Show the video [Historical Spotlight](#) (9:19) to the class. Recall the voice of the farmer in the video who says, "... that doesn't seem fair ..." and then facilitate a discussion using questions such as:
 - a. What do we mean when we say, "This is not fair"?
 - b. What do you think makes an action fair or unfair?
 - c. Who decides what is fair or unfair—what is just or not?
 - d. Think of a time when you experienced an unfair situation. What was unfair about it? How did you feel in that situation? What did you learn from it?
2. Recall how the farmer in the video argues that the tax was not "equal." Then display this [image](#) and invite students to discuss which picture represents a situation that is more "fair" and why they feel that way. You might also illustrate the issues by having students sit in a circle, take off their left shoes and throw them in the middle. Then distribute the shoes at random and suggest, when confronted with the inevitable complaints, that you were being completely fair in that you gave each student one left shoe. Discuss why that is not acceptable. Then you might explore questions like:
 - a. In what way was the whisky tax unfair?
 - b. Who stood to benefit from the tax? Who would the tax hurt the most?
 - c. How would you feel if you were forced to pay an unfair tax?
 - d. Is it ever fair to tax some people in order to pay for a war? Under what conditions might that be fair?
3. Review the Stamp Act of 1765 and how it contributed to the American War of Independence. Ask students to consider whether or not the Whisky Rebellion was a courageous stand for justice or an act of treason. Point out that how one answers that may depend on who one identifies with in the story. You might facilitate the discussion with questions like:
 - a. Is it important to stand up for oneself (or for someone else) when one feels something is unfair or unjust? Can you provide an example?
 - b. Would you consider the farmers who fought against the tax as brave? Why or why not? What is bravery?
 - c. How would you characterize those who fled when the army came? Those who signed the Oath of Loyalty under pressure? Those who refused to sign? Why?

4. Have students research the whisky tax and compare that to how governments tax alcohol, tobacco and other commodities today. Suggest they address the following questions:
 - a. In what ways are the whisky tax and modern alcohol taxes similar? Different?
 - b. How are the taxes from alcohol and tobacco used today? Do you think the taxes are fair? Why or why not?
 - c. Would legalizing and taxing marijuana help the government fund more services for Canadians? Would this be fair? Why or why not?
 - d. Would it be fair to tax alcohol, tobacco and marijuana in order to raise money to fight the “war on drugs”?

Drug literacy

Big idea

- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples’ principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story

Social Justice 12

Big ideas

- Individual worldviews shape and inform the understanding of social justice issues
- The causes of social injustice are complex and have lasting impacts on society

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess and compare the significance of people, places, events, or developments at particular times and places, and determine what is revealed about issues of social justice in the past and present (significance)
- Ask questions and corroborate inferences about the content, origins, purposes and context of multiple sources and multiple perspectives (evidence)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups and individuals in different times and places (continuity and change)



- Determine and assess the long and short term causes and consequences of an event, legislative and judicial decision, development, policy, and movement (cause and consequence)
- Explain different perspective on past and present people, places, issues and events and distinguish between worldviews of the past or present (perspective)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about controversial actions in the past and present after considering the context and standards of right and wrong (ethical judgment)