

# Primary Source

## THE CLASH OF ARMS

### Conflicting Versions of the Outbreak (1775)

British troops from Boston, seeking secret military stores and presumably rebel leaders, clashed with colonialists at Lexington and then Concord on April 19, 1775, in the first bloodshed of the American Revolution. Among the numerous conflicting accounts that exist, these two excerpts, representing an American version and an official British version are noteworthy. To this day scholars have not proved who fired the first shot. What undisputed and what probably facts emerge from these accounts? How can historians extract truth from conflicting contemporary testimony?

#### BRITISH VERSION

.....Six companies of (British) light infantry... At Lexington found a body of the country people under arms, on a green close to the road. And upon the king's troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason of their being so assembled, they went off in great confusion. And several guns were fired upon the king's troops from behind a stone wall, and also from the meeting house and her houses, by which one man was wounded, and Major Pitcairn's horse shot in two places. In consequence of this attack by the rebels, the troops returned the fire and killed several of them...

#### AMERICAN VERSION

At Lexington... A company of militia mustered near the meeting house. The (British) troops came in sight of them just before sunrise; and running with a few rods of them, the Commanding Officer (Pitcairn) accosted the militia in words to this effect: "Disperse, you rebels—damn you, throw down your arms and disperse"; upon which the troops huzzaed, and immediately one or two officers discharged their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by the firing of four or five of the soldiers, and then there seemed to be a general discharge from the whole body. Eight of our men were killed and nine wounded...

In Lexington (the British)... also set fire to several other houses... They pillaged almost every house they passed... But the savage barbarity exercised upon the bodies of our unfortunate brethren who fell is almost incredible. Not contented with shooting down the unarmed, aged, and infirm, they disregarded the cries of the wounded, killing them without mercy, and mangling their bodies in the most shocking manner.

### Gaining Perspective

With a partner, read the introduction and each version of the battles of Lexington and Concord above. After reading, complete the steps below.

1. Underline any words that made this reading hard to understand. In the margins, write what you *think* the word might mean.

2. Define PERSPECTIVE:

3. Circle key words or phrases in each version that demonstrate the American and British perspective.

4. Using text evidence, write a complete statement taking sides with either the American or British Perspective, in the space below. *Who do you think fired the first shot?*

## SCHOOL HOUSE ROCK QUESTIONS

### **“No More Kings”**

1. In what year did the Pilgrims land in America?
2. The Pilgrim settlement eventually became which of the 13 colonies?
3. Who was the King of England in this episode of SHR?
4. The colonists who did not have a say in England cried, “No taxations without \_\_\_\_\_” and that’s not fair!
5. What events in our nation’s history are show taking place as a result of unfair taxation of the colonies by England?

### **“The Shot Heard ‘Round the World: The start of the Revolution”**

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1. Who warned that the British were coming?
2. What were the first battles of the American Revolution?
3. Who was the commander of the American Army?
4. What was the true name of the American Army?
5. Why do you think that Prescott warned his soldiers to not fire on the British until, “... you see the white’s of their eyes”?
6. From what countries did the Americans receive help during the Revolution?
7. Name the last battle of the Revolution where Cornwallis surrenders to Washington.