

***A Secret Party in Boston Harbor***, by Kris Hemphill, is the story of a young girl's involvement in the Boston Tea Party. The mystery begins with Sarah Turner breaking Boston's 9:00 curfew to investigate the noise she hears on Boston Common, just a few blocks from her house. To her horror she witnessed a fight (later known as the Boston Massacre) in which three colonists, including her cousin were shot by British soldiers. Because she feared for herself and her family, she did not come forward to testify against the soldiers. For three years she agonized over her decision. And then she began receiving threatening notes from someone who knew she was there.

Sarah's father and his other Whig friends, including Samuel Adams, met often at the Turner's coffee house to discuss their displeasure with new British laws and taxes. They strongly believed that "taxation without representation," was unfair and they encouraged other colonists to boycott taxed British goods, including tea. Britain, scheming to end the boycott, passed the Tea Act which lowered the price of British tea. To retaliate the Whigs organized a "tea party" to peacefully destroy a big shipment of British tea. Sarah, after overhearing a traitor's intentions to botch the plan, ended up saving the day, even dressing as a boy to join in the tea party herself.

### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading ***A Secret Party in Boston Harbor***, discuss with the class what they already know about the Revolutionary War. After sharing responses, read the title and tell them that the story takes place during the time leading up to the war. Some questions for discussion might be:

- If this story takes place in Boston in 1773, where does it fit in chronologically with other events of the Revolution already studied?
- Who could be having a "secret" party at this time? Why "in" Boston Harbor?
- Look at the map at the beginning of the book. Find Boston Harbor, and King Street, where the heroine of the story lives. Three buildings are labeled. What do you think will happen here? If ships were coming in from Sea where do you think they would dock?
- Have any students been to Boston? Walked along the harbor? Visited some historic sights? What are their impressions of Boston now?

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

#### Literature • Social Studies • Art • Writing

1. After reading all or part of the book, discuss historical fiction as a type of literature, a mixture of fact and fiction. Some of the characters in the story actually existed and many of the events really occurred. Even those characters that are created by the author probably shared some of the experiences and feelings of real people who lived

at the time. Discuss how the reader can distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Groups of students might try researching events and characters in the story using sources such as encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, historical documents, newspapers, etc. Have a mini-lesson about how to use these sources and a class "debriefing". What names and events could they read about in other sources and which were most likely created by the author?

2. This story exposes children to several events leading up to the Revolutionary War, but does not tell the whole story. Encourage them to dig a little deeper into the past to discover more information:

- This story took place in 1773, three years before the famous battles of Lexington and Concord. What else was happening in Boston and nearby towns around the same time?
- What other information can you find about the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party? How do you think children your age might have experienced these events?
- Choose any aspect of the Revolutionary War to investigate further. Brainstorm a list of possible topics as a class.

3. On page 21, you will find a discussion of why some colonists decided to boycott British tea. Have students heard about or participated in any modern-day boycotts themselves? Discuss why people might boycott a certain product or company and what effect it could have. Look in newspapers, or better yet, log onto the internet to find information about current boycotts.

4. Your students will probably come across unfamiliar vocabulary as they are reading. The sentence on page 46 uttered by Samuel Adams, "Levyng taxes, even a single farthing, against us without our consent is pure extortion!" no doubt has at least three. Suggest that they "post-it" pages with unfamiliar words. Later, come together in small groups or as a class to discuss them. Talk about different strategies to figure out the meaning of a word (i.e. context, dictionaries), and have student model these strategies using examples from the book. Students may enjoy making "Colonial English Dictionaries" of new words they learn.

5. As hard as colonial children worked, they still managed to find time to play. "Pickadill," a game of chase in the snow, is one game mentioned in the book. What other games did children play in colonial times? Where could you find this information (Books about colonial times? Books about games?) Send different groups to the library to investigate! Ask children to interview their parents and/or grandparents about games they used to play as children. Have extended recess for a week, allowing 5-10 minutes for each child to teach their favorite "old fashioned" game to the class. Make a class book of these games that can go out to recess along with the balls and jump ropes.

# TEACHERS GUIDE

## A Secret Party in Boston Harbor

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6. In chapter 4, Sarah and her mother attend a “quilting” with a group of friends. On page 40, there is a detailed description of the quilt they are making. Send a group of students to the library to find books on quilts. Can they find pictures of American quilts from the 1700’s? Perhaps a parent or volunteer could visit the class to do a quilting demonstration. Are students able to sew “twelve stitches to the inch” as Sarah’s mother expected? Another alternative to sewing a real quilt square is to design quilts on a computer. Using a program with a mirror writing tool, students could draw a design, and then cut and paste squares to make a paper “quilt”.

7. Many of the items we buy at the grocery store today, were hand-made by children and families in colonial times. In Chapter 3 (pages 26 and 27), Sarah makes soap from ashes, water and lard. Brainstorm a list of other items that colonial children helped to make (i.e. candles, paper, wooden utensils). Send groups of children off to investigate what and how items were made. Have them share their expertise by attempting to make the items themselves.

### COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY

#### Plan and Host a Colonial Day!

It might be fun to end your reading of the book with a “colonial day,” dressing in colonial costumes (for ideas, see pages 24 for girls and 76 for boys), drinking tea (Dutch, of course!), and visiting various stations (in your classroom or outside on the playground) where soap, paper, quilts, etc. are being made. Put students in charge of researching a topic and demonstrating how it is made. Invite other students at your school to visit. Make sure to ask for parent volunteers to help out.

Make drama part of your colonial day. One of the stations could be The Maple Leaf Coffee House, where Sarah worked. Students could write their own scripts for the discussions that Samuel Adams and other Whigs may have had, and perform them for visitors “stopping by for tea.” If students created “boats” out of cardboard boxes, you could even do a reenactment of the Boston Tea Party. Another possibility is to stage a debate between a group of Tories and Whigs about whether or not England should tax the colonists.

No doubt your students will have more creative ideas about how to share their expertise on the Boston Tea Party. As much as possible, let them run the show!



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